Intersections of Racism and Sexism in Rape Myth Research:

Exploring how Race Conditions the Effects of Rape Myths on Rape Perceptions and

Criminal Justice Responses

by

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ABSTRACT

For 40 years, rape myth scholars have assessed the effects of rape myths on perceptions of and responses to rape, demonstrating that rape myths pose significant barriers to rape prevention efforts and contribute to attrition. Most of this research centers female victims, theorizing rape myths' relationship to gender stereotypes and how they maintain women's oppression. However, scholars have largely ignored the relationship between rape myths and race and how rape myths contribute to racial oppression.

I used an intersectional framework to reconceptualize rape myths as tools of both gender and racial oppression. I argued that rape myths have race-specific effects on rape perceptions and case processing outcomes, that rape myths contribute to racial disparities that align with racist social hierarchies, and that their influence is structural and systemic. I used three studies to assess these assertions. First, I used a randomized vignette survey to explore how victim and perpetrator race (e.g., White, Black, and Latinx) moderate the effects of rape myths (e.g., "victim precipitation," "accidental rape," "women cry rape," and the "real rape" myth), on victim and perpetrator blame in a hypothetical rape (Chapter 2). Second, I assessed how victim race (e.g., White, Black, and Latinx) moderates the effects of rape myth factors (e.g., victim precipitation, credibility issues, real rape consistency) on police case processing decisions in real sexual assault cases (Chapter 3). Third, I analyzed sex crimes detectives' descriptions of victims, reports, and decisions to determine how rape myths influence their focal concerns (Chapter 4).

Collectively, findings indicate that rape myths contribute to racial oppression. In Chapters 2 and 3 I found that race moderated the effects of rape myths on rape perceptions and police decisions. Further, rape myths had more negative impacts for

Black and Latinx victims, than White victims. Finally, in Chapter 4, I found that detectives use rape myths to evaluate victim credibility, evidence, and case viability, suggesting that rape myths' influence is structural and systemic. In addition to implications for practitioners, these findings indicate that rape myth scholars should rearticulate rape myths and their effects intersectionally, with particular attention to intersections with race.

DEDICATION

To my sister wives. You know who you are.

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They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it took a village to raise me, and it took a "village" to write this dissertation. This achievement is the culmination of many people's labor, time, and investment. To everyone who encouraged me, supported me, and critiqued me; who talked through ideas with me, went on walks with me, drank wine with me; who celebrated wins with me and who shared struggles with me, I am grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH GAPS IN THE CONCEPTUALIZATION, MEASUREMENT, AND

EFFECTS OF RAPE MYTHS

Myths are more than made-up stories. They are also firmly held beliefs
that represent and attempt to explain what we perceive to be the truth.
They can become more credible than reality, holding fast even in the face
of airtight statistics and rational arguments to the contrary.
—Dorothy Roberts (1997, p. 8)

Over the past few years, high profile cases, such as those involving Harvey

Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, Brett Kavanaugh, and R. Kelly, along with social movements

like #MeToo and #TimesUp, have pushed sexual assault and sexual harassment into the

public eye. This national reckoning has revealed the prevalence of sexual violence, as

well as the criminal legal system's feeble response. In the United States, one in five

women and one in thirty-three men will be victims of rape or sexual assault in their

lifetimes (Rape Abuse and Incest National Network, 2020). More subtle forms of sexual

violence, like sexual harassment at work and school, in public and online, are even more

common (Das, 2009; Gekoski et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2019; Rospenda et al., 2009;

Wood et al., 2021). Yet only a fraction of individuals who perpetrate sexual assault are

held accountable for their actions in the criminal legal system. In the United States in

2020, only 23% of victims reported their sexual victimizations to the police (Morgan &

Truman, 2021). Nationally, suspects are arrested in only 14% of reported sexual assaults

(Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018a); they are convicted in only 9% of reported cases

(Rape Abuse and Incest National Network, 2020). The magnitude of sexual violence

combined with a lack of criminal justice sanction suggests that we live in a society in

which sexual violence is normative and normalized. Indeed, feminist scholars have long

argued that sexual violence and "rape culture" emerge from and maintain patriarchal power arrangements (Armstrong et al., 2018). For example, Susan Griffin argued in 1971, that "the fact that rape is against the law should not be considered proof that rape is not in fact encouraged as part of our culture" (p. 27).

Rape myths are one of the most studied components of rape culture (Süssenbach et al., 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2021; Ward et al., 2006). Rape myths are "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). Importantly, scholars have shown that rape myths emerge from traditional gender norms through discursive processes (Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987). Discursive processes are processes that produce and reinforce knowledge through systems of symbolic representation, such as language (Foucault, 1972; Schneider, 2013; Karlberg, 2011). For example, Susan Estrich's (1987) examination of appellate decisions showed how judges drew on their "knowledge" of women's nature and sexuality to define which rapes were "real" and which victims were "credible." The myths of "real rape" and "simple rape" emerged from these discourses. "Real rape," involves a stranger who attacks a sober woman using force, victim resistance and injury, and an immediate report. By contrast, in "simple rape," the woman knows the assailant, provokes the attack with flirtatious or risky behavior, does not resist, and delays the report. Although both "real rape" and "simple rape" are rape according to legal statutes, Estrich's analyses revealed that judges were suspicious toward allegations of "simple rape," and they framed these assaults as neither needing nor deserving prosecution or punishment. Rape myths, therefore, are articulated and codified into social norms, values, and laws through

patriarchal discourses, like legal decisions.

At the same time, rape myths reinforce patriarchal power arrangements by normalizing and naturalizing sexual violence. Researchers have consistently shown that people who endorse rape myths perceive victims as less credible and more responsible for rape, exonerate perpetrators for their actions, and minimize the harms associated with sexual violence (Edwards et al., 2011; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). This is especially true when victims violate traditional gender role norms (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Masser et al., 2010). For example, presumed indicators of sexual interest or experience, such as drinking or having had multiple past sexual partners, are associated with perceiving victims as more responsible and perpetrators as less responsible for rape (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Jaffe et al., 2021; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Romero-Sanchez et al., 2018). There is also evidence that rape myth acceptance (RMA) influences men's propensity to rape and victim's decision to report rape incidents to the police (Bohner et al., 2006; Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; Heath et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2020). Similarly, rape myths influence the decisions of police, prosecutors, and jurors (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Dinos et al., 2015; Hine & Murphy, 2019; St. George & Spohn, 2018; Venema, 2019).

Cumulatively, research on rape myths has contributed to our understanding of how rape culture maintains the unequal distribution of power across gender. Rape myths and RMA normalize men's sexual aggression against women and hinder the criminal legal system's ability to sanction sexual violence. Questions remain, however, about the content and impact of rape myths. Specifically, like many feminist-led social movements, activism, and reforms (Crenshaw, 1990), the rape myth literature to date has largely failed to consider how rape myths intersect with race. Are rape myths race-neutral, or are

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there different myths associated with different racial groups? How does race moderate the relationship between rape myths and rape perceptions? Do rape myths have race-specific effects on criminal justice outcomes? Furthermore, why do rape myths influence criminal justice outcomes even when individual actors don't endorse them? Are the effects of cultural beliefs that blame victims and minimize the harms of rape mitigated or exacerbated by criminal justice policies and procedures that constrain discretion?

I explore these questions in the studies that follow. By doing so, I hope to bring race from the margins to the center of rape myth research. Specifically, I explore how rape myths generate racial disparities in criminal justice outcomes, how criminal justice practices and policies exacerbate these disparities, and how, ultimately, rape myths contribute to structural inequalities across both race and gender. Below, I briefly describe the emergence, content, and function of rape myths. Then, I expand on remaining questions and propose three studies to address them.

Background: Rape Myths, Rape Perceptions, and Case Attrition

The concept of rape myths emerged in the United States during the second wave feminist movement, when the social understanding of rape evolved radically. During the 1970s, feminist scholars and activists challenged the belief that rape was a result of individual-level sexual pathology. Rather, they suggested that rape was a cultural phenomenon, a product and tool of patriarchal power arrangements. In other words, they suggested that rape was not about sex or lust but about maintaining men's power over women (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Herman, 1979). Building on these radical ideas, scholars identified specific attitudes, norms, and values that contributed to sexual violence. Specifically, Burt (1980, p. 217) defined rape myths as "prejudicial,

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stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists," codified specific myths (e.g., "Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to."), and identified correlations between RMA and other attitudes, such as sex role stereotyping and acceptance of interpersonal violence. Since then, researchers have examined various aspects of rape myths and their effects, including: identifying specific rape myths and their source (Edwards et al., 2011; Estrich, 1987; Lea, 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994); developing RMA scales (Gerger et al., 2007; McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999); assessing rape myths' relationship to other oppressive attitudes, like racism, homophobia, and classism (Aosved & Long, 2006; Burt, 1980; Sjöberg & Sarwar, 2022; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010); investigating their relationship with rape perceptions (Grubbs & Turner, 2012; Hockett et al., 2016; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014), and assessing their impact on rape proclivity, rape reporting, and criminal justice responses (Dinos et al., 2015; Heath et al., 2013; Johnson & Beech, 2017; Sleath & Bull, 2017; Yapp & Quayle, 2018).

Rape Myths, Traditional Gender Role Norms, and Discursive Processes

Scholars identifying specific rape myths and their source have shown that rape myths are produced and maintained through discursive processes. According to discourse theory, knowledge is not learned or recorded passively. Rather what we hold to be true about the world and ourselves is systematically constructed and reinforced through communication and exchange (Schneider, 2013; Karlberg, 2011). Discourses—such as language, media, and other systems of symbolic representation—are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). So, what people say in various discourses both represents, and constructs, knowledge about reality.

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Knowledge and truth, therefore, can change over time as the stories we tell about ourselves, and how we tell them, change.

Rape myths emerged from discourses that linked sex, rape, and violence to traditional gender role norms and values. For example, Susan Estrich (1987) revealed how rape myths emerged through discursive processes. Her examination of appellate decisions showed how judges drew on their "knowledge" of women's nature and sexuality to define which rapes were "real" and which victims "credible." Specifically, judges' expectations about women's chastity, passivity, desire, and deceitfulness influenced their interpretations of consent, force, and resistance. Judges described women's ambivalence toward sex and suggested that if the victim and perpetrator knew each other, the victim could have (subconsciously) welcomed the attack, enjoyed the rape, and (eventually) consented. Judges' decisions also emphasized that the only way to confirm that a woman did not consent was through utmost physical resistance, which was deemed the only normal and natural response to sexual advances that were truly unwanted.

Rape myths emerged from these repetitive and cumulative judicial decisions, among other discourses, to suggest that women provoke rape with their dress or behavior ("victim precipitation"), that women enjoy rape ("rape as fantasy"), and that women frequently make false claims of rape to cover up consensual sex ("women cry rape;" Edwards et al., 2011; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Similarly, the myth that men rape when their sex drive gets out of control suggests that men are easily sexually aroused and may be unable to control themselves, especially around provocative women ("he didn't mean to;" McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999). In addition to naturalizing

men's sexual aggression, this myth blames women for rape if they arouse men, even if they do so unintentionally. Cumulatively, these myths frame most rapes as regrettable or deviant sex, which makes indicators of violence, such as force, weapons, and resistance resulting in injury, critical for differentiating "real rape" from false or less serious reports ("it wasn't really rape;" Payne et al., 1999; Burt, 1980).

Other criminological discourses likewise draw on and reinforce rape myths. Until rape law reforms in the 1970s and 80s, most states incorporated rape myths directly into their legal statutes and practices. Rape was legally defined as penile-vaginal penetration of a woman, not one's wife, by force and against her will (Spohn & Horney, 1992).[1] Additionally, to go to trial, many jurisdictions required evidence of resistance "to the utmost" to demonstrate non-consent and evidence corroborating the victim's testimony to prevent false allegations. At trial, defense attorneys were permitted to introduce the alleged victim's prior sexual history as evidence of her consent (Spohn & Horney, 1992). Even decades after rape law reforms,[2] resistance, evidence corroborating the victim's statement, and victim-suspect relationship (e.g., intimate partners versus strangers) continue to influence the likelihood of arrest and charges (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Alderden & Ullman, 2012; Morabito et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; St. George & Spohn, 2018; Tasca et al., 2013). Furthermore, many current rape laws in the United

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[1] Until 2012, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports defined rape as "the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will," which precluded police departments from including rapes lacking force (e.g., rape by incapacitation), the rapes of men, and nonconsensual oral copulation in statistics reported to the agency (United States Department of Justice Archives, 2012).

[2] Reforms varied across jurisdictions but generally included one or more of the following: redefining "rape" to include male victims and spouses, and various forms of penetration; removing the corroboration and resistance requirements; and introducing rape shield laws to prevent discussing an alleged victim's prior sexual experiences at trial (Spohn & Horney, 1992).

States and worldwide require proof of non-consent for a guilty conviction. That is, unlike

other crimes that include non-consent as an element, many rape laws are written in a way

that presumes consent is given, and sex permissible, unless the victim unambiguously

takes consent away (Little, 2005; Malm, 1996).[3] Many rape laws, therefore, perpetuate

the myth that women always are willing to have sex, hold women responsible for

communicating non-consent—but not men for ensuring consent is given!—and normalize

men's right to sexual access. Similarly, policies controlling the movements of convicted

sex offenders perpetuate the myth of "stranger danger" and project an image of

punitiveness in response to sex offenses, while ignoring the prevalence and harm of the

more common forms of sexual violence. Sex offender registration and living restrictions,

for example, do not protect children from sexual abuse by family members, or college

students from assaults by classmates. In this way, discursive interpretations and selective

applications of law and punishment contour rape myths out of traditional gender and

sexuality norms and sutured them to "the definition of the crime and the rules of proof"

required to sanction sexual aggression (Estrich, 1987, p. 29).

Rape Myths, Sexual Violence, and Sexual Assault Case Attrition

At the same time, rape myths normalize and naturalize the traditional gender and

sexuality roles from which they were molded. First, rape myths encourage sexual

aggression among men and minimize the perceived harm of rape. Scholars have shown

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[3] As an example, see how Remick (1992) explains the way laws treat non-consent differently in rape and auto theft: "Only in rape is proof of a lack of consent insufficient to prove nonconsent. A common defense to a charge of auto theft, for example, is that the car's owner consented to the defendant's use of the vehicle. A mere showing that the owner never gave the defendant permission to take the car is enough to defeat this defense; no showing that the owner actually told the defendant not to take the car is necessary. In rape law, however, the "default" position is consent .... [T]he prosecution must show that the alleged victim indicated to the defendant through her overt actions and/or words that she did not wish to participate in sexual activity with him" (p. 1111).

that men who endorse rape myths are more likely to have raped, to endorse forced sex, and to believe some resistance (e.g., token resistance) is normal during consensual sexual encounters (Bohner et al., 2006; Johnson & Beech, 2017; O'Connor, 2021; Shafer et al., 2018; Trottier et al., 2021). Additionally, women who endorse rape myths are less likely to acknowledge nonconsensual sex as rape. This is particularly true when the incident involves acquaintances, alcohol, or other deviations from the "real rape" myth (Bondurant, 2001; Newins et al., 2018).

Second, rape myths promote victim blaming and discourage reporting. Scholars have consistently found that individuals with high RMA blame victims more and perpetrators less in depicted rape scenarios, particularly when victims violate traditional gender role expectations, such as drinking, flirting, or wearing revealing clothing (Gravelin et al., 2019; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; van der Burggen & Grubb, 2014). There is also evidence that rape myths influence victims' decision to report sexual assault to the police. Self-blame, fear of being blamed by others, and fear of "secondary victimization" within the criminal legal system all contribute to victims' decision to not report sexual assault victimizations to the police (Cohn et al., 2013; Heath et al., 2013; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011b).

Third, rape myths hinder criminal justice interventions and contribute to sexual assault case attrition. Police and prosecutors use rape myths to classify sexual assault cases into genuine/credible and false/dubious reports (Frohmann, 1991; Jordan, 2004; Spohn et al., 2001; Venema, 2016). Furthermore, rape myth-related factors, such as victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol or drug use at the time of the incident, and the promptness of reports influence police and prosecutors' case processing decisions, such

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as to unfound a report, arrest a suspect, and file charges (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Alderden & Ullman, 2012; Bouffard, 2000; LaFree, 1981; Frazier & Haney, 1996; Kerstetter, 1990; Morabito et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; St. George & Spohn, 2018; Tasca et al., 2013). Studies also indicate that rape myths influence jurors' assessments of guilt (Dinos et al., 2015). Altogether, this research shows that rape myths normalize sexual violence and reinforce traditional gender roles by blaming victims and denying justice to women who deviate from norms of chastity, passivity, and men's right to sexual access.

Rape Myths and Schema-Driven Processing

Researchers theorizing how rape myths influence perceptions of, and responses to, sexual violence have suggested that rape myths act like cognitive schemas (Eyssel & Bohner, 2011; Krahé et al., 2007; Süssenbach et al., 2013). Schemas are cognitive organization tools that are "activated in response to environmental input" and provide "context for interpreting experience and assimilating knowledge" (Derry, 1996, p. 167). Schematic processing occurs when new information is interpreted based on generalizations and stereotypes in order to save mental resources (Kunda, 1999). Conceptualizing rape myths as cognitive schemas suggests that individuals use rape myths to organize and interpret information about rape incidents or victims. Importantly, rape myth schemas draw attention to certain factors—like the victims' sexual experience, precipitative behavior, and motives to lie—when interpreting rape-related information. Other factors, like the perpetrator's aggression, are less salient. For example, confronted with a date rape in which a woman says no but does not physically resist, an individual may draw on the "victim precipitation" and "rape as fantasy" schemas to interpret the

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victim's romantic relationship with the perpetrator or a lack of resistance as evidence of consent, while ignoring the perpetrator's force, coercion, or disregard of non-consent.

Scholars suggest that individuals who endorse more rape myths are more prone to using rape myth schemas to interpret rape-related information (Krahé et al., 2007; Krahé et al, 2008: Süssenbach et al., 2013). Scholars assessing perceptions of depicted rapes have consistently shown that individuals with high RMA perceive victims more negatively and perpetrators more positively than individuals with low RMA (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). High RMA individuals also tend to minimize the harm associated with depicted rape. Rape myth-related victim and incident characteristics like victim-perpetrator relationship, victim precipitation (e.g., intoxication), and victim resistance, also influence rape perceptions, with more relational intimacy, more precipitation, and less resistance predicting more victim blaming attitudes (Hockett et al., 2016). Importantly, consistent with the rape myths as schemas mechanism, RMA moderates the effects of victim and incident characteristics on victim blaming attitudes. That is, rape myth-related victim and incident characteristics influence rape perceptions more among individuals with high RMA, which suggests that these factors are more salient to individuals who endorse more rape myths (Krahé et al., 2008; Süssenbach et al., 2013).

In addition to research demonstrating schematic processing in response to hypothetical rape scenarios, some scholars have identified schematic processing in the decision-making of criminal justice practitioners. Venema (2016) found that police categorized sexual assault case reports according to rape myth schema: police associated ambiguous and false reports with victims involved in prostitution or who had motives to lie, victims who engaged in risky behavior, and victims who knew their assailants. By

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contrast, they associated credible reports with incidents involving strangers, injury, and victims of "good character." Scholars have also identified rape myths in police summaries of rape investigations (Shaw et al., 2017) and reasons for not submitting sexual assault evidence kits for testing (Campbell & Fehler-Cabral, 2018). Similarly, Frohmann's (1991) research revealed that prosecutors drew on (and constructed) "typifications of rape-relevant behavior" when discrediting victims and assessing the likelihood of conviction. Finally, in a series of qualitative examinations of jury deliberations in response to a performed rape trial, Ellison and Munro (2009a,b, 2013) found that jurors focused on extra-legal factors and drew on rape myths to interpret ambiguous evidence. For example, some jurors used the alleged victim's prior sexual intimacy with the defendant to interpret inconclusive findings from the medical exam; some jurors suggested that if the couple regularly enjoyed rough sex, then that could account for some vaginal injuries but not indicate rape (Ellison & Munro, 2013). Altogether, these studies suggest that rape myths contribute to sexual assault case attrition because criminal justice practitioners and jurors use schematic processing to assess victim credibility and responsibility, case viability, and perpetrator guilt.

Research Gaps

Cumulatively, the research described above shows that rape myths simultaneously come from and contribute to patriarchal power arrangements. Fearing being raped, being blamed, or being denied justice, women's access to public spaces and institutions, such as work, education, criminal justice, and leisure activities, is restricted. Furthermore, rape myths seem to influence perceptions of rape, rape proclivity, and rape reporting, and they contribute to sexual assault case attrition. Given their importance, therefore, it is

unsurprising that rape myths and RMA are the "best researched, and theoretically most developed individual factor in the etiology of sexual offending" (Süssenbach et al., 2013, p. 2252; Ward et al., 2006). Nevertheless, there are some important gaps in this robust body of literature.

Do Rape Myths and Their Effects Vary Across Race?

First, the conceptualization, identification and measurement of rape myths are incomplete. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) explained, a problem with mainstream feminist discourse and activism is that, in centering gender alone, it often presumes a White, middle class, heterosexual woman as its subject. The failure to explicitly name and center other axes of oppression results in the exclusion of Black women, poor women, immigrant women, and other women within disadvantaged groups from the mainstream feminist agenda.[4] Rape myth theory and research suffers from the same problem. In failing to explicitly reference race, sexuality, and non-binary gender identities, studies on rape myths center White, heterosexual, cis-gendered women, as well as women who are typically abled, middle class, and young (Crenshaw, 1990). This focus has resulted in a robust body of literature theorizing and measuring rape myths about White women, but it has ignored, theoretically and methodologically, the role of intersectional identities and experiences in the formation of rape myths and their effects.

Intersectionality theory asserts that the race, gender, and other social statuses

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[4] Consistent with calls to recognize "Black" as more than a color, but a word signifying "a history and the racial identity of Black Americans," I capitalize "Black" when referring to people of African descent (Nguyễn & Pendleton, 2020, para. 2; Tharps, 2014). I likewise capitalize "White" because "To not name "White" as a race is, in fact, an anti-Black act which frames Whiteness as both neutral and the standard" (Nguyễn & Pendleton, 2020, para. 6). Given this dissertation explicitly addresses the presumption of White neutrality in rape myth literature, it is important to draw attention to the intentionality of the language I use.

(e.g., class) are not independently constructed, nor do they independently affect

individuals. Rather people are multiply situated within a *matrix* of oppression, and this

multidimensional location results in forms of marginalization and privilege not reducible

to a single social status characteristic (May, 2015; Collins, 2000). Furthermore,

representations of different social status characteristics are entangled, so that stereotypes

and expectations about femininity vary across other characteristics, like race and age.

This representational intersectionality is particularly important in the study of rape

myths. While rape myth theorists have shown how myths emerge from traditional gender

role norms, they have ignored how these norms may vary by race (and class, sexuality,

and other social status characteristics; Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Edwards et al.,

2011; Estrich, 1987). Nevertheless, some scholars have identified gender stereotypes

associated specifically with women of color (Arrizón, 2008; Brennan, 2006; Roberts,

1997; Wyatt, 1982). For example, Dorothy Roberts (1997) described how stereotypes of

Black women emerged discursively from sociological and medical discourses that

aligned Black women's bodies with primitive sexuality, hyper-fertility, and moral and

intellectual deficiency. Stereotypes like the Jezebel, the Mammy, and the Welfare Queen,

all represent Black women's gender and sexuality in specific ways that differ from

representations of White women (Roberts, 1997; Wyatt, 1982). Furthermore, while some

gender representations and stereotypes may apply across race, they still can have

different impacts. As Crenshaw explained, "although White and Black women have

shared interests in resisting the madonna/whore dichotomy altogether, they nevertheless

experience its oppressive power differently" (1990, p. 1241).

Just as rape myths commonly identified in the literature trace their origins to

stereotypes about the typical or ideal (White, heterosexual) woman, stereotypes and archetypes of Black women, or Latina women, may translate into rape myths associated specifically with Black or Latinx victims. Unfortunately, rape myth theory and measures have generally overlooked how intersectional representations of race and gender may generate different rape myths. While some studies theorize and measure myths about male victims (Chapleau et al., 2008; DeJong et al., 2020; Melanson, 1998; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Turchik & Edwards, 2012), queer victims (Schultze et al., 2019), and child victims (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010), the vast majority of rape myth studies focus on female victims and male perpetrators, ignore gender and sexual minorities, and leave race unspecified. This is true despite disparate rates of sexual violence victimization among minority groups (Cantor et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2017). Furthermore, most scales measuring RMA describe female victims and are colorblind (See Burt, 1980; Payne et al., 1999; and McMahon & Farmer, 2011). To date, there are no RMA scales that *center* race. The most widely used RMA scales—Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS) and Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald's (1999), Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA)—refer to victims as "women." This practice explicitly defines victims as female and implicitly defines them as White, heterosexual, and cis-gendered. Only one item on Burt's scale acknowledges that the relevance of rape myths may vary by victim characteristics, including race, gender, age and class, but she does so only in reference to victim credibility (e.g., "How likely would you be to believe [a person's rape claim] if the person were: a black woman? A neighborhood woman? A young boy? [etc.]"). Male and queer RMA scales are likewise colorblind (Melanson, 1998; Schulze et al., 2019; Struckman-Johnson &

Struckman-Johnson, 1992).

The scientific study of rape myths and RMA is itself a discourse that has generated "knowledge" about women. However, its failure to account explicitly for the variation of rape myths and their effects across race and ethnicity has resulted in rape myth theory and measures that describe and assess myths about White heterosexual cis-gendered women. While much of this discourse has questioned and disrupted assumptions about White women's gender and sexuality, its inattention to intersectional identities may perpetuate stereotypes about non-White victims, which may amplify their marginalization. A reliance on college student samples to construct and test RMA scales exacerbates the problem of colorblindness. Until recently, student samples may have underrepresented minority individuals (See Burt, 1980; Payne et al., 1999);[5] studies relying on mostly White samples to assess rape myths may fail to identify and measure myths associated specifically with non-White groups. Furthermore, laboratory studies that do not specify victim or perpetrator race in hypothetical vignettes may misrepresent the effects of rape myths on perceptions of rapes involving non-White victims and perpetrators. That is, race may affect rape perceptions, like assessments of victim and perpetrator blame. Further, race may affect how rape myths affect rape perceptions.

While research on rape myths and perceptions of hypothetical rape scenarios largely ignores race, researchers have shown that racialized gender and sexuality stereotypes influence victims' responses to sexual violence (Ahrens et al., 2010; Cavanaugh et al., 2014; Donovan & Williams, 2002; Littleton et al., 2007; Maier, 2008;

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[5] "Sexuality-blindness" and "gender-blindness" will have similar problems, though exploring these other intersections is outside the scope of the current investigation.

McGuffey, 2013; Neville et al., 2004; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; West et al., 2016). For example, sexual stereotypes about Black women, like the Jezebel, the Gangster Bitch, and the Baby Mama, portray Black women as promiscuous, deceitful, and irresponsible (Brennan, 2006; Crenshaw, 1990; George & Martinez, 2002; Stephens & Few, 2005; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; Wyatt, 1982). Black women socialized into these "Black promiscuity" gender and sexuality roles often blame themselves for rape or fear negative treatment by criminal justice officials, family members, and their community (McGuffey, 2013; Maier, 2008; Neville et al., 2004). Black women, therefore, use race-specific gender and sexuality stereotypes to appraise their sexual assault experiences, predict reactions from others, and decide on courses of action, including whether to seek out mental and physical health services and criminal justice interventions (Donovan & Williams, 2002; Maier, 2008; McGuffey, 2013). Studies have shown that Latinx specific gender/sexuality stereotypes influence Latinx women's sexual socialization and vulnerability to sexual violence (Ahrens *et al.,* 2010; Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2014; Littleton et al., 2007).

Furthermore, several studies have assessed the effects of race-specific gender or sexuality stereotypes on rape perceptions. Specifically, Donovan (2007) explored the effects of the Jezebel stereotype, and Miller (2019) explored the effects of the hypersexual Black male stereotype, on rape perceptions. While these studies have made important contributions, the relationship between race and rape myths remains unclear. I know of no study to date to assess the relationship between race and the women cry rape myth, or the real rape stereotype, for example. Furthermore, I know of no study to date that assesses if race moderates the relationship between rape myths and rape perceptions,

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or tests if rape myths are not, in fact, race-neutral. In study 1, I address these gaps by examining if the effects of rape myths on rape perceptions depend on victim and perpetrator race. Specifically, I use a randomized vignette survey to assess, quantitatively, the race-specific effects of rape myths on victim and perpetrator blame.

Do Rape Myths Contribute to Racial Disparities in Attrition?

Beyond perceptions of hypothetical rape scenarios, it remains unclear if rape myths have race-specific effects on criminal justice responses to real rape reports. If rape myths generate racial disparities in criminal justice outcomes, they may contribute to structural inequality across race. Feminist scholars and researchers studying rape myths have already revealed how they contribute to women's oppression (Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987). St. George and Spohn (2018) asserted that by "disproportionately ignoring and rejecting cases involving women who violate traditional gender norms, the criminal legal system effectively permits violence against women, reinforces rape myths, and maintains gender inequality" (p. 27). Specifically, because rape myths influence the decision-making of victims, police, prosecutors, and juries in ways that result in a lack of reporting and sexual assault case attrition, (female) victims of (sexual) violence often are denied justice. The rape myth literature has ignored, however, how rape myths may also contribute to unequal access to justice across other axes of oppression, including race.

Drawing again on the work of Black feminist scholars, intersectional thinking emphasizes that gender inequality and racial inequality are entangled. If rape myths contribute to gender inequality, they must also contribute to racial inequality (Collins, 2000, 2019; Crenshaw, 1990). Importantly, scholars have used intersectionality theory and frameworks to show that multiple membership in different subordinated groups

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produces unique forms of discrimination and marginalization that may be masked or understated in analyses that examine a single axis (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; May, 2015; McCall, 2005; Crenshaw, 1990; Collins & Bilge, 2016). In sexual assault, if rape myths associated with gender and sexuality stereotypes are also racialized, then the particular rape myths that pose barriers to successful adjudication may be different for Black women, Latina women, and White women (as well as Native women, and Asian women). Furthermore, racialized rape myths may result in even more negative and discriminatory consequences for women of color, than for women in general. To the extent that policies developed to combat rape myths and the gender oppression they perpetuate ignore race/ethnicity-specific rape myths and effects, they may not improve responses to Black and Latina victims, or worse, may further marginalize them.

Researchers have found that race and ethnicity influence criminal justice responses to sexual assault cases. Studies consistently report that prosecutors are less likely to file charges in sexual assault cases (LaFree, 1980b; Maxwell et al., 2003), and less likely to seek the death penalty in capital rape cases (Williams et al., 2007) when the victim is Black compared to White. Similarly, Latino suspects are less likely than White suspects to be found guilty in rape cases; when found guilty, they receive shorter prison sentences than White defendants (Maxwell et al., 2003). There is also evidence that attorneys draw on racialized gender stereotypes to support their arguments at trial. Studying child sexual abuse trials, Powell and colleagues (2017) found that defense attorneys drew on stereotypes about the hypersexuality of black and brown female bodies to impeach the credibility of Black and Latina victims, but not White victims.

Cumulatively, the research described above suggests that racialized gender and

sexuality stereotypes of Black and Latina women limit their access to justice by affecting both their own (victims') decisions, and the responses of criminal justice actors. Unfortunately, direct assessments of how race-specific gender and sexuality stereotypes affect legal actors' decisions in sexual assault cases are lacking. Specifically, no known has assessed the race-specific impacts of rape myths on criminal justice decision-making. In study 2, I address this gap by assessing if victim race conditions the effects of rape myth-related factors on police decisions to unfound and arrest. By doing so, I assess if rape myths contribute to racial disparities in criminal justice responses to sexual violence.

Do Rape Myths Influence Decisions Through Schematic Processing or Other Mechanisms?

Finally, it is unclear how rape myths continue to influence criminal justice decision-making, like the decision to arrest a suspect, even when RMA among criminal justice actors is low. The rape myths as schemas mechanism hypothesizes that rape myths influence behavior when they are accepted or endorsed. So, whether implicit or explicit, RMA results in individuals focusing on factors associated with victims' responsibility and credibility instead of perpetrators' aggression or other legally relevant factors in the case (Eyssel & Bohner, 2011; Krahé et al., 2007; Süssenbach et al., 2013). For example, if a police officer endorses the "real rape" or "women cry rape" myths, they may focus on the victim's relationship to the suspect and possible motives to lie, perceive the allegation as not credible, not harmful, or victim-precipitated, and decide to not arrest the suspect in the case.

Although this mechanism has empirical support, the influence of rape myths on criminal justice decision-making may be more complex. On the one hand, there is

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evidence that RMA among criminal justice practitioners, such as police, is low. Studies generally find that most police officers do not strongly endorse rape myths (Page, 2010; Murphy & Hine, 2019; Sleath & Bull, 2015; Venema, 2018), which suggests their responses to sexual assault allegations should not be influenced by rape myth schemas. However, research consistently shows that rape myth-related factors influence police decisions (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Alderden & Ullman, 2012; Bouffard, 2000; LaFree, 1981; Frazier & Haney, 1996; Kerstetter, 1990; Morabito et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; Tasca et al., 2013). Furthermore, despite greater awareness of the realities of sexual violence, as well as 40 years of reforms, arrest and prosecution rates remain low. So, rape myths seem to continue to influence criminal justice outcomes, but not necessarily through practitioners' use of schematic processing to make case assessments.

On the other hand, although rape myths clearly play a role, there is evidence that police also consider legally relevant factors when responding to sexual assault cases. Physical evidence, witnesses, weapon use, and victim cooperation influence police decisions, sometimes more so than rape myth factors (Morabito et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; Tasca et al., 2013; Wentz, 2020). Expectations about prosecutors' decisions and the availability of resources to process cases also influence police decisions (Page, 2008; Spohn et al., 2014). Importantly, the influence of rape myth-related factors on decision-making may depend on the assemblage of victim and incident characteristics in the case as well as departmental factors. For example, Morabito and colleagues (2019) found that the decision to arrest was influenced by an interaction between "real rape" factors (e.g., victim-suspect relationship), victim credibility issues (e.g., victim's mental

health), and victim precipitation (e.g., victim's use of drugs or alcohol at the time of the incident). Similarly, studying prosecutors' decision to file charges, Beichner and Spohn (2012) found that victim credibility factors only influenced the charging decision in nonstranger rapes. St. George and Spohn (2018) found that real rape consistency (e.g., stranger perpetrator, victim resistance), only influenced the charging decision in non-penetrative cases. Furthermore, Holleran and colleagues (2010) found that different factors influenced prosecutors' charging decisions depending on the case screening procedures used in the jurisdiction.

Altogether, this research suggests that rape myths influence criminal justice decision-making, but not necessarily through, or only through, the schema-driven information processing mechanism. Rather than endorsing rape myths, criminal justice practitioners may assess rape myths among other focal concerns, such as case viability and organizational resources. Or they may use rape myths, among other tools, to assess victim credibility and the likelihood of conviction before deciding on courses of action. Such a function would align rape myths less with internalized cultural *norms* and *values*, and more with cultural *toolkits*, in which culture "shapes a repertoire... of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action'" (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). So, police may not believe in or endorse rape myths. Rather, they may consciously use rape myths among other factors to predict chargeability and convictability, so as to use resources efficiently. In study 3, I explore the possible mechanisms through which rape myths may influence criminal-justice decision-making. Specifically, I examine how rape myths emerge in police detectives' descriptions of their unfounding, arrest, and referral decisions. Furthermore, in study 3, I explore the procedural and organizational constraints

on police discretion in sexual assault cases in order to determine if the gender and racial oppression rape myths facilitate is systemic and structural.

Proposed Studies: Research Questions and Data

The proposed dissertation addresses these gaps in three separate, but related studies. In study 1 I use an intersectional framework to reimagine rape myths and explore their race-specific effects on rape perceptions. In study 2 I assess if victim race and ethnicity condition the effects of rape myth factors on police decisions. In study 3 I examine the mechanism through which rape myths influence police decision-making. Below, I briefly describe the research questions, expectations, and data for each study. See Chapters 2-4 for more detailed descriptions of data and methodologies.

Study 1

First, in study 1, I question the race-neutrality of rape myths. I assess if the myths most frequently measured on rape perception scales have different effects on perceptions of rape involving White, Black, and Latinx victims and perpetrators. Specifically, I asked two research questions: 1) Do the rape myths identified in the current literature affect perceptions of victims and perpetrators differently depending on the victim's and the perpetrator's race? 2) Do victim and perpetrator race moderate the relationship between rape myths and perceptions of victims and perpetrators (e.g., victim blame)? I expected that participants would blame Black and Latinx victims more than White victims. Further, I expected that different rape myths would have different (e.g., larger or smaller) effects on victim and perpetrator blame, depending on victim and perpetrator race.

The data used for study 1 came from a randomized vignette survey designed in Qualtrics and administered online to ~5000 participants. Participants included both

undergraduate students at Arizona State University and a community sample recruited

from Amazon's Mechanical Turk crowdsourcing platform. Participants were randomly

assigned to read one of 100 versions of a vignette describing a date rape. Vignettes varied

victim race/ethnicity (White, Black, Latino/a, no race specified), *victim gender/sexual*

orientation (straight cis-female, straight cis-male, lesbian cis-female, gay cis-male,

straight transgender female), and *rape myth* (victim precipitation, s/he didn't mean to,

s/he lied, all myths, no myths). After reading the vignette, participants responded to

questions assessing perceptions of the incident, including victim and perpetrator blame,

and how four rape myth factors—victim precipitation, accidental rape, women cry rape,

and the real rape stereotype—contributed to the incident. All surveys ended with

questions assessing participants' RMA, demographic characteristics, and prior

experiences with sexual violence. Data were analyzed in STATA, using bivariate and

multivariate techniques, to determine the direct and indirect relationships between victim

and perpetrator race, rape myths, and victim and perpetrator blame.

Study 2

In study 2 I explored if rape myths have race-specific effects on responses to real

cases. Building on the assertion in study 1 that rape myths have race-specific effects on

rape perceptions, I asked two interrelated questions: 1) Do rape myths have race-specific

effects on criminal justice response to real sexual assault cases? 2) Do rape myths

contribute to racial disparities in sexual assault case outcomes? Consistent with prior

research, I expected that victim and case characteristics associated with rape myths—

such as victim precipitation and credibility issues—would influence police decisions to

unfound reports and arrest suspects, in part because they influence assessments of

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chargeability and other focal concerns. But, similar to study 1, I argued that race would condition which rape myths influence police perceptions of victims, suspects, and cases. I expected, therefore, that which rape myths affect police decisions would vary for White, Black, and Latina victims. Further, I expected that rape myths would affect case outcomes more negatively for Black and Latina victims than for White victims.

For study 2, I used data from the Los Angeles Sexual Assault Study conducted by Spohn and Tellis (2014). The study was a mixed-methods investigation of the processing of sexual assaults reported to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) (Spohn & Tellis, 2014). In study 2, I used the quantitative data on a stratified random sample of sex crimes reported to LAPD and LASD in 2008. All cases involved female victims ages 12 and older and male suspects. I included all completed investigations of non-statutory rape, attempted rape, and sexual battery cases involving White, Black, and Latinx victims and perpetrators (N=726).

I examined two decision points: the decision to unfound the report as false or baseless, and if founded, the decision to arrest a suspect. I assessed the direct effects of three rape myth factors (victim precipitation, victim credibility issues, real rape consistency) and three victim race categories (White, Black, Latina) on these decision points. I also assessed how victim race moderated the effects of rape myth factors on decisions. Data were analyzed in STATA, using logistic regression (unfound) and Heckman's bivariate probit (arrest) models. All models controlled for victim and suspect demographics (e.g., age), case characteristics (e.g., evidence strength) and investigating agency (e.g., LAPD).

Study 3

In study 3, I investigated the mechanisms through which rape myths influence police assessments of and responses to sexual assault reports. I was particularly interested in untangling detectives' individual-level biases from the organizational factors that constrain decision-making. Using the focal concerns framework, I qualitatively examined how police detectives described their responses to sexual assault cases and victims. I focused on two research questions: 1) What factors do detectives say influence their responses to sexual assault victims and reports? In other words, what are the focal concerns that guide detectives' decisions, and what factors constrain their decisions? 2) How do rape myths come up in detectives' descriptions of victims, reports, and responses, and specifically, do detectives use rape myths to assess victim credibility and case viability? I expected that police would describe a range of focal concerns, including legal (e.g., evidence), extralegal (e.g., rape myths), and practical (e.g., convictability) concerns. I also expected that detectives' comments would reference rape myths frequently, and in ways that overlapped with other focal concerns.

The data for study 3 also came from the Los Angeles Sexual Assault Study (Spohn & Tellis, 2014). Specifically, I used qualitative data from 52 face-to-face interviews conducted by Spohn and Tellis (2014) with LAPD detectives who had experience investigating sexual assault cases. Questions focused on detectives' investigative and case processing decisions, including the decision rules used to guide unfounding, arrest, and referral decisions; the cases most and least likely to result in arrest and prosecution; and how they assessed victim credibility. Completed interviews were transcribed, and detectives' responses were organized into themes (e.g., "what it

takes to arrest"). This process generated 611 unique comments.

I conducted a content analysis of these comments to identify detectives' focal concerns. I examined comments qualitatively, looking for references to rape myths, suspect culpability and dangerousness, evidence, victim cooperation, the downstream decisions of prosecutors and juries, availability of resources, and victim and suspect demographic characteristics. After two coders independently and reliably coded all themes, I assessed the frequency with which comments referenced different rape myths, and how references to rape myths overlapped with other focal concerns.

Organization

The rest of the dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 2 investigates how victim and perpetrator race influence rape perceptions, including how race moderates the effects of rape myths on victim and perpetrator blame. Chapter 3 triangulates the findings in chapter 2, investigating if victim race moderates the effects of rape myths on police unfounding and arrest decisions. Chapter 4 builds on the studies described in Chapters 2 and 3, assessing the factors that detectives say influence their decisions to better understand the mechanisms through which rape myths influence their responses to rape victims and reports. Finally, chapter 5 synthesizes the findings from Chapters 2, 3, and 4, discusses implications for rape myth research, and describes future directions.

CHAPTER 2

RACE-SPECIFIC EFFECTS OF RAPE MYTHS ON RAPE PERCPETIONS

Chapter Summary

Prior rape myth literature is robust but colorblind. Few researchers have identified race-specific rape myths, measured acceptance of race-specific rape myths, or assessed the effects of race-specific rape myths on rape perceptions. In this chapter, I explore how victim race influences rape perceptions directly; I also assess if rape myths have race-specific effects on victim and perpetrator blame attributions. Using a randomized vignette design, I assessed 409 students' and 2180 community members' perceptions of a hypothetical acquaintance rape that varied victim race (White, Black, Latinx) and rape myth elements (precipitation, perpetrator sex drive/intoxication, motives to fabricate report). I analyzed the direct effect of victim race on victim and perpetrator blame. I also assessed if victim race moderated the relationship between rape myth elements and blame attributions. Victim race did not directly influence blame attributions. Several statistically significant interactions revealed that the effects of the "victim precipitation" myth and the "victims lie" myth were amplified for Black and Latinx victims; the "accidental rape" myth only influenced victim blame for White victims; the "real rape" myth only influenced perpetrator blame for Black victims. Rape myths, therefore, have race-specific effects on blame attributions, which may translate into racial disparities in criminal justice responses to rape. Researchers and practitioners need to reconceptualize rape myths intersectionally, with particular attention to their relationship with race.

Introduction

[I]t is fairly obvious that treating different things the same can generate as much inequality as treating the same things differently.
—Kimberlé Crenshaw (1997, p. 285).

False beliefs and misunderstandings about rape, rape victims, and rapists justify sexual violence, minimize its harms, and blame victims. Researchers have documented the enduring impacts of these false beliefs since Martha Burt (1980) first defined and codified them as *rape myths.* Specifically, researchers have found that: greater endorsement of rape myths—or higher rape myth acceptance (RMA)—is associated with sexual violence victimization (Cooke et al., 2020; Haugen et al., 2019; Turchik et al, 2010); higher RMA among men increases rape proclivity and likelihood of committing sexual assault (Bohner et al., 2006; Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; O'Connor, 2021); and RMA is associated with perceiving victims as more responsible and perpetrators as less responsible in hypothetical rape scenarios (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Jaffe et al., 2021; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Romero-Sanchez et al., 2018; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

Beyond increasing the prevalence of sexual violence or influencing perceptions of hypothetical cases, rape myths have real world impacts on the criminal legal system's ability to prevent and sanction rape. Victims with higher RMA are less likely to acknowledge nonconsensual sex as rape and to report assaults to the police (Heath et al., 2013; LeMaire et al. 2016; Reed et al., 2020). Additionally, rape myths influence the likelihood that police arrest suspects (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Morabito et al., 2019; Venema, 2019), that prosecutors file charges (St. George & Spohn, 2018), and that jurors return guilty verdicts (Dinos et al., 2015). Furthermore, despite the rape law reforms of the 70s and 80s (Spohn & Horney, 1992), contemporary movements bringing the

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problem of sexual violence into the public eye (e.g., #MeToo, #TimesUP), and evidence

suggesting that overall RMA is decreasing (Beshers & DiVita, 2021), recent research

shows that rape myths continue to influence rape perceptions and criminal justice

responses to sexual violence (Garza & Franklin, 2021; Jozkowski et al., 2021; Persson &

Dhingra, 2020; Shechory Bitton & Jaeger, 2020; St. George, 2021; St. George et al.

2022). The need to debunk rape myths, combat RMA, and minimize the influence of rape

myths on criminal justice case processing, therefore, persists today.

Some scholars suggest that the pervasive and enduring influence of rape myths is

strategically motivated to maintain the unequal power arrangements that characterize our

society (Armstrong et al. 2018; Bongiorno et al., 2016; Chapleau & Oswald, 2013;

Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; White, 1995). Specifically, scholars have shown that rape

myths discursively emerge from, and help maintain, traditional gender role norms and

values that define sexual aggression as natural masculine behavior that women provoke,

enjoy, or can avoid through good behavior (Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987).[6] Beliefs

suggesting that women deserve to be raped, are more likely to be raped, or are more

responsible for rape when they dress provocatively, act assertively, or access traditionally

male spaces like bars "serve to restrict women's sense of agency, autonomy, and

freedom" (Barn & Powers, 2021, p. 3529; Grubb & Turner, 2012). Rape myths,

therefore, are both produced in, and help maintain, a patriarchal culture that subordinates

women and condones men's sexual aggression.

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[6] The myth that women provoke rape when they wear revealing clothing, flirt with men, or drink (Payne et al., 1999) reinforces the expectation that women be modest, chaste, and restrained. Similarly, the myth that men only rape because they are too aroused to control themselves (Payne et al., 1999) reinforces the expectation that men are sexually aggressive and assertive, and that women should only arouse men if they intend to have sex (i.e., women as gatekeepers).

While the link between rape myths and gender has been well documented, described, and theorized, the rape myth literature has failure to conceptualize rape myths intersectionally.[7] Specifically, intersectional thinking emphasizes that gender oppression intersects with racial oppression (Crenshaw, 1990; Roberts, 1997; Collins, 2000, 2019), so rape myths may come from and reinforce both sexist and racist power arrangements. Importantly, researchers have identified race-specific gender stereotypes—like the hypersexual Black man—which, when manifested as race-specific rape myths, reinforce not just gender oppression but also racial oppression (Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019; Roberts, 1997; Willis, 1992; Wyatt, 1982). Unfortunately, research investigating the role of race-specific gender stereotypes and rape myths is limited. Most of the studies that explore race in the domain of rape myths and rape perceptions assess the direct effects of observer race on RMA or rape perceptions, or the direct effects of victim or perpetrator race on rape perceptions (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; e.g., Dupuis & Clay, 2013; Foley et al., 1995; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Johnson et al, 1997; Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002; Lee et al., 2005; Nagel et al., 2005; Piatak, 2015; Verales & Foley, 1998). Additionally, most of this research focuses on comparisons between White and Black observers, victims, or perpetrators; comparisons with other racial groups are less common (Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Dupuis & Clay, 2013; Foley et al., 1995; Hymes et al., 1993; Johnson et al, 1997; Nagel et al., 2005; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Varelas &

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[7] For example, the scales most commonly used to assess RMA, including Burt's (1980) Rape Myths Scale, Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald's (1999) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, and McMahon and Farmer's (2011) Subtle Rape Myths Scale, describe victims and perpetrators in race-neutral ways. Some scholars have discussed race-specific gender stereotypes (e.g., the Jezebel; Donovan, 2007) or race-specific rape myths (e.g., the Black male rapist myth; Miller, 2019), but these myths have not been codified or measured consistently in the extant literature.

Foley, 1998; but see Genna, 2017; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Miller, 2019; and Piatak,

2015). However, race may influence rape perceptions in more nuanced ways.

Specifically, I suggest that race influences rape perceptions—and by extension rape

acknowledgement, reporting behavior, and criminal justice responses—by moderating the

influence of rape myths on rape perceptions. In the current study, I explore if the effects

of different rape myths on rape perceptions, including assessments of victim and

perpetrator blame, depend on the race of the victims and perpetrators involved. I further

explore differences in effects across three racial categories: White, Black, and Latinx.

Understanding the nuanced ways that race may contribute to specific rape myths

and their effects is important for several reasons. On the one hand, there is some evidence

that women of color, particularly Black women, are at greater risk of sexual violence than

similarly situated White women (Cantor et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2017, though see

Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).[8] At the same time, Black and Latina women are less likely to

report sexual assault to the police or seek medical or psychological help after an assault

(Amstadter et al., 2008; Kaukinen, 2004; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011a,b). Given

evidence that RMA contributes to rape victimization, acknowledgement, and reporting,

higher victimization rates and less access to help among Black and Latina women

suggests that the negative effects of rape myths are amplified for Black and Latina

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[8] In the current study, I assess the effects of Black and Latinx identities on rape perceptions, so the literature discussed in the following sections focuses on these groups. However, it is important to note that rates of sexual violence against Indigenous women are also disproportionately high (Bachman et al., 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006), and Indigenous women face unique barriers, like jurisdiction issues, that make it particularly difficult for them to solicit criminal justice interventions (Bachman et al., 2010; Deer, 2004; Wahab & Olson, 2004). Evidence suggests that Asian women, however, experience lower rates of violence compared to White women (Kalof, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Exploring the role of Indigenous and Asian identities on rape perceptions is outside the scope of the current study and an important avenue for future research.

women. On the other hand, there is evidence that the criminal legal system responds more aggressively to sexual assaults involving White women compared to Black or Latina women (Cochran et al., 2019; Chaffin et al., 2016; Hamid, 2020; LaFree, 1980a,b; Maxwell et al., 2003; Pokorak, 2006; Williams et al., 2007). Sentencing decisions, in particular, treat assaults against White women as more serious and perpetrators as more dangerous, as defendants convicted of raping White women receive the most severe sentences, including death (Cochran et al., 2019; LaFree, 1980a; Williams et al., 2007; Wolfgang & Riedel, 1975).[9] To the extent that rape myths create unique or more challenging barriers for Black and Latina women seeking justice, rape myths may contribute to racial disparities that accumulate across decision points. Removing biases that disadvantage women of color in the criminal legal system is a necessary part of dismantling systems of oppression in society more broadly. The current study contributes to this work by exploring if and how race moderates the effects of rape myths on rape perceptions.

Rape Myths: Definition, Types, and Consequences

Rape myths are attitudes and false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rape perpetrators that justify sexual aggression, deny its prevalence, and minimize its harms (Burt, 1980; Edwards et al., 2011; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape myths include attitudes that excuse the behavior of perpetrators and blame victims for rape. Specifically, the myth of "accidental rape" suggests that men don't rape intentionally; rather men

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[9] Black men convicted of raping White women are also over-represented among wrongful convictions compared to White men convicted of rape or defendants convicted of other crime types (Johnson, 2020; Smith & Hattery, 2011). This over-representation, Johnson (2020) suggests, results from the perceived severity of the rape of White women by Black men, which contributes to "tunnel vision" and misconduct, as police and prosecutors feel pressured to expedite "justice" in these cases.

become too sexually aroused to control themselves, or they misunderstand consent, typically because they are intoxicated (Leverick, 2020; Payne et al., 1999). Additionally, the "victim precipitation" myth suggests that victims provoke rape by behaving in sexually arousing ways, like dressing in revealing clothing, flirting, or engaging in foreplay. The victim precipitation myth also blames victims if they engage in behavior perceived as risky (e.g., drinking, hitchhiking), or if they could have done more to avoid risky situations (e.g., being alone with men, communicating non-consent clearly; Burt, 1980; Edwards et al., 2011; Leverick, 2020; Payne et al., 1999). These attitudes shift responsibility for rape from perpetrators to victims, so victims are responsible for not arousing potential perpetrators, avoiding risky situations, and communicating non-consent effectively.

Rape myths also include beliefs that question the credibility of victims and deny the prevalence and severity of rape. The "women cry rape" myth induces undue skepticism for rape reports by suggesting that most allegations of rape are false, and that women lie about being raped to cover up misbehavior (e.g., someone cheating on their partner or teenagers missing curfew), save their reputations, or for revenge (Burt, 1980; Leverick, 2020; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).[10] Additionally, the "real rape" myth suggests that rape is only "real" or serious when it involves strangers, physical force, resistance, injury, and a prompt report. According to this myth, alleged rapes involving

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[10] Studies assessing the frequency of false reports suggest that about 5% of reported rapes are false (Ferguson & Malouff, 2016; Kelly, 2010; Lisak et al., 2010). Scholars also find that police officers tend to overestimate the frequency of false reports and use victim non-cooperation, recantation and multiple reports as evidence the report was false (Ask, 2010; Kelly, 2010; McMillan, 2018; Spohn et al. 2014; St. George et al., 2022). This skepticism reduces reporting: in 2020, only 23% of rapes and sexual assaults were reported to the police (Morgan & Thompson, 2021), and victims frequently note fear of not being believed as a reason they did not report (Cohn et al., 2013; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011b).

people who know each other are less traumatic or serious than rapes involving strangers; they are framed as he said-she said case involving miscommunication or that the victim consented eventually or enjoyed the rape (Estrich, 1987; Leverick, 2020). Real rape consistency is also used to differentiate true from false allegations: victims are presumed to provoke, invite, or enjoy rape by an acquaintance or intimate partner but not a stranger; physical force, resistance, and injury are assumed to be clear indicators of non-consent; and victims are presumed to have fewer opportunities, and fewer motives, to fabricate crimes when they are reported promptly. Collectively, rape myths frame most rape allegations as false or not serious and suggest that "real" rape—rape necessitating criminal justice intervention and sanction—is rare.

Scholars have found that belief in rape myths, or rape myth acceptance (RMA), influences how individuals interpret and respond to rape-related information. Studies assessing perceptions of hypothetical rape scenarios consistently report that higher RMA is associated with more negative attitudes toward rape victims and more positive attitudes toward perpetrators (Edwards et al., 2011; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Specifically, higher RMA is associated with more victim blame, perceiving the incident as consensual, lower perpetrator blame, and perceiving the perpetrator as not guilty (Dinos et al., 2015; Gravelin et al., 2019; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Jaffe et al., 2021; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Romero-Sanchez et al., 2018; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; van der Burggen & Grubb, 2014). RMA is also associated with rape proclivity (Bohner et al., 2006; Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; O'Connor, 2020), rape acknowledgement (LeMaire et al. 2016; Reed et al. 2020), the likelihood of disclosing/reporting sexual victimization (Heath et al., 2013), and perceiving reports as false (Adolfsson, 2018; McMillan, 2018;

Page, 2010). Importantly, scholars also have shown that myth-related characteristics, like victim-perpetrator relationship and victim resistance only influence victim and perpetrator blame attributions among individuals with high RMA. In other words, RMA causes individuals to attend to myth-related characteristics of victims and incidents when assessing victim and perpetrator responsibility (Krahé et al., 2008; Süssenbach et al., 2013). Furthermore, there is evidence that police, prosecutors, and jurors draw on rape myth schema when responding to sexual assault reports in real life. Quantitative studies assessing factors predicting case outcomes consistently show that rape myth factors like victim risk-taking behavior and character/reputation issues decrease the likelihood of arrest, charges, and conviction (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Beichner & Spohn, 2012; Lundrigan et al., 2019; Morabito et al., 2019; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017; Spohn et al., 2001; Spohn & Tellis, 2012, 2014; St. George & Spohn, 2018). Meanwhile, qualitative studies assessing police, prosecutor, and jury decision-making have shown that these actors draw on rape myth schemas to assess victim credibility and responsibility, suspect culpability and convictability, and defendant guilt, respectively (Ellison & Munro, 2009a,b, 2013; Frohmann, 1991; Shaw et al., 2017; Venema, 2016).

Given the consequences of rape myths, scholars have produced an impressive body of literature assessing the correlates of RMA and the factors that influence rape perceptions. Research has followed two lines of inquiry: 1) identifying which participant characteristics and attitudes predict RMA and rape perceptions (e.g., victim and perpetrator blame attributions) and 2) identifying which victim, perpetrator, and incident characteristics predict rape perceptions. In the first line, researchers have found differences in RMA across gender, age, education, sexual orientation, political ideology,

victimization experiences, affiliation with Greek life on college campuses, and nationality (Burt, 1980; Devdas & Rubin, 2007; Sjöberg & Sarwar, 2020; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Walfield, 2021). Being male, older, and less educated, for example, correspond to higher RMA. Additionally, within the second line of inquiry, studies have assessed how victim, perpetrator, and incident characteristics influence victim and perpetrator blame attributions. For example, researchers have found that victims are blamed more, and perpetrators are blamed less, when the victim is male, gay, and intoxicated (Gravelin et al., 2019; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Persson & Dhingra, 2020; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2018; Whatley, 1996; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Additionally, victims are blamed more, and perpetrators less, when they do not physically resist, when they have a closer relationship with the perpetrator, and when they have more extensive sexual experience (Gravelin et al., 2019; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014).

Race, Ethnicity, and Rape Myths

Studies exploring the relationship between race/ethnicity and rape myths and their effects has fallen within these two domains. In the first line of inquiry, researchers have assessed the relationship between *participant* or *observer* race or ethnicity and RMA, as well as perceptions of hypothetical scenarios. Overall, findings show that White participants tend to report lower RMA than non-White participants (Johnson et al, 1997; Lee et al., 2005; Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002; Nagel et al., 2005; Piatak, 2015; though see Carmody & Washington, 2001; for a meta-analysis, see Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Additionally, scholars have found that White observers perceive victims less negatively and perpetrators more positively than non-White observers (Jimenez & Abreu., 2003; St. George, 2021; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Varelas & Foley, 1998). Furthermore,

some scholars report racial or ethnicity differences in the *specific* myths groups endorse.

For example, Johnson et al. (1997) found racial differences in the justification for

acquaintance rape, but not the tendency to blame victims or exonerate perpetrators.

Similarly, Barn and Powers (2021) compared attitudes of students in the UK and India

and found that UK students endorsed the myth that women provoke rape, while Indian

students endorsed the myth that rape results from men's sex drives. These differences, the

authors suggested, may be due to the more explicitly patriarchal culture in India, where

marriages are still arranged, pre-marital sex remains uncommon and subject to criticism,

and norms emphasize men's sexuality and prowess with little attention to women's

sexuality (Barns & Powers, 2021). Collectively, these studies suggest that differences in

gender role socialization influence both overall RMA and the specific rape myths

individuals endorse.

Additionally, in the second line of inquiry, scholars have explored how *victim* and

perpetrator race and ethnicity influence rape perceptions, such as assessments of victim

and perpetrator blame and responsibility. Most studies to date have focused on

comparisons between White and Black victims and perpetrators, finding that observers

perceive hypothetical scenarios as less serious or "real" and victims as more responsible

or culpable when the victim is Black, compared to White (Gravelin et al., 2019; Foley et

al., 1995; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014, Willis, 1992; though see Acosta, 2021). For

example, Willis (1992) found that observers perceived Black victims more negatively

than White victims in a date rape scenario, and they perceived perpetrators more

positively—less likely to rape again—when the victim was Black. Likewise, Foley and

colleagues (1995) found that observers perceived the rape as less serious and were less

likely to agree the incident was a crime when the victim was Black compared to White. Other racial comparisons are less common and find different results: several studies comparing perceptions of White victims to Hispanic victims, for example, found that ethnicity did not influence assessments of victim blame or empathy (Genna; 2017; Miller, 2019; Piatak, 2015).

In addition to the effects of victim race, studies also reveal that perpetrator race influences rape perceptions in complex ways, though this evidence is mixed. Some authors found that perpetrator race had no effect on rape perceptions (Foley et al., 1995; Franklin & Garza, 2021). By contrast, Varelas and Foley (1998) reported that White male observers, but not women or Black observers, attributed less responsibility to Black perpetrators compared to White perpetrators. Dupuis and Clay (2013) also found that observers perceived White perpetrators as more responsible and guilty than Black perpetrators. Meanwhile, Miller (2019) found that perpetrator race had no effect on assessments of *perpetrator* culpability, but observers perceived *victims* as more culpable when the perpetrator was Black, compared to White or Hispanic. Other scholars have found that the effect of perpetrator race on blame attributions depends on other perpetrator characteristics, like celebrity status (Knight et al., 2001).

Findings are even more complex in studies assessing the interactions between victim race and perpetrator race. Donovan (2007) assessed perceptions of an acquaintance rape and found that male observers—but not females—perceived White perpetrators as more culpable than Black perpetrators, but only when the victim was White. Donovan also found that male observers perceived Black perpetrators as more culpable in intra-racial rapes than in inter-racial rapes. By contrast, Hymes and colleagues

(1993) found that inter-racial rape perpetrators were perceived as more guilty than intra-rape perpetrators, regardless of perpetrator race. Further complicating these relationships, George and Martínez (2002) compared inter- and intra-racial stranger rapes involving Black and White victims and perpetrators, hypothesizing that Black victims of White perpetrators would be blamed more and White victims of Black perpetrators would be blamed less than intra-racial groupings. They found, however, that victims of inter-racial rapes were blamed more than victims of intra-racial rapes, regardless of perpetrator race. Importantly, George and Martínez drew on race-specific gender stereotypes to explain these unexpected findings, suggesting that while stereotypes ascribing promiscuity to Black women framed them as more responsible for the rape than White perpetrators, stereotypes of the Black male rapist contributed to perceiving White victims as more responsible, presumably because they put themselves at risk by "fraternizing" with a Black man. Similarly, Foley et al. (1995), in finding that victim race but not perpetrator race influenced rape perceptions, concluded that the "stereotype of the Black male rapist is not as strong as that of the White female victim" (p. 15).[11] These findings suggest that race and ethnicity influence rape perceptions via race-specific myths.

Intersecting Rape Myths with Race

Most of the rape myth literature assesses rape myths' effects without attending to race-specific rape myths. For example, the measurement tools most used to assess RMA—Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance scale, Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald's (1999) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale, and more recently, McMahon and Farmer's

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[11] This finding is not surprising, given rape myths' tendency to shift attention from perpetrators to victims. Stereotypes and myths blaming female victims for precipitation, a lack of resistance, or lying, may be more influential than stereotypes and myths exonerating perpetrators for hypersexuality.

(2011) Subtle Rape Myths Scale—assess rape myth without specifying victim or perpetrator race. Likewise, scholars tracing the origins of rape myths have focused on their relationship to traditional gender role norms (Edwards et al., 2011; Estrich, 1987; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), but ignored their relationship to racial stereotypes. This oversight is problematic. Intersectionality scholars emphasize that social identities are entangled in ways that affect individuals' experiences, including how they experience privilege and oppression (Collins, 2000, 2019; Crenshaw, 1990). Black women, for example, experience discrimination associated with being women, discrimination associated with being Black, and discrimination associated with being *Black women* (Crenshaw, 1990). These experiences cannot be reduced to only their gender or race. Likewise, intersectionality theory emphasizes that representations of race and gender are entangled (Collins, 2000, 2019; Crenshaw, 1990; Roberts, 1997), which suggests that gender stereotypes are race-specific. If rape myths are associated with gender role norms and stereotypes, which are racialized, then rape myths also may be racialized.

Furthermore, intersectionality theory emphasizes that oppressive social structures like sexism and racism are entangled (Crenshaw, 1990; Collins, 2000, 2019). So, rape myths, which feminist scholars have suggested maintain patriarchal power arrangements (Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987; Hamid, 2020), also may maintain white supremacy (Hamid, 2020). Racist stereotypes about Black men and women's hypersexuality were used to maintain and justify Black people's enslavement and oppression (Davis, 1983; Hamid, 2020; Wallace-Sanders, 2002). The myth of the Black male rapist framed rape as almost exclusively perpetrated by Black men against White women and was used to justify the lynching of any Black man who engaged in sexual activity with a White

woman.[12] At the same time, White men could legally rape Black women (Cochran et al., 2019; Hamid, 2020; Pokorak, 2006). Racialized gender stereotypes, therefore, were used to maintain and justify White people's control over Black people's bodies, sex, and lives (Hamid, 2020; Pokorak, 2006). Even after slavery was abolished in the United States, scientific and medical discourses ascribed hypersexual and aggressive characteristics to men and women of color, particularly men and women of African descent (Crockett, 2013; Prather et al., 2018; Roberts, 1997; Washington, 2006). Vestiges of these discourses persist today (Prather et al., 2018; Washington, 2006). The persistence of the Black male rapist myth is evident in the disproportionate use of severe punishment, particularly the death penalty, for Black men who assault White women (Bardaglio, 1994; LaFree, 1980a; Wiggins, 1983; Williams et al., 2007; Wolfgang & Riedel, 1975). Likewise, the Jezebel stereotype describes Black women as hypersexual and promiscuous (Crockett, 2013; Hamid, 2020; Roberts, 1997). These characteristics essentially make Black women "unrapeable" because they are stereotyped as always welcoming and enjoying sex.

Some scholars have explored the effects of racialized gender stereotypes on women's sexual behavior and disclosure decisions. For example, scholars have found that Black women who are socialized into, or familiar with, Black promiscuity stereotypes like the Jezebel and the Gold Digger (Donovan & Williams, 2002), blame themselves for rape or fear negative responses from family members and the criminal legal system (McGuffey, 2013; Neville et al., 2004). Additionally, Black women who internalize the

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[12] Even consensual sexual activity was prohibited (e.g., anti-miscegenation laws; Bhusal, 2017). Likewise, any perceived sexual interest of a Black male toward a White female could result in death, as in the case of Emmett Till, among others (Davis, 1983; Taylor & Nichols, 2010).

matriarch stereotype—a stereotype that describes Black women as strong, resilient, aggressive, and unfeminine (Collins, 2000; Donovan & Williams, 2002)—may be less likely to seek help after an assault (Donovan & Williams, 2002; Maier, 2008; McGuffey, 2013; West et al., 2016). More generally, Bond and colleagues (2021), suggested that race-based sexual stereotypes "may cause [Black] women to adopt more traditional gender roles in Western society, making them less likely to feel empowered in sexual decision-making" (p. 299).

Like Black men and Women, Latinx men and women are socialized into Latinx-specific gender stereotypes, like the Marianismo-Machismo stereotypes that idealize Latina women's sexual purity and hyperfemininity and Latino men's aggressiveness, dominance, and hypersexuality (Ahrens *et al.*, 2010; Arrizón, 2008; Bracero, 1998). Scholars have found that Latina women socialized into the Marianismo stereotype have more stereotypical rape scripts and are more vulnerable to sexual violence in intimate relationships than peers who adhere less strongly to these norms (Ahrens *et al.*, 2010; Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2014; Littleton et al., 2007).

Additionally, several scholars have examined the relationship between race-specific gender stereotypes or rape myths and assessments of gendered violence. Donovan (2007) explored the effects of victim and perpetrator race on assessments of a rape survivor as promiscuous (i.e., the Jezebel stereotype) and found that participants perceived Black victims as more promiscuous than White victims. Similarly, assessing attitudes toward intimate partner violence among Black men and women, Cheeseborough et al. (2020) found that endorsing the Jezebel stereotype increased participants' justification for intimate partner violence. Additionally, Miller (2019) found support for

the Black male rapist stereotype, finding that participants attributed more hypersexuality to Black men than White or Hispanic men. She also found that while perpetrator race had no effect on assessments of perpetrator culpability, observers perceived victims as more culpable for the rape when the perpetrator was Black, compared to White or Hispanic, and that some of this effect was mediated by observers' endorsement of the rape propensity stereotype, or the "uncontrollable male sex drive" myth. She concluded that the stereotype of Black male sexuality, which culminates in the myth of the Black male rapist, results in greater blame of victims who choose to "fraternize" with Black men or otherwise fail to protect themselves from men who are naturally inclined to sexual aggression (Miller, 2019).

Cumulatively, these studies reveal that racialized rape myths exist and influence perceptions of and responses to rape. However, a full exploration of the way that rape myths intersect with race is lacking. There may be other rape myths specific to Black, Latinx, Asian, or other racial groups that have yet to be articulated or measured. Furthermore, the colorblind rape myths frequently assessed in the literature—those measured on validated RMA scales—may not be race-neutral. The Jezebel stereotype, for example, overlaps substantially with the victim precipitation myth. It may be that all women are held responsible for rape when they engage in behavior perceived as promiscuous or risky, but this effect may be exaggerated for Black women who are stereotyped as promiscuous Jezebels (Donovan, 2007). Similarly, stereotypes of hypersexuality may, as Miller (2019) found, result in perceiving sexual aggression as more accidental when perpetrators are Black, compared to White. In the current study, I begin to unpack the racialized effects of rape myths on rape perceptions.

Present Study

Prior research outlined above suggests that race- and ethnicity-specific gender stereotypes contribute to race-specific rape myths. Prior literature describing rape myths and measuring RMA, however, have articulated colorblind myths. That is, except for several studies focused explicitly on assessing race-specific rape myths like the "Black male rapist" (Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019), studies identifying rape myths, measuring RMA, and assessing the effects of rape myths on rape perceptions have used assessment tools that describe rape myths in race-neutral ways. In the current study, I propose that rape myths are not race-neutral. Instead, I suspect that different rape myths like victim precipitation, accidental rape, skepticism (women cry rape), and the "real rape" stereotype are associated with race-specific gender stereotypes. By extension, I propose that race will influence which rape myths participants perceive as contributing to the incident, and race will moderate the influence of rape myths on victim and perpetrator blame attributions. Additionally, I expand the literature assessing the effect of race on rape perceptions by exploring the direct and moderating effects of Latinx identities on rape perceptions.

Drawing on the theory that rape myths act like cognitive schema (Eyssel & Bohner, 2011; Krahé et al., 2007; Süssenbach et al., 2013), I propose that victim and perpetrator race will influence which rape myths are activated when making attributions about hypothetical rape, such as victim and perpetrator blame and responsibility. Schemas are cognitive organization tools that are "activated in response to environmental input" and provide "context for interpreting experience and assimilating knowledge" (Derry, 1996, p. 167). Schematic processing saves mental resources by allowing

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individuals to analyze and respond to new information based on pre-formed generalizations and stereotypes (Kunda, 1999). Schemas also help individuals assess and categorize ambiguous stimuli. In the case of rape, individuals may draw on rape myth schemas to categorize the incident as rape or consensual sex, assess victim responsibility and motives to lie, and determine the perpetrator's guilt.[13] Rape myth schemas, therefore, help individuals organize and interpret information about rape so they can efficiently assess the situation and respond accordingly.[14]

Conceptualizing rape myths as schemas, I suggest that if rape myths are race-specific, then victim and perpetrator race will affect which rape myths are activated when observers make assessments about rape incidents. For example, given the overlap between the Jezebel stereotype and the victim precipitation myth, observers may draw more on the victim precipitation myth when assessing victim blame in rapes involving Black victims, compared to those involving White victims. This study is exploratory, so I make no formal predictions about which rape myths will be activated by each racial category. However, I expect to find several trends. First, I expect that victim and

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[13] For example, allegations describing a rape at a party where the alleged victim and perpetrator were friends, drank together, and kissed, may activate the "victim precipitation" schema, resulting in the perception that the victim provoked the rape by kissing the perpetrator or could have avoided the rape if they had not been drunk. This scenario may likewise activate the "accidental rape" schema, resulting in the perception that the perpetrator was too aroused to control themself or too drunk to realize what they were doing. Based on these assessments, the perceiver may determine that the allegations do not describe a "real" rape, that the victim is responsible for what happened, and the perpetrator is not guilty.

[14] I expect that individuals who *do not* endorse rape myths may still use rape-related schemas to assess rape incidents. However, their schemas may focus on a lack of affirmative consent or explicit non-consent, intoxication indicating incapacitation, or other characteristics commonly associated with sexual assault. These "anti-myth" rape schemas may also include representations of rape that involve victim and incident characteristics typically excluded from "real rape," such as precipitation, male victims, or people involved in sex work. While I know of no study to date that assesses rape schemas that diverge from or oppose rape myth schemas, I expect that most people use schemas to process rape-related information. However, it is the people who endorse rape myths who use rape myth schemas in ways that end up denying rape, framing allegations as false, or blaming victims.

perpetrator race will influence assessments of victim and perpetrator blame directly. For example, I expect participants will attribute more blame to the victim and less to the perpetrator when the victim is Black or Latinx, compared to White. Second, I expect that victim and perpetrator race will influence which rape myths participants agree contributed to the rape incident. For example, participants may be more likely to agree that the victim's precipitative behavior contributed to the incident when the victim is Black, compared to White. Finally, I expect that victim and perpetrator race will moderate the effect of contributing rape myth factors on assessments of victim and perpetrator blame. For example, victim precipitation may have a larger effect on victim blame attributions when the victim is perceived as Black, compared to White.

Methods

The Sample

The sample used in the current study consisted of 2589 participants recruited from online, undergraduate courses at Arizona State University and Amazon's Mechanical Turk crowd sourcing platform. Participants were on average 36 years old ($SD = 12$ years; range: 18-90).[15] Fifty-three percent of participants identified as male, 45% as female, and 2% as some other gender. Most (77%) participants identified as heterosexual, and as White (79%). Additionally, 11% identified as Black, 7% as Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, and 3% as Native, "other" or mixed race. Eight percent of participants identified as Latinx or Hispanic. Forty-three percent of participants reported having been forced or

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[15] I collected responses from both students and community members for two reasons. First, I needed a large sample to identify small effects, so including students who took the questionnaire voluntarily decreased costs. Second, in future work, I plan to assess differences between students and MTurk workers on demographic characteristics, attitudes, and rape perceptions in order to discuss the pros and cons of using each sample type in rape myth research.

coerced to have sex, or had had sex when they didn't want to, at some point in their lives; 17% reported having sex with someone who didn't want to at some point in their lives. Eighty-four percent ($n = 2180$) were drawn from the community compared to 16% ($n = 409$) recruited from the university. Sample characteristics are described in table 2.1.

Study Design and Vignette Versions

Participants responded to a randomized vignette survey that used a 4 (victim race) x 5 (victim gender/sexual orientation) x 5 (rape myth condition) between-subjects design. Each participant read one vignette describing a hypothetical date rape. All vignettes described two people who knew each other go out to dinner, then return to the victim's apartment, where intercourse occurred. A few days later, the victim disclosed the rape. The incident purposefully lacked "real rape" elements like force and resistance. Specifically, the perpetrator did not use physical force and the victim did not physically resist or say "no," "stop," or "don't."

Vignettes varied victim and perpetrator race (White, Black, Latino/a, no race specified), victim gender and sexual orientation (cis-straight female, trans straight female, lesbian female, cis straight male, gay male) and rape myth elements (precipitation, accident, and victims lie, all myth elements, no myth elements). Vignettes described victims and perpetrators as "White," "Black," or "Latina/o," or did not specify a race/ethnicity. Victims and perpetrators were always described as the same race/ethnicity. Vignettes also varied the victim's gender and sexual orientation through descriptions of victims and perpetrators. Victims were described as a "girl" (cisgender female condition), "lesbian," "transgender girl," "guy" (cisgender male condition), or "gay guy." Perpetrators were described as a "male friend" or "guy" in the cisgender female,

transgender female, and gay male conditions; they were described as a "female friend" or "girl" in the lesbian female and cisgender male condition.[16] Finally, vignettes varied the presentation of three different rape myth elements, resulting in five myth conditions: The "precipitation" condition described the victim as having a prior sexual relationship with the perpetrator, wearing sexy clothing, drinking, flirting, and kissing the perpetrator. The "accident" condition described the perpetrator—but not the victim—as drinking, feeling drunk, being turned on, and passing out after intercourse. The "skepticism" condition (i.e., "victims lie" myth) described the victim as living with a boyfriend or girlfriend (instead of a roommate). The "all myths" condition contained elements of all three rape myths, while the "no myths" condition contained no rape myth elements.

In the vignettes, I conceptualized "Annie" or "Andy" as the victim and "David" or "Diana" as the perpetrator. An example of a vignette with no myth elements was:

> Annie *(Andy),* a White *(Black/Latino) (gay)* girl *(guy/transgender girl)*, is working late one evening when David *(Diana),* a White *(Black/Latino)* male *(female)* friend calls her and invites her out for dinner. Annie agrees because her roommate, Eliza, is out of town. After dinner, they take a walk and continue talking. Then, David says, "Let me walk you home." Annie agrees. When they arrive at Annie's apartment, Annie invites David in. While sitting on the couch, David begins to rub Annie's thigh. Annie pushes David's hand off and says, "I just want to hang out, okay?" David says "OK." After a while, Annie gets up to go to bed. David begins taking off Annie's clothes. Annie says, "Hey, what are you doing?" Then David takes off Annie's clothes and has sex with her. Afterwards, David leaves. Annie goes to her room and goes to bed.
>
> A few days later, Annie's roommate, Eliza finds Annie's underwear under the couch. She confronts Annie about it. Annie gets upset and says that David raped her a few days ago. Annie tells Eliza she wants to call the

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[16] In the current study, I assess the effects of victim and perpetrator race on assessment of victim and perpetrator blame attributions. Although I control for the victim's gender and sexual orientation specified in the vignettes, I do not explore the effects of these identities on rape perceptions. Doing so is outside the scope of the current investigation and a topic of future work.

police.

An example of a vignette with all three myth elements was:

> Annie *(Andy),* a White *(Black/Latino) (gay)* girl *(guy/transgender girl)*, is working late one evening when David *(Diana),* a White *(Black/Latino)* guy (girl) she used to hook up with calls her and invites her out for dinner. Annie agrees because her boyfriend who she lives with, Elliott, is out of town. Annie wears a sexy dress. At dinner, Annie and David share two bottles of wine. While they eat, Annie rubs David's leg under the table. After dinner, they take a walk and continue talking. They kiss. After talking and making out a bit more, Annie says, "Wow, I'm drunk. I should go home." David says, "Yeah me too. Let me walk you home." Annie agrees. When they arrive at Annie's apartment, Annie invites David in for another drink. They kiss some more. While sitting on the couch, David begins to rub Annie's thigh. Annie pushes David's hand off and says, "I just want to hang out, okay?" David says "OK. You just turn me on so much." After a while, Annie gets up to go to bed. Annie and David kiss again and David begins taking off Annie's dress. Annie says, "Hey, what are you doing?" Then David takes off Annie's dress and has sex with her. Afterwards, David passes out. Annie goes to her room and goes to bed.
>
> A few days later, Annie's boyfriend, Elliott, finds Annie's underwear under the couch. He confronts Annie about it. Annie gets upset and says that David raped her a few days ago. Annie tells Elliott she wants to call the police.

Variables and Measures

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were participants' perceptions of the incident described in the vignette. After reading the vignette, participants responded to questions assessing their perceptions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree). *Victim blame* was the average of seven items assessing the victim's consent, intentions, and control in the incident (e.g., "Annie consented to sex with David"). Higher scores indicated more victim blame (*M* = 2.88, *SD* = 1.00, *alpha* = .89). *Perpetrator blame* was the average of seven items

assessing the perpetrator's perceptions of consent, intentions, and control in the incident (e.g., "David though Annie wanted to have sex"). Higher scores indicated more perpetrator blame ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .63$, $alpha = .67$).

I also assessed participants' perceptions about how four different rape myths contributed to the incident. *Precipitation* was the average of seven items describing victim precipitation or risky behavior (e.g., "Annie getting drunk contributed to what happened"). Higher scores indicated greater agreement that the victim's behavior and clothing contributed to the incident ($M = 3.03$ $SD = 1.12$, $alpha = .91$). *Accident* was the average of four items assessing if the perpetrator acted accidentally (e.g., "David only had sex with Annie because his sex drive was out of control"). Higher scores indicated more agreement that the incident was an accident ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.89$, $alpha = .91$). *Skepticism* was the average of four items assessing participants' perceptions that the victim was lying (e.g., "Annie may be lying about being raped to cover up cheating"). Higher scores indicated more skepticism of the victim's allegations ($M = 3.01$ $SD = 1.20$, $alpha = .93$). Finally, *real rape consistency* was the average of six items assessing how real rape characteristics influenced the perceived severity of the incident. This attitude was measured in two ways: Participants who agreed or strongly agreed to the question "David raped Annie" responded to items assessing if real rape elements would make the incident more serious (e.g., "I would characterize this incident as more serious if Annie hadn't made David think she wanted to have sex."). Participants who disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed to the question "David raped Annie" responded to items assessing if real rape elements would increase the perception that the incident was rape (e.g., "I would be more likely to characterize what happened as rape if Annie hadn't made David

think she wanted to have sex."). Responses to these items were averaged to create a *real rape consistency* scale ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.12$, $alpha_{deny\ harm} = .93$, $alpha_{deny\ rape} = .75$), with higher scores indicating greater agreement that real rape consistency would make the incident more serious or a "real rape."[17] See table 2.2 for a complete list of scale items and distribution of responses. All scales were standardized in the final models.

Independent Variables and Interactions

The primary independent variables were *victim race* and *perpetrator race*. After reading the vignette, participants responded to two questions assessing perceptions of the characters' race/ethnicity: "When picturing Annie (David) from the scenario, what race/ethnicity is she (he)?" Response options included "White," "Black," "Latinx," and "Other" with the option to specify an "Other" race/ethnicity. Most participants perceived victims as "White," "Black," or "Latinx," with participants occasionally perceiving "Asian" or noting that no race was specified. In the current study, I limited the sample to cases in which victim and perpetrator race was specified, and participants perceived the victim's and perpetrator's race as "White," "Black," or "Latinx."[18] I also assessed the effects of all four rape myth scales—*precipitation, accident, skepticism,* and *real rape*

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[17] While the phrasing of the *real rape consistency* questions varied to account for participants' belief that the incident described a rape, conceptually, the items in both phrasings assess how real rape characteristics influence the perceived severity of the incident. I therefore treat responses to the two phrases as responses to the same scale and assess its effect accordingly. However, I control for phrasing in statistical models.

[18] Victim and perpetrator race/ethnicity were specified in 75% of vignettes to ensure that enough participants perceived victims and perpetrators as White, Black, and Latinx—the race categories of interest. About 25% of vignettes did not specify victim or perpetrator race. These vignettes were included in the original data collection to assess a different research question than explored in the current study: if participants assume a White subject when no race is specified. I exclude responses to "no race" vignettes from the analyses. Twenty-one percent of participants who read vignettes with a specified race misidentified the victim's race; 24% misidentified the perpetrator's race. I was interested in how perceived race of the victim and perpetrator influenced rape perceptions, so I used *perceived race* instead of *specified race* as the independent variable. I controlled for *specified race* in the models.

consistency—on *victim blame* and *perpetrator blame*.

In addition to direct effects of victim and perpetrator race and rape myth scales, I explored interactions between these variables. Interactions included *Black victim-precipitation, Latinx victim-precipitation, Black victim-accident, Latinx victim-accident, Black victim-skepticism, Latinx victim-skepticism, Black victim-real rape consistency, Latinx victim-real rape consistency, Black perp-precipitation, Latinx perp-precipitation, Black perp-accident, Latinx perp-accident, Black perp-skepticism, Latinx perp-skepticism, Black perp-real rape consistency,* and *Latinx perp-real rape consistency*.

Control Variables

I controlled for participants' general *RMA* using McMahon and Farmer's (2011) Subtle Rape Myths scale.[19] The 22 items in the original scale were modified to be gender neutral and participants indicated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Responses were averaged ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.12$, *alpha* = .98), with higher scores indicating higher RMA. I also controlled for participants' *age* (years), gender (*male* = 1, *other gender* = 1, female = reference), sexual orientation (*heterosexual* = 1, not heterosexual = reference), race (*Black* = 1, *Asian, Hawaiian, Pacific Islander* = 1, *Other/mixed* = 1, White = reference), and ethnicity

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[19] McMahon and Farmer (2011) suggested that while rape myths persist, they have become more subtle, so some scales assessing RMA may be outdated. They updated items from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale-Short Form (IRMA-SF) to develop the Subtle Rape Myths Scale. Like the IRMA-SF, the scale contains four subscales: she asked for it (precipitation); he didn't mean to (accident); it wasn't really rape ("real rape" stereotype); and she lied. The most notable difference between the two scales is the replacement of "woman/women" and "man/men" with "girl/girls" and "guy/guys," respectively. Other outdated terms were also replaced (e.g., "women cry rape" replaced with "girls say they were raped"). Despite updated language, the scale ignores race and sexual orientation, and refers only to (cis-gendered) female victims and (cis-gendered) male perpetrators. In the surveys for Chapter 1, I replaced victim and perpetrator's gendered terms (e.g., "girl," "guy") with gender-neutral terms (e.g., "a person/people," "someone").

(*Latinx* = 1, not Latinx = reference). Additionally, I controlled for prior sexual assault victimization and perpetration. Participants were asked three questions assessing their experiences with sexual violence: 1) "Have you ever been forced or coerced to engage in sexual activity with anyone, including people you know?" 2) Have you ever had sex with someone when you didn't want to?" and 3) Have you ever had sex with someone when they didn't want to. Response options included "yes," "no" and "I don't know" with the option to explain.

In analyses, *never victim* (responded "no" to questions 1 and 2) and *maybe victim* (responded "I don't know" to questions 1 and 2) control for prior victimization (yes responses = reference category). Likewise, *never perpetrated* (responded "no" to question 3) and *maybe perpetrated* (responded "I don't know" to question 3) control for prior perpetration (yes responses = reference category).

I also controlled for variations in the vignettes. I controlled for myth version (*precipitation elements, accident elements, victim lied elements, all myth elements,* and *no myth elements* = reference), and the victim's specified gender and sexual orientation (*cisgender hetero female* = reference, *lesbian female, transgender female, hetero male, gay male*). I also controlled for victim's specified race—the race/ethnicity specified in the vignette (*Black, Latinx, White* = reference). Finally, I controlled for the mode of participant recruitment (*Mturk* = 1, *student* = reference), and the real rape consistency question phrasing ("I would characterize this incident as more serious if.." phasing = 1, "I would be more likely to characterize what happened as rape if…" = reference).

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Table 2.1.

Sample, Variable, and Vignette Characteristics

Variable	Coding Scheme	Distribution in Sample
		M (SD)/N (%)
Dependent Variables		
Victim blame	average of 7 items, alpha = .89	2.88 (1.00)
Perpetrator blame	average of 7 items, alpha = .65	3.47 (.63)
Precipitation	average of 6 items, alpha = .91	3.03 (1.12)
Accident	average of 4 items, alpha = .91	2.64 (1.19)
Skepticism	average of 4 items, alpha = .93	3.01 (1.20)
Real rape consistency	average of 6 items, alpha (deny harm) = .92; alpha (deny rape) = .76	3.15 (1.12)
Independent Variables		
Perceived victim race		
Black victim	descried victim as Black	757 (29.2%)
Latinx victim	descried victim as Latinx	585 (22.6%)
White victim	descried victim as White (reference)	1247 (48.2%)
Perceived perpetrator race		
Black perpetrator	descried perpetrator as Black	744 (28.7%)
Latinx perpetrator	descried perpetrator as Latinx	549 (21.2%)
White perpetrator	descried perpetrator as White (reference)	1296 (50.1%)
Participant Characteristics		
RMA	average of 22 items, alpha = .98	2.78 (1.12)
Age	describe age in years	36.20 (12.23)
Female	described self as female (reference)	1146 (45.0%)
Male	described self as male	1362 (53.5%)
Other gender	described self as transgender, androgynous, intersex, other, or multiple gender categories	40 (1.6%)
Heterosexual	described self as heterosexual	1967 (77.3%)
Non-heterosexual	describe self as gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, queer or other (reference)	579 (22.7%)
White	described self as White/Caucasian (reference)	2014 (79.0%)
Black	described self as Black/African American	284 (11.1%)
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	described self as Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander,	170 (6.7%)
Other/mixed race	described self as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Other race, Multiple race categories	82 (3.2%)
Latinx/Hispanic	described self as Latinx/Hispanic	208 (8.2%)
Never victimized	never forced/coerced to have sex when didn't want to (reference)	1413 (55.4%)
Maybe victimized	maybe forced/coerced to have sex when didn't want to	43 (1.7%)
Rape victim	yes forced/coerced to have sex when didn't want to	1093 (42.88%)
Never perpetrated	never had sex with someone else when they didn't want to (reference)	2060 (81.0%)
Maybe perpetrated	maybe had sex with someone else when they didn't want to	40 (1.6%)
Rape perpetrator	yes had sex with someone else when they didn't want to	443 (17.4%)

Mode of Distribution		
MTurk worker	recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk	2180 (84.2%)
Student (reference)	recruited from undergraduate classes	409 (15.8%)
Vignette characteristics		
Myth Version		
Precipitation elements	vignette described victim precipitation	519 (20.1%)
Accident elements	vignette described perpetrator intoxication, sex drive	521 (20.1%)
Victims lie elements	vignette described victim living with romantic partner	533 (20.6%)
All myths elements	vignette described all myth elements	487 (18.8%
No myths	vignette described no myth elements (reference)	529 (20.4%)
Victim/Perpetrator Race		
Black	vignette described victim and perpetrator as Black	849 (32.8%)
Latinx	vignette described victim and perpetrator and Latinx	854 (33.0%)
White	vignette described victim and perpetrator as White (reference)	886 (34.22%)
Victim gender/sexual orientation		
Cisgender, hetero female	vignette described victim as female and perpetrator as male (reference)	524 (20.2%)
Lesbian female	vignette described victim as gay female and perpetrator as female	526 (20.3%)
Transgender female	vignette described victim as trans female and perpetrator as male	533 (20.6%)
Hetero male	vignette described victim as male and perpetrator as female	522 (20.2%)
Gay male	vignette described victim as gay male and perpetrator as male	484 (18.7%)

Table 2.2

Distribution of Responses to Dependent Variable Items

Variable Item	Percent of Respondents in Each Response Category				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Victim Blame					
Annie consented to sex with David.	23.8	20.3	19.0	26.6	10.2
Annie wanted to have sex with David.	23.3	21.1	20.7	22.6	12.3
At first, Annie didn't want to have sex with David, but by the end, she consented.	22.3	18.1	19.6	28.4	11.6
Annie is responsible for what happened.	22.0	18.8	19.0	25.4	14.9
Annie could have avoided what happened.	10.9	11.8	19.6	40.3	17.5
Annie had control over what happened.	14.8	16.4	21.6	31.1	16.1
What happened with David upset Annie. (R)	4.2	8.6	18.7	37.4	31.2
Perpetrator Blame					
David thought Annie consented to sex. (R)	13.2	16.0	22.0	37.9	19.9
David thought Annie wanted to have sex. (R)	12.1	16.4	20.9	33.0	17.7
David is responsible for what happened.	1.2	4.6	15.6	43.6	35.0
David could have avoided what happened.	1.4	5.0	13.7	40.4	39.5
David had control over what happened.	1.4	5.3	15.8	42.6	34.9
David intended to rape Annie.	7.3	17.4	28.3	27.0	20.0
What happened with Annie upset David. (R)	10.8	22.2	24.2	24.2	18.7
Precipitation					
Annie getting drunk contributed to what happened.	20.8	16.5	16.7	36.5	9.6
Annie's clothing contributed to what happened.	27.3	21.3	17.9	19.4	14.2
Annie inviting David into her apartment contributed to what happened.	14.1	13.1	17.1	29.5	16.3
Annie engaging in foreplay with David contributed to what happened.	19.6	15.1	18.5	31.3	15.6
Annie not clearly saying "no" contributed to what happened.	20.9	18.3	17.7	29.4	13.7
Annie not physically resisting contributed what happened.	18.8	15.3	18.7	31.1	16.0
Accident					
David did not mean have sex with Annie.	28.9	28.2	15.3	20.1	7.6
David only had sex with Annie because his/her sex drive was out of control.	24.7	20.6	20.5	21.4	12.8
David was too drunk to notice that Annie resisted.	25.1	22.3	20.1	23.6	9.0
It's not rape because Annie and David were both drunk.	31.4	20.8	16.6	18.9	12.2
Skepticism					

Annie may be lying about being raped to cover up cheating.	20.7	16.0	19.1	34.1	10.1
Annie may be lying about being raped because she regrets having sex with David.	18.4	15.4	19.8	37.1	9.4
Annie may be lying about being raped because she doesn't want to seem slutty.	21.1	17.8	22.0	25.1	13.9
I am skeptical of Annie's allegations.	18.8	14.7	19.5	32.4	14.5
Real Rape Consistency					
I would characterize this incident as more serious if Annie hadn't made David think he/she wanted to have sex.	18.1	19.1	21.3	33.6	7.9
I would characterize this incident as more serious if Annie had said "no" clearly.	14.7	15.1	18.3	30.9	21.0
I would characterize this incident as more serious if Annie and David were strangers.	19.0	20.2	18.3	29.7	12.7
I would characterize this incident as more serious if Annie had physically fought back.	13.2	11.9	16.4	35.5	23.1
I would characterize this incident as more serious if David had used a weapon.	13.5	12.6	15.0	33.2	25.8
I would characterize this incident as more serious if Annie had reported immediately.	15.9	14.2	19.9	31.6	18.5

Notes. (R) indicates item was reverse coded. Male victims were named "Andy." Female perpetrators were named "Diana." Real rape consistency items were asked as "I would be more likely to characterize what happened as rape if…" when observers agreed with the item "David raped Annie."

Procedure

I submitted a study protocol along with relevant materials to the Institutional Review Board at Arizona State University, and I received approval in Spring 2020. Data collection began in August 2020. All questionnaires were completed online in Qualtrics. I recruited both students and community members to participate. Students taking online courses at Arizona State University were recruited for the study in the Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Summer 2021 semesters. I first contacted instructors of online undergraduate courses to advertise the study and request that they share the study's description and survey link with their students. Instructors who agreed shared the study information with students. Students interested in the study clicked the link and were taken to the Qualtrics page where they indicated consent to participate before moving on to the questionnaire. I recruited community members using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) crowd sourcing software. I published the study in 12 batches between February and August 2021. Workers read a brief description of the study (e.g., "This is a survey to learn more about how people perceive sexual encounters. You will read 2 scenarios and respond to questions about them. The task takes 5-15 minutes.") and offered .50 cents to complete the task. If interested, workers clicked on the survey link and were taken to the Qualtrics page where they indicated consent to participate before moving on to the questionnaire.

Participants were randomly assigned to read one myth vignette.[20] The frequency of responses to each vignette version was well balanced (26% White victims/perpetrators,

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[20] The survey also included 100 vignettes using the 4 x 5 x 5 design that varied victim credibility issue (criminal record, substance abuse, sex worker, mental illness, no issue) instead of rape myth elements. Each participant read one myth vignette and one credibility vignette. I explore the relationship between victim identity (race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation), credibility issues, and rape perceptions elsewhere.

25% Black victims/perpetrators, 25% Latinx victims/perpetrators, 24% no race specified) indicating that participants were effectively randomized to conditions. After each vignette, participants responded to questions assessing rape perceptions, contributions of specific rape myths, and victim and perpetrator blame scales. They also responded to the Subtle Rape Myths scale (McMahon & Farmer, 2011) and demographic questions.[21] The questionnaire ended with questions assessing experiences with sexual violence. After completing the questions, participants were brought to a debrief page that explained the goals of the research, provided links to online resources for victims of sexual assault, and encouraged participants to reach out with questions or concerns.

A total of 5,110 individuals, including 939 students and 4,171 Mturk workers, began the survey. I excluded 336 responses because participants completed the survey in less than two minutes. I also excluded the responses of 1,104 participants who failed attention checks and 94 participants who failed manipulation checks (assessing attention to the myth elements). Surveys missing responses on rape perception variables ($n = 88$) and perceptions of victim and perpetrator race ($n = 86$) were also dropped. Of the remaining 3,402 surveys, 123 (3.6%) were missing responses to one or more questions assessing control variables. I used multiple imputation to replace missing values. In the current analyses, I was interested in how victim race influenced rape perceptions, so I excluded the 813 participants who responded to vignettes in the "no race" condition. The

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[21] I used a Latin Square design to control for order effects of the vignettes and RMA scale (Bradley, 1958). Given the schematic effects of rape myths, responding to an RMA scale before reading a depicted rape scenario may prime respondents to think more about rape myths when indicating rape perceptions. Reading a depicted rape first, however, may prime respondents to endorse more myths on the scale. Additionally, responses to a second vignette may be influenced by the first. To control for these possible order effects, the order in which respondents read the vignettes and the RMA scale was randomized. Additionally, the order of the vignettes was randomized to control for stimulus order effects.

final sample included 2589 participants.[22]

Results

The purpose of the current study was to assess the effects of victim and
perpetrator race on rape perceptions. Overall, participants displayed moderate levels of
victim and perpetrator blame, with slightly lower scores for *victim blame* ($M = 2.88$, $SD =$
1.00) than *perpetrator blame* ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .63$). Participants also displayed moderate
levels of agreement that the four rape myth factors contributed to the incident. They were
least likely to agree that the rape was an accident ($M = 2.64$; $SD = 1.19$), and they were
most likely to agree that real rape factors would have made the incident more serious (or
make them more likely to characterize the incident as a rape; $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.12$). On
average, participants neither agreed nor disagreed that the victim precipitated the incident
($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.12$) or that the victim lied ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.20$).

Bivariate Analyses

Bivariate analyses revealed that victim and perpetrator race influenced the
perceived contribution of the rape myth factors as well as assessments of victim blame
and perpetrator blame (see table 2.3).[23] One way ANOVA tests revealed statistically

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[22] The questionnaire used a 4 x 5 x 5 between subject design. An *a priori* power analysis using G*Power
(Faul et al., 2007) estimated that a sample size of 4,100 could detect a small effect (f = .10). As this study
was exploratory, I wanted sufficient power to detect a small effect size. A sample of approximately 5000
participants was selected to achieve the 4,100 responses needed, with room for missing data and incomplete
questionnaires. Additionally, a post-hoc power analysis based on the 3 x 5 x 5 between subject design used
in the current study—the unspecified race condition was excluded, resulting in three race conditions instead
of four—revealed that a sample size of 2,500 provided sufficient power (Type II error = .80) to detect an
effect size as small as f = .13.

[23] I conducted bivariate analyses using the non-imputed sample of complete cases because STATA cannot
average the results of bivariate analyses across imputed samples, and tests using a combined sample of all
imputed subsamples distorts the statistical significance of the tests performed. Additionally, diagnostic tests
revealed no substantive differences in results from the non-imputed sample and the imputed samples.

significant relationships between *victim race* and *precipitation* (*F* = 43.38, *p* < .001),

accident (*F* = 99.57, *p* < .001), *skepticism* (*F* = 43.08, *p* < .001), *real rape consistency* (*F*

= 29.98, *p* < .001), *victim blame* (*F* = 35.59, *p* < .001), *and perpetrator blame* (*F* = 21.58,

p < .001). Mean comparisons revealed that the relationship between *victim race* and

specific rape myths followed a similar trend across the four rape myth scales. Participants

agreed that each of the rape myth factors contributed most to the incident when the victim

was White, followed by Black, then Latinx. Mean comparisons also revealed that

participants blamed victims the most when they were perceived as White (*M* = 3.04, *SD* =

.95), followed by Black (*M* = 2.81, *SD* = 1.01) and Latinx (M = 2.63, *SD* = 1.03). By

contrast, participants blamed perpetrators the least when they perceived victims as White

(*M* = 3.39, *SD* = .58), followed by Black (*M* = 3.52, *SD* = .64) and Latinx (*M* = 3.58, *SD*

= .69). Post hoc Tukey tests using the Honest Significant Difference comparison revealed

all pairwise differences were statistically significant.

ANOVA tests also revealed statistically significant relationships between

perpetrator race and *precipitation* (*F* = 40.94, *p* < .001), *accident* (*F* = 75.28, *p* < .001),

skepticism (*F* = 39.39, *p* < .001), *real rape consistency* (*F* = 25.01, *p* < .001), *victim*

blame (*F* = 29.26, *p* < .001), and *perpetrator blame* (*F* = 18.04, *p* < .001). Mean

comparisons revealed that the relationship between *perpetrator race* and specific rape

myths followed a similar trend across the four rape myth scales. Participants perceived

that each of the rape myth factors contributed most to the incident when the perpetrator

was perceived as White, followed by Black and Latinx. Additionally, participants blamed

victims the most when perpetrators were perceived as White (*M* = 3.01, *SD* = .95)

compared to Black (*M* = 2.82, *SD* = 1.01) or Latinx (*M* = 2.64, SD = 1.05). By contrast,

Table 2.3.

One-way ANOVA Tests for Differences in Means of Rape Perception Variables Across Victim and Perpetrator Race

	Victim Race					
	Total (N = 2589)	White (N = 1247)	Black (N = 757)	Latinx (N = 585)		
Variable	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F	p
Precipitation	3.03 (1.12)	3.23 (1.07)	2.92 (1.14)	2.74 (1.10)	43.38	<.001
Accident	2.64 (1.19)	2.94 (1.19)	2.50 (1.16)	2.17 (1.02)	99.57	<.001
Skepticism	3.01 (1.20)	3.22 (1.13)	2.89 (1.21)	2.70 (1.25)	43.08	<.001
Real rape consistency	3.15 (1.12)	3.32 (1.07)	3.06 (1.13)	2.92 (1.15)	29.98	<.001
Victim blame	2.88 (1.00)	3.04 (.95)	2.81 (1.01)	2.63 (1.03)	35.59	<.001
Perpetrator blame	3.47 (.63)	3.39 (.58)	3.52 (.64)	3.58 (.69)	21.58	<.001
	Perpetrator Race					
	Total (N = 2589)	White (N = 1296)	Black (N = 744)	Latinx (N = 549)		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F	p
Precipitation	3.03 (1.12)	3.21 (1.08)	2.91 (1.13)	2.74 (1.11)	40.94	<.001
Accident	2.64 (1.19)	2.90 (1.20)	2.51 (1.16)	2.21 (1.05)	75.28	<.001
Skepticism	3.01 (1.20)	3.20 (1.14)	2.89 (1.21)	2.70 (1.24)	39.39	<.001
Real rape consistency	3.15 (1.12)	3.30 (1.08)	3.07 (1.13)	2.92 (1.14)	25.01	<.001
Victim blame	2.88 (1.00)	3.01 (.95)	2.82 (1.01)	2.64 (1.05)	29.69	<.001
Perpetrator blame	3.47 (.63)	3.40 (.58)	3.51 (.65)	3.58 (.69)	18.04	<.001

Note. All pairwise comparisons revealed statistically significant differences between group means.

participants blamed perpetrators the least when they were perceived as Black ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .65$), followed by White ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .58$) and Latinx ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .69$). Post hoc Tukey tests revealed that all pairwise differences in means were statistically significant. These initial analyses warranted further investigation using multivariate models, which I describe below.

Multivariate Analyses

Before performing more multivariate analyses, I assessed the data for violations of the OLS regression assumptions. Bivariate scatter plots revealed linear relationships between the four rape myth factors and victim and perpetrator blame. Box plots revealed no significant outliers. Additionally, skewness for all continuous variables (*victim blame, perpetrator blame, precipitation, accident, skepticism, real rape consistency, RMA,* and *age*) fell between -1 and 1, and kurtosis was below 4, indicating normal distribution (West et al., 1995). All variance inflation factors were below 10, indicating no multicollinearity (Chatterjee & Price, 1991). Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg tests for heteroskedasticity indicated a violation of the homoskedasticity assumption, so I standardized all scale variables and estimated models with robust standard errors.

I used ordinal least squares (OLS) regression to estimate the effects of victim and perpetrator race on perceptions of the rape scenario. First, I assessed the effect of *victim* and *perpetrator race* on the contributing rape myth factors, including *precipitation, accident, skepticism,* and *real rape consistency* (table 2.4). Second, I assessed the effects of *victim race* and *perpetrator race* on *victim blame* and *perpetrator blame* (step 1, table 2.5). Then, I added the four rape myth factors to assess the direct effects of contributing rape myth factors on *victim blame* and *perpetrator* (step 2, table 2.5).

After assessing direct effects, I assessed the effects of interactions between *victim* and *perpetrator race* and each of the rape myth factors on blame attributions. Building on step 2 models, I estimated 10 models (steps 3-12) for each outcome—*victim blame* and *perpetrator blame*. Steps 3-7 estimated the effects of *victim race*-rape myth interactions on blame attributions. Step 3 included the *victim race-precipitation* interactions. Step 4 included the *victim race-accident* interactions. Step 5 included the *victim race-skepticism* interactions. Step 6 included the *victim race-real rape consistency* interactions. Finally, Step 7 included all eight *victim race*-rape myth interactions. Steps 3-7 models assessing *victim blame* are displayed in table 2.6. Steps 3-7 models assessing *perpetrator blame* are displayed in table 2.7. Next, I assessed the effects of *perpetrator race*-rape myth interactions on blame attributions. Step 8 included the *perpetrator race-precipitation* interactions. Step 9 included the *perpetrator race-accident* interactions. Step 10 included the *perpetrator race-skepticism* interactions. Step 11 included the *perpetrator race-real rape consistency* interactions. Finally, Step 12 included all eight *perpetrator race*-rape myth interactions. Steps 8-12 models assessing *victim blame* are displayed in table 2.8. Steps 8-12 models assessing *perpetrator blame* are displayed in table 2.9. All tests for significance are based on a significance level of alpha at .05.[24] In every model, I controlled for participant characteristics (RMA, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, sexual violence experiences), mode of recruitment (Mturk worker or student), vignette characteristics (rape myth elements, specified victim/perpetrator race, specified

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[24] Although the number of statistical tests of significance being performed indicates a higher than usual risk of Type I error, this study is exploratory, so I also was concerned with overlooking statistically significant relationships, if they exist. I used the standard, alpha = .05 significance level to balance Type I and Type II error concerns.

victim gender/sexual orientation), and real rape consistency question type.

In the paragraphs below, I describe the effects of victim and perpetrator race on rape perceptions. Other variables in the models were statistically significantly associated with the outcomes described. I do not discuss these results or their implications here. As the current study focuses on the direct and indirect effects of victim and perpetrator race on rape perceptions, a complete discussion of other factors that influenced perceptions in the models is outside the scope.

Direct Effects of Race on Rape Myth Contributions

First, I assessed if perceived victim and perpetrator race influenced the perception that the rape myth factors contributed to the incident (table 2.5). *Black victim* was not statistically significantly associated with any of the rape myth factors. *Latinx victim* was statistically significantly associated with *precipitation* ($B = .133$, *se* $= .05$, $p < .01$), *accident* ($B = -.199$, *se* $= .05$, $p < .001$), and *real rape consistency* ($B = .176$, *se* $= .07$, $p < 05$). Specifically, participants indicated more agreement that the victim precipitated the incident when the victim was Latinx compared to White. Additionally, participants indicated less agreement that the perpetrator accidentally raped the victim when the victim was Latinx compared to White. Finally, participants indicated more agreement that real rape consistency would make the incident more serious (or more characteristic of a rape) when the victim was Latinx compared to White. As for perpetrator race, perceiving a *Black perpetrator* was not statistically significantly associated with any of the rape myth factors. *Latinx perpetrator* was statistically significantly associated with *precipitation* ($B = -.122$, *se* $= .05$, $p < .05$). Participants indicated more agreement that the victim precipitated the incident when the perpetrator was Latinx compared to White.

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Direct Effects of Race and Rape Myths on Blame Attributions

Next, I assessed if perceived victim and perpetrator race influenced perceptions of victim and perpetrator blame (step 1, table 2.5). *Black victim* was not statistically significantly associated with *victim blame* or *perpetrator blame*. *Latinx victim* was statistically significantly and positively associated with *victim blame* ($B = .106$ *se* $= .05$, *p* $< .05$) but not *perpetrator blame*. Participants perceived victims as more blameworthy or responsible for the assault when the victim was Latinx, compared to White. Neither *Black perpetrator* nor *Latinx perpetrator* was statistically significantly associated with *victim blame* or *perpetrator blame*.

I also assessed the direct effects of rape myth factors on *victim blame* and *perpetrator blame* (table 2.5, step 2). *Precipitation* ($B = .273$, *se* $= .03$, *p* $< .001$), *accident* ($B = .059$, *se* $= .02$, *p* $< .01$), *skepticism* ($B = .351$, *se* $= .02$, *p* $< .001$), and *real rape consistency* ($B = .070$, *se* $= .02$, *p* $< .001$) were all statistically significantly and positively associated with *victim blame*. Specifically, more agreement that the victim precipitated the assault, more agreement the perpetrator's actions were accidental, more skepticism in the victim's disclosure, and more agreement that real rape consistency would have made the incident more serious (or more characteristic of rape) were all associated with more victim blame. The addition of the rape myth factors in step 2 also affected the relationships between *victim* and *perpetrator race* and *victim blame*. The effect of *Latinx victim* failed to reach statistical significance. However, the effect of *Black perpetrator* was statistically significantly positively associated with *victim blame* ($B = .072$, *se* $= .04$, p $< .05$). That is, victims were blamed more when the perpetrator was Black. The changes in significance of the effects of perceived victim and perpetrator race suggest that the

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addition of the rape myth factors mediated the effect of *Latinx victim* on *victim blame*,
while the exclusion of these factors suppressed the effect of *Black perpetrator* on *victim
blame*.

The model assessing the direct effects of rape myth factors on *perpetrator blame*
are displayed in step 2 of table 5. The addition of contributing rape myth factors revealed
that *precipitation* ($B = -.086$, *se* $= .04$, *p* $< .05$), *accident* ($B = -.250$, *se* $= .03$, *p* $< .001$),
and *skepticism* (B $= -.290$, se $= .03$, p $< .001$) were all statistically significantly negatively
associated with *perpetrator blame*. Specifically, more perceived victim precipitation,
more agreement the assault was accidental, and more skepticism in the victim's
disclosure were related to less perpetrator blame. Agreement that real rape consistency
would have made the assault more serious (or more characteristic of rape) was not
statistically significantly associated with perpetrator blame ($B = -.050$, *se* $= .03$, *p* $= .096$).
Next, I explored how victim and perpetrator race moderated the relationship between
contributing rape myth factors and rape perceptions.

Interactive Effects of Race and Rape Myths on Blame Attributions

Victim race-rape myth interactions and victim blame. Models displaying the
interactive effects of *victim race* and rape myth factors on *victim blame* are displayed in
table 2.6 (steps 3-7). The individual interaction models assessing interactions between
perceived victim race and rape myth factors (steps 3-6) revealed statistically significant
interactions between *Black victim* and *accident* ($B = .058$, *se* $= .02$, *p* $< .05$) and *Latinx
victim* and *accident* ($B = .065$, *se* $= .03$, *p* $< .05$). Figure 2.1 displays the predicted values
of *victim blame* over values of *accident* for White, Black, and Latinx victims, holding all
other variables at their means. The figure reveals that as agreement that the perpetrator

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Table 2.4

Direct Effects of Victim and Perpetrator Race on Rape Myth Contributions

	Precipitation		Accident		Skepticism		Real Rape Consistency	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Victim Race								
Black	.007	.05	-.090†	.05	-.047	.05	-.029	.06
Latinx	.133*	.05	-.199***	.05	.096	.07	.176*	.07
Perpetrator Race								
Black	-.059	.05	-.033	.04	-.039	.05	.040	.05
Latinx	-.122*	.05	-.019	.04	-.108†	.06	-.037	.07
Participant characteristics								
RMA	.770***	.01	.771***	.01	.712***	.02	.745***	.02
Age	.002*	.00	-.001	.00	.005***	.00	.003**	.00
Male	.017	.02	-.012	.02	.019	.03	.073**	.03
Other gender	-.081	.08	.057	.06	-.050	.08	-.173†	.09
Heterosexual	.089***	.03	-.068**	.02	.106***	.03	.118***	.03
Black	.138***	.04	.138***	.04	.094*	.04	.030	.04
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.110*	.05	.068†	.04	.109*	.05	.104†	.06
Other/Mixed race	-.045	.06	-.004	.05	.031	.07	-.070	.08
Latinx/Hispanic	-.059	.05	-.041	.04	-.005	.05	.021	.06
Never Victimized	.017	.03	.012	.02	-.033	.03	.011	.03
Maybe Victimized	.047	.10	.062	.09	.024	.09	.131	.11
Never Perpetrated	-.101**	.04	-.272***	.04	-.093*	.04	-.042	.04
Maybe Perpetrated	-.033	.10	-.222*	.09	-.126	.09	-.028	.11
Mturk Worker	-.013	.04	.048	.03	-.067	.05	-.067	.05
Vignette characteristics								
Precipitation elements	.365***	.03	.117***	.03	.047	.04	.105**	.04
Accident elements	.128***	.03	.174***	.03	-.036	.04	.055	.04

Victims lie elements	.083*	.03	.008	.03	.126***	.04	.107**	.04
All myths elements	.445***	.04	.183***	.03	.223***	.04	.211***	.04
Victim/Perpetrator Race								
Black	.045	.04	.067*	.03	.065†	.04	.010	.04
Latinx	.011	.03	.105***	.03	.005	.03	-.079*	.04
Victim gender/sexual orientation								
Cis female, gay victim	.000	.03	.077*	.03	.080*	.04	.041	.04
Trans female, heterosexual victim	.030	.03	.064*	.03	.028	.04	-.006	.04
Cis male, heterosexual victim	.040	.04	.095**	.03	.094**	.04	.001	.04
Cis male, gay victim	-.001	.04	.064*	.03	.060	.04	-.002	.04
Real rape question type	-.309***	.02	.007	.02	-.525***	.03	-.274***	.03
Intercept	-.121†	.07	.131*	.06	.085	.07	-.097	.08
F	246.99***		392.75***		212.39***		149.54***	

Notes. †$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. All models estimated with robust standard errors. All rape myth scales were standardized. The effect of Black victim on Accident was statistically significant at $p = .051$.

Table 2.5

Direct Effects of Victim and Perpetrator Race and Rape Myth Factors on Blame Attributions

Variable	Victim Blame				Perpetrator Blame			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Victim Race								
Black	-.059	.05	-.037	.04	.045	.06	.008	.06
Latinx	.106*	.05	.035	.04	-.062	.07	-.063	.07
Perpetrator Race								
Black	.043	.05	.072*	.04	-.018	.06	-.040	.06
Latinx	-.061	.05	.013	.04	.033	.07	-.015	.06
Rape myth contributions								
Precipitation			.273***	.03			-.086*	.04
Accident			.059**	.02			-.250***	.03
Skepticism			.351***	.02			-.290***	.03
Real rape consistency			.070***	.02			-.050†	.03
Participant characteristics								
RMA	.707***	.02	.149***	.02	-.524***	.02	-.020	.04
Age	.006***	.00	.004***	.00	.000	.00	.001	.00
Male	.015	.02	.000	.02	-.040	.03	-.033	.03
Other gender	-.055	.08	-.007	.06	-.138	.12	-.154	.11
Heterosexual	.073**	.03	.008	.02	-.069*	.03	-.042	.03
Black	.098*	.04	.017	.03	-.023	.05	.052	.05
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.061	.05	-.018	.04	-.041	.06	.022	.06
Other/Mixed race	.001	.06	.008	.04	-.131	.09	-.131†	.07
Latinx/Hispanic	.073	.05	.092*	.04	.038	.06	.022	.05
Never Victimized	-.008	.03	-.003	.02	-.062	.04	-.066†	.03
Maybe Victimized	.013	.08	-.021	.06	.171	.11	.204*	.09
Never Perpetrated	-.164***	.04	-.084**	.03	.062	.05	-.044	.05

Maybe Perpetrated	-.034	.10	.035	.08	.011	.10	-.085	.09
Mturk worker	.003	.04	.032	.03	-.099†	.05	-.111*	.05
Vignette characteristics								
Precipitation elements	.117***	.04	-.013	.03	-.220***	.05	-.141***	.04
Accident elements	.051	.03	.014	.03	-.101*	.05	-.054	.04
Victims lie elements	.134***	.04	.059*	.03	-.038	.05	.013	.04
All myths elements	.211***	.04	-.015	.03	-.265***	.05	-.106*	.04
Specified Victim/Perpetrator Race								
Black	.069†	.04	.029	.03	-.030	.05	.010	.04
Latinx	.006	.04	.001	.03	-.004	.05	.020	.04
Victim gender/sexual orientation								
Cis female, gay victim	0.074*	.03	.038	.03	-.144***	.04	-.099*	.04
Trans female, hetero victim	0.018	.03	-.003	.03	-.064	.04	-.037	.04
Cis male, heterosexual victim	.174***	.04	.125***	.03	-.130**	.04	-.076†	.04
Cis male, gay victim	.047	.04	.023	.03	-.140**	.05	-.107*	.04
Real rape question type	-.639***	.03	-.351***	.02	.675***	.03	.484***	.03
Intercept	.058	.07	.060	.06	-.079	.09	-.037	.08
F	233.32***		445.25***		67.84***		81.00	

Notes. †p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. All models estimated with robust standard errors. Victim blame and perpetrator blame scales were standardized.

acted accidentally increased, victim blame also increased, but only when the victim was White. The predicted values of victim blame for Black and Latinx victims were not statistically significantly different from zero.

Looking at the combined interaction model in Step 7 revealed several additional statistically significant interactions: *Black victim* interacted with *accident* (B = -.137, *se* = .04, p < .01); *Latinx victim* interacted with *accident* (B = -.140, *se* = .04, p < .001); and *Latinx victim* interacted with *skepticism* (B = .123, *se* = .05, p < .05). Figures 2.2 and 2.3 display the predicted values of victim blame over levels of accident and skepticism, respectively, for White, Black, and Latinx victims. Figure 2.2 reveals that when the victim was White, victim blame increased as agreement that the incident was accidental increased. However, accident had no effect on victim blame when the victim was Black or Latinx. Importantly, the effect of accident on victim blame among White victims was so strong that it masked a nonsignificant effect among Black and Latinx victims. Additionally, figure 2.3 revealed that, for all victims, victim blame increased as skepticism in the victim's disclosure increased, but this effect was amplified for Latinx victims.[25]

Victim race-rape myth interactions and perpetrator blame. Models displaying the interactive effects of *victim race* and rape myth factors on *perpetrator blame* are displayed in table 2.7. The individual interaction models assessing interactions between *victim race* and rape myth factors (steps 3-6) revealed statistically significant interactions between *victim race* and three of the rape myth factors. Specifically, step 3 revealed

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[25] The interaction between Black victim and precipitation in the combined interaction model trended toward statistical significance, where the positive effect of precipitation on victim blame was amplified for Black victims. This interaction is displayed in figure 2.4.

Table 2.6

Victim Race-Rape Myth Interactions on Victim Blame

	Step 3		Step 4		Step 5		Step 6		Step 7	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Interactions										
Black victim-Precipitation	.002	.02							.098†	.05
Latinx victim-Precipitation	-.011	.02							.023	.06
Black victim-Accident			-.058*	.02					-.137**	.04
Latinx victim-Accident			-.065*	.03					-.140***	.04
Black victim-Skepticism					-.012	.02			-.002	.05
Latinx victim-Skepticism					.026	.02			.123*	.05
Black victim-Real rape consistency							-.005	.02	.007	.05
Latinx victim-Real rape consistency							-.014	.02	-.040	.05
Victim Race										
Black	-.037	.04	-.017	.04	-.035	.04	-.036	.04	-.014	.04
Latinx	.034	.04	.035	.04	.040	.04	.034	.04	.037	.04
Perpetrator Race										
Black	.073*	.04	.071*	.04	.071*	.04	.073*	.04	.071†	.04
Latinx	.013	.04	.017	.04	.014	.04	.014	.04	.019	.04
Rape myth contributions										
Precipitation	.275***	.03	.273***	.03	.273***	.03	.273***	.03	.236***	.04
Accident	.059**	.02	.092***	.02	.062**	.02	.059**	.02	.141***	.03
Skepticism	.351***	.02	.350***	.02	.347***	.03	.351***	.02	.313***	.04
Real rape consistency	.070***	.02	.069***	.02	.070***	.02	.076***	.02	.077*	.03
Intercept	.059	.06	.053	.06	.064	.06	.059	.06	.056	.06
F	423.27***		423.73***		423.35***		421.23***		367.17***	

Notes. †p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. All models estimated with robust standard errors. Victim blame and perpetrator blame scales were standardized. Effects of participant and vignette characteristics not displayed here (See appendix A).

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Figure 2.1

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Accident (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White,
Black, and Latinx Victims: Individual Interaction Model

Figure 2.2

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Accident (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White,
Black, and Latinx Victims: Combined Interaction Model
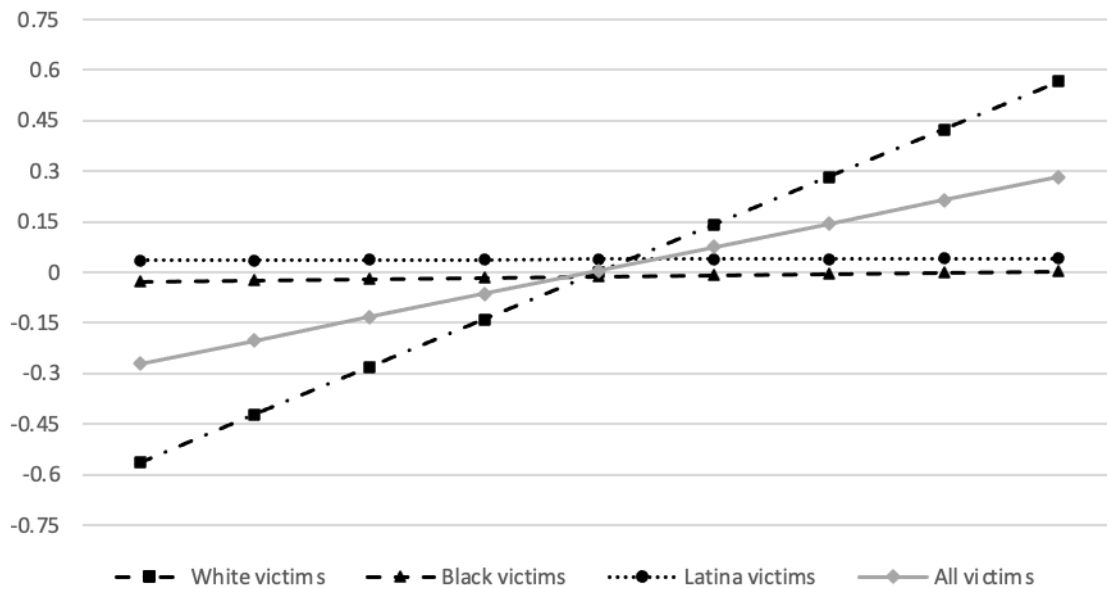
Figure 2.3

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Skepticism (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Victims: Combined Interaction Model

Figure 2.4

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Precipitation (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Victims: Combined Interaction Model (Effect of Black is significant at p< .10)
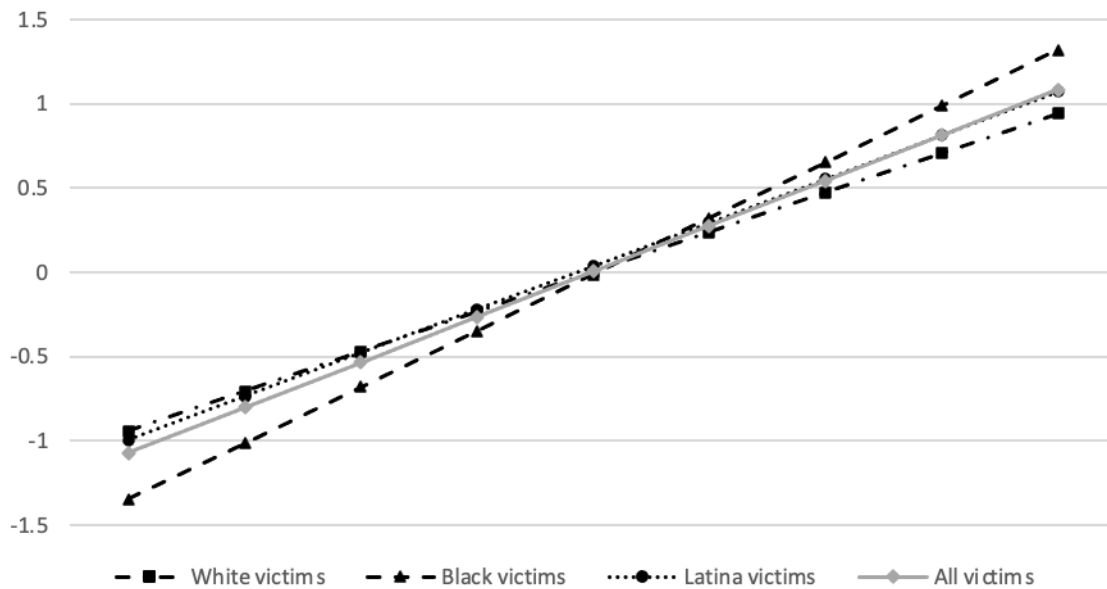
statistically significant interactions between *Black victim* and *precipitation* (*B* = -.075, *se* = .04, *p* < .05) and *Latinx victim* and *precipitation* (*B* = -.108, *se* = .04, *p* <.01); step 5 revealed statistically significant interactions between *Black victim* and *skepticism* (*B* = -.076, *se* = .04, *p* <.05) and *Latinx victim* and *skepticism* (*B* = -.105, *se* = .04, *p* <.01); and step 6 revealed a statistically significant interaction between *Black victim* and *real rape consistency* (*B* = -.099, *se* = .04, *p* <.01). I looked at the predicted values of *perpetrator blame* across values of each rape myth factor for White, Black, and Latinx victims, holding all other variables at their means, to help explain these effects (figures 2.5-2.8). Figure 2.5 reveals that as perceived victim precipitation increased, perpetrator blame decreased, but only when the victim was Black or Latinx; the predicted values of perpetrator blame across precipitation for White victims were not statistically significantly different from zero. Additionally, figure 2.6 reveals that, for all victims, as skepticism in the disclosure increased, perpetrator blame decreased, but this effect was amplified when the victim was Black or Latinx. Finally, figure 2.7 reveals that as agreement that real rape consistency would make the incident more serious increased, perpetrator blame decreased, but only when the victim was Black; the predicted values of perpetrator blame were not statistically significantly different from zero when the victim was White or Latinx.

In the combined interaction model displayed in step 7—the model containing all the interactions simultaneously—none of the interaction terms were statistically significant. The interaction between *Latinx victim* and *precipitation* approached statistical significance (*B* = -.141, *se* = .08, *p* = .09), as did the interaction between *Black victim* and *real rape consistency* (*B* = -.119, *se* = .07, *p* = .10). The failure to reach statistical

significance could result from multicollinearity issues related to including multiple interactions between the same variables in the model. I looked at the figures to assist interpretation. Figure 2.8 displays the predicted values of perpetrator blame across values of precipitation for White, Black, and Latinx victims; more precipitation was associated with less perpetrator blame, and this effect was amplified when the victim was Latinx. Additionally, figure 2.9 displays the predicted values of perpetrator blame over values of real rape consistency for White, Black, and Latinx victims; more real rape consistency was associated with less perpetrator blame when the victim was Black but had no effect on perpetrator blame when the victim was White or Latinx.

Perpetrator race-rape myth interactions and victim blame. Interactive effects of *perpetrator race* and rape myth factors on *victim blame* are displayed in table 2.8. Individual interaction models revealed a statistically significant interaction between *Black perpetrator* and *accident* (step 9: $B = .054$, $se = .02$, $p < .05$) and *Latinx perpetrator* and *skepticism* (step 10: $B = .051$, $se = .02$, $p < .05$). The predicted values of victim blame over values of accident for White, Black, and Latinx perpetrators while holding all other variables at their means (figure 2.10) revealed that as agreement the incident was an accident increased, victim blame increased when the perpetrator was White. When the perpetrator was Black, the predicted values were only statistically significant at 0, 1, and 2sds around the mean. The predicted values of victim blame were not statistically significantly different from zero when the perpetrator was Latinx. Additionally, looking at the predicted values of victim blame over values of skepticism for White, Black, and Latinx perpetrators (figure 2.11) revealed that more skepticism increased victim blame, and this effect was amplified when the perpetrator was as Latinx.

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Table 2.7

Victim Race-Rape Myth Interactions on Perpetrator Blame

	Step 3		Step 4		Step 5		Step 6		Step 7	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Interactions										
Black victim-Precipitation	-.075*	.04							-.015	.08
Latinx victim-Precipitation	-.108**	.04							-.141†	.08
Black victim-Accident			-.037	.04					.068	.06
Latinx victim-Accident			-.065	.04					.053	.06
Black victim-Skepticism					-.076*	.04			-.015	.07
Latinx victim-Skepticism					-.105**	.04			-.104	.07
Black victim-Real rape consistency							-.099**	.04	-.119†	.07
Latinx victim-Real rape consistency							-.056	.04	.096	.07
Victim Race										
Black	.024	.07	.021	.07	.027	.07	.025	.07	.012	.07
Latinx	-.068	.07	-.068	.07	-.069	.07	-.061	.07	-.069	.07
Perpetrator Race										
Black	-.040	.06	-.040	.06	-.042	.06	-.041	.06	-.033	.06
Latinx	-.011	.06	-.012	.06	-.011	.06	-.011	.06	-.019	.06
Rape myth contributions										
Precipitation	-.032	.04	-.086*	.04	-.086*	.04	-.084*	.04	-.039	.06
Accident	-.256***	.03	-.224***	.04	-.257***	.03	-.255***	.03	-.295***	.04
Skepticism	-0289***	.03	-.291***	.03	-.234***	.03	-.290***	.03	-.252***	.04
Real rape consistency	-.050†	.03	-.052†	.03	-.051†	.03	-.003	.04	-.041	.05
Intercept	-.045	.08	-.046	.08	-.042	.08	-.037	.08	-.046	.08
F	76.39***		76.38***		76.51***		76.8***		65.92***	

Notes. †p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. All models estimated with robust standard errors. Victim blame and perpetrator blame scales were standardized. Effects of participant and vignette characteristics not displayed here (see appendix B).

Figure 2.5

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Precipitation (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Victims: Individual Interaction Model
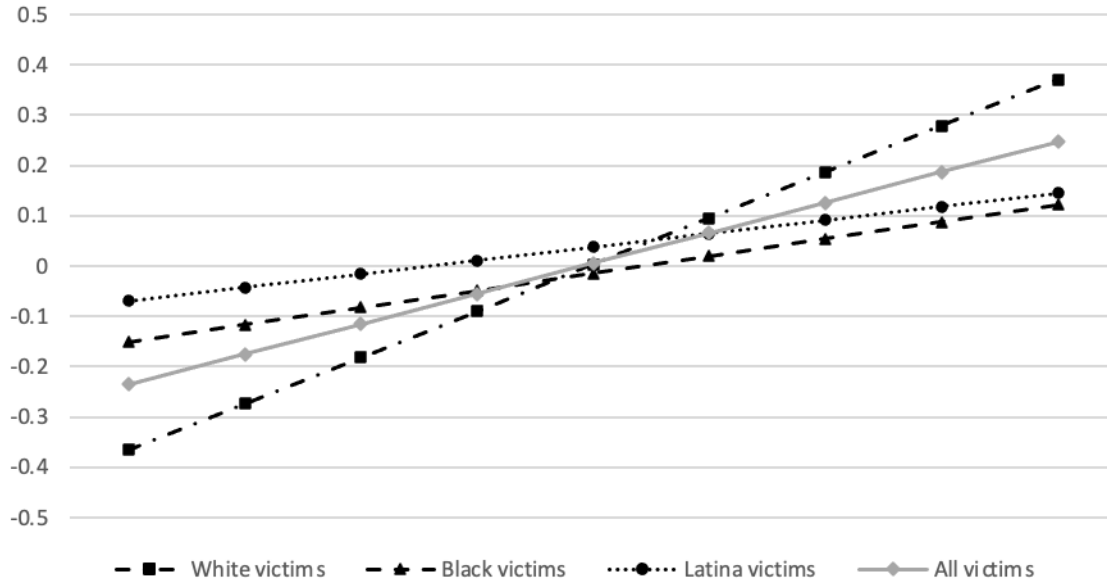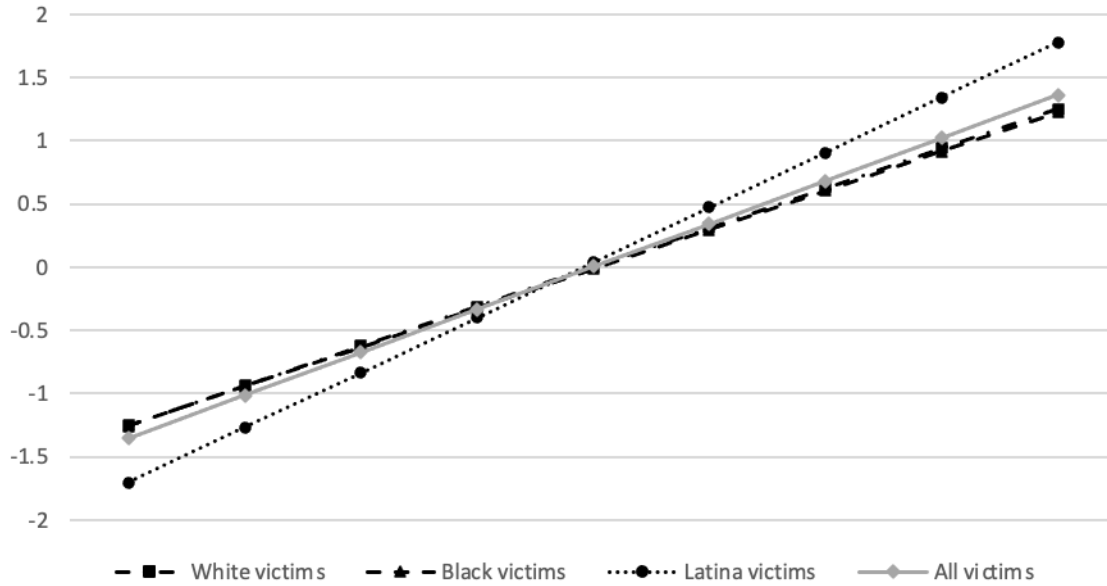

Figure 2.6

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Skepticism for (-4 SD to 4 SD) White, Black, and Latinx Victims: Individual Interaction Model
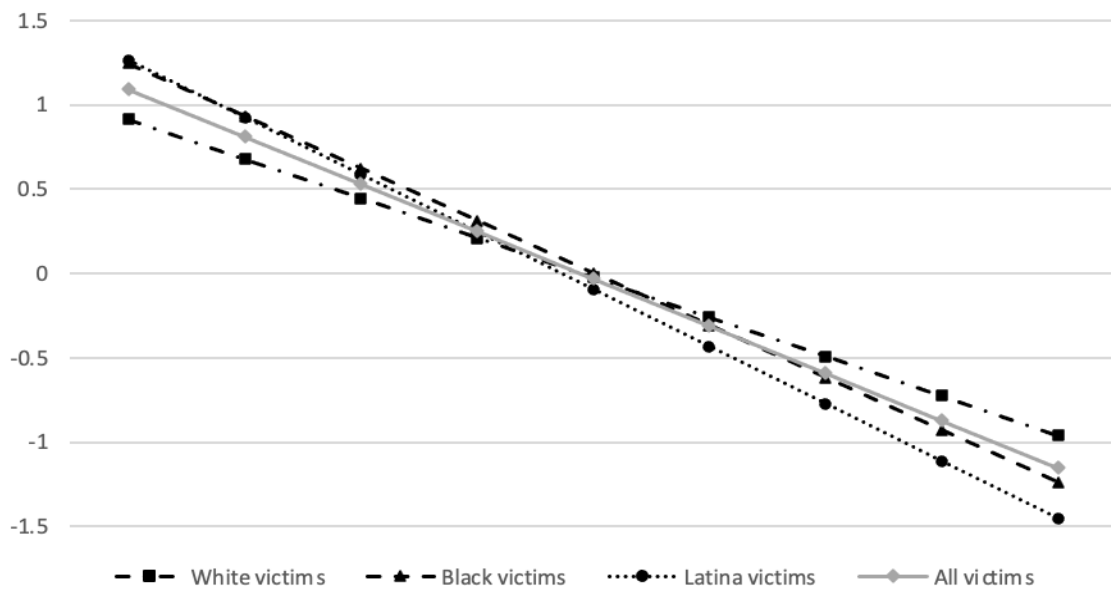
Figure 2.7

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Real Rape Consistency (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Victims: Individual Interaction Model

Figure 2.8

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Precipitation (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Victims: Combined Interaction Model (Effect of Latinx significant at p < .10)
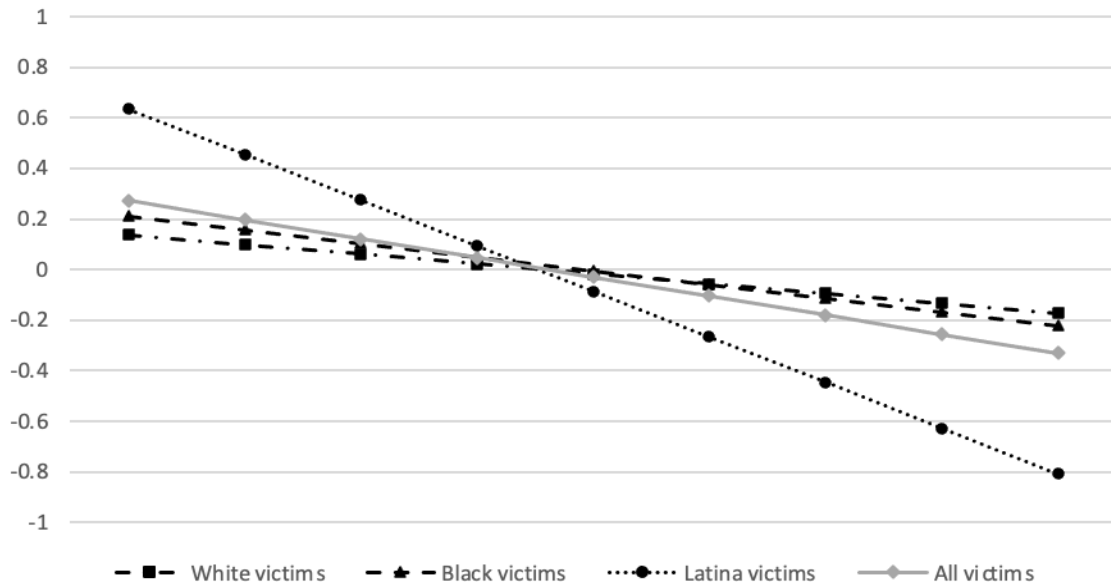
Figure 2.9

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Real Rape Consistency (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Victims: Combined Interaction Model (Effect of Black Significant at p < .10)
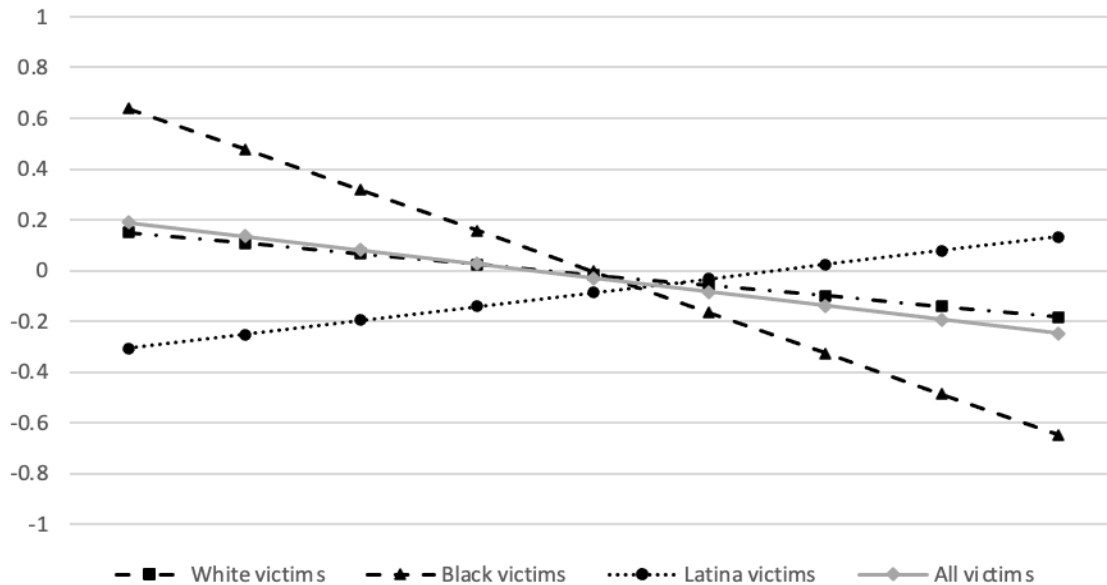
The combined interaction model displayed in Step 12, revealed statistically significant interactions between *Black perpetrator* and *precipitation* ($B = .127$, *se* = .05, *p* < .05), *Black perpetrator* and *accident* ($B = -.157$, *se* = .04, *p* < .001), *Latinx perpetrator* and *accident* ($B = -.128$, *se* = .05, *p* < .01), and *Latinx perpetrator* and *skepticism* (B = .136, *se* = .05, *p* < .01). Looking at the predicted values of victim blame over levels of precipitation, accident, and skepticism, respectively, for White, Black, and Latinx perpetrators (figures 2.12-2.14) demonstrates these effects. Specifically, victim blame increased as perceived victim precipitated increased, and this effect was amplified when the perpetrator was Black (figure 2.12). Additionally, victim blame increased as agreement that the assault was an accident increased when the perpetrator was White and

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Table 2.8

Perpetrator Race-Rape Myth Interactions on Victim Blame

	Step 8		Step 9		Step 10		Step 11		Step 12	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Interactions										
Black perp-Precipitation	.019	.02							.127*	.05
Latinx perp-Precipitation	.018	.02							.047	.06
Black perp-Accident			-.054*	.02					-.157***	.04
Latinx perp-Accident			-.034	.03					-.128**	.04
Black perp-Skepticism					.003	.02			.000	.05
Latinx perp-Skepticism					.051*	.02			.136*	.05
Black perp-Real rape consistency							.010	.02	.008	.05
Latinx perp-Real rape consistency							.006	.02	-.056	.05
Victim Race										
Black	-.037	.04	-.038	.04	-.040	.04	-.037	.04	-.040	.04
Latinx	.032	.04	.047	.04	.032	.04	.034	.04	.051	.04
Perpetrator Race										
Black	.068†	.04	.089*	.04	.071*	.04	.071*	.04	.091*	.04
Latinx	.015	.04	.009	.04	.021	.04	0.014	.04	.008	.04
Rape myth contributions										
Precipitation	.262***	.03	.274***	.03	.274***	.03	.273***	.03	.224***	.04
Accident	.060**	.02	.083***	.02	.062**	.02	.060**	.02	.141***	.03
Skepticism	.351***	.02	.351***	.02	.336***	.02	.351***	.02	.314***	.03
Real rape consistency	.070***	.02	.069***	.02	.070***	.02	.066***	.02	.077**	.03
Intercept	.060	.06	.062	.06	.065	.06	.059	.06	.065	.06
F	423.7***		421.6***		424.47***		421.89***		367.92***	

Notes. †$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. All models estimated with robust standard errors. Victim blame and perpetrator blame scales were standardized. Effects of participant and vignette characteristics not displayed here (see appendix C).

Figure 2.10

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Accident (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Individual Interaction Model

Figure 2.11

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Skepticism (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Individual Interaction Model

Figure 2.12

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Precipitation (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Combined Interaction Model
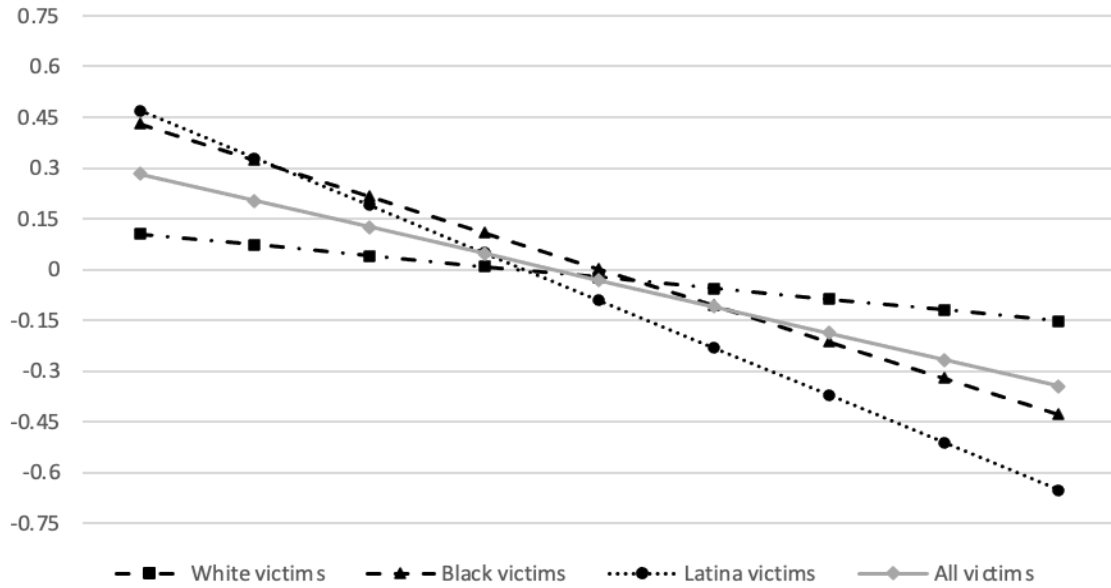

Figure 2.13

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Accident (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Combined Interaction Model

Figure 2.14

Predicted Values of Victim Blame over Values of Skepticism (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White,
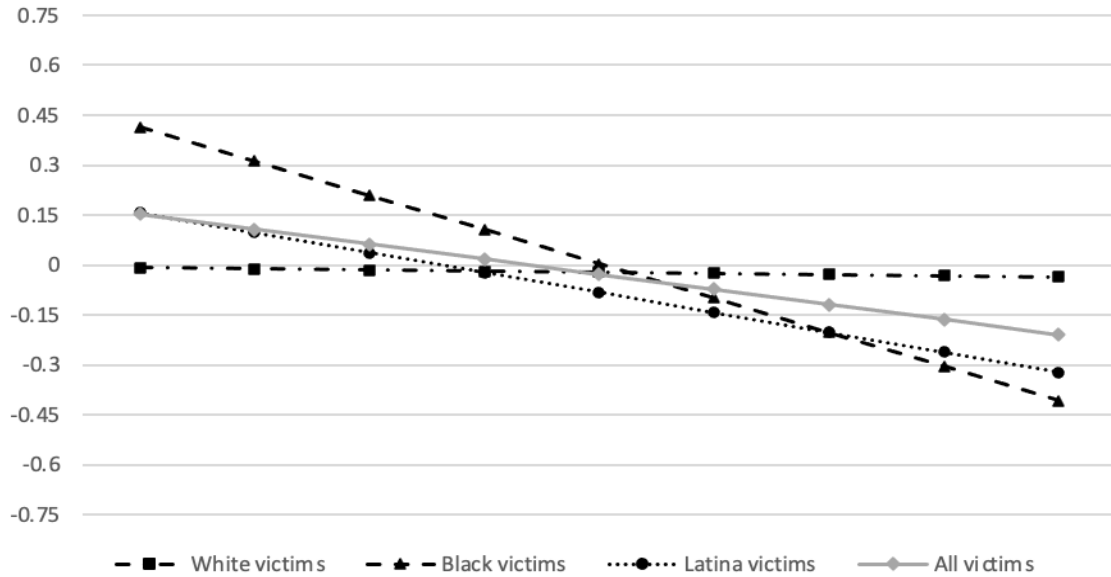*Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Combined Interaction Model*

Latinx, and this effect was amplified among White perpetrators (figure 2.13). When the

perpetrator was Black, however, agreeing the incident was an accident was not

statistically significantly associated with victim blame. Finally, victim blame increased as

skepticism increased, and this effect was amplified when the perpetrator was Latinx,

compared to White (figure 2.14).

    Perpetrator race-rape myth interactions and perpetrator blame. Next, I looked at

interactive effects of *perceived perpetrator race* and rape myth factors on *perpetrator*

blame (table 2.9, steps 8-12). Individual interaction models revealed statistically

significant interactions between perceived perpetrator race and three rape myth factors.

Specifically, step 8 revealed statistically significant interactions between *Black*

perpetrator and *precipitation* ($B = -.095$, $se = .04$, $p < .01$) and *Latinx perpetrator* and

precipitation (B = -.119, *se* = .04, p <.01); step 10 revealed statistically significant

interactions between *Black perpetrator* and *skepticism* (B = -.092, *se* = .04, p <.05) and

Latinx perpetrator and *skepticism* (B = -.109, *se* = .04, p <.01); and step 11 revealed a

statistically significant interactions between *Black perpetrator* and *real rape consistency*

(B = -.116, *se* = .04, p <.001). Again, I looked at the predicted values of perpetrator

blame across values of the rape myth factors for White, Black, and Latinx perpetrators

while holding all other variables at their means (figures 2.15-2.17). Figure 2.15 reveals

that as perceived victim precipitation increased, perpetrator blame decreased, but only

when the perpetrator was Black or Latinx; predicted values of perpetrator blame were not

statistically significantly different from zero when the perpetrator was White.

Additionally, figure 2.16 reveals that as skepticism increased, perpetrator blame

decreased, and this effect was amplified when the perpetrator was Black or Latinx

compared to White. Finally, figure 2.17 reveals that as agreement that real rape

consistency would make the incident more serious increased, perpetrator blame decreased

for Black perpetrators; the predicted values revealed that real rape consistency had no

effect on perpetrator blame when the perpetrator was White or Latinx.

In the combined interaction model displayed in step 12, only the interaction

between *Latinx perpetrator* and *precipitation* was statistically significant (B = -.164, *se* =

.08, p < .05). Figure 2.18 displays the predicted values of perpetrator blame across levels

of precipitation for White, Black, and Latinx perpetrators, holding all other variables at

their means. The figure reveals that as perceived victim precipitation increased,

perpetrator blame decreased, but only when the perpetrator was Latinx. Precipitation had

no effect on perpetrator blame when the perpetrator was White or Black. Additionally, in

Table 2.9

Perpetrator Race-Rape myth Interactions on Perpetrator Blame

	Step 8		Step 9		Step 10		Step 11		Step 12	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Interactions										
Black perp-Precipitation	-.095**	.04							-.044	.08
Latinx perp-Precipitation	-.119**	.04							-.164*	.08
Black perp-Accident			-.044	.04					.084	.06
Latinx perp-Accident			-.060	.04					.081	.06
Black perp-Skepticism					-.092*	.04			-.018	.06
Latinx perp-Skepticism					-.109**	.04			-.094	.07
Black perp-Real rape consistency							-.116***	.04	-.122†	.07
Latinx perp-Real rape consistency							-.071†	.04	.077	.07
Victim Race										
Black	.008	.06	.009	.06	.010	.06	.008	.06	.012	.06
Latinx	-.047	.07	-.052	.07	-.050	.07	-.051	.07	-.059	.07
Perpetrator Race										
Black	-.018	.06	-.026	.06	-.021	.06	-.021	.06	-.029	.06
Latinx	-.028	.06	-.024	.06	-.024	.06	-.020	.06	-.023	.06
Rape myth contributions										
Precipitation	-.026	.04	-.086*	.04	-.086*	.04	-.084*	.04	-.029	.06
Accident	-.255***	.03	-.224***	.04	-.255***	.03	-.256***	.03	-.305***	.04
Skepticism	-.289***	.03	-.290***	.03	-.232***	.03	-.288***	.03	-.258***	.04
Real rape consistency	-.051†	.03	-.052†	.03	-.050†	.03	.003	.03	-.031	.05
Intercept	-.041	.08	-.041	.08	-.037	.08	-.033	.08	-.039	.08
F	76.53***		76.42		76.55		76.89		66.29	

Notes. †$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. All models estimated with robust standard errors. Victim blame and perpetrator blame scales were standardized. Effects of participant and vignette characteristics not displayed here (see appendix D).

Figure 2.15

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Precipitation (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Individual Interaction Model
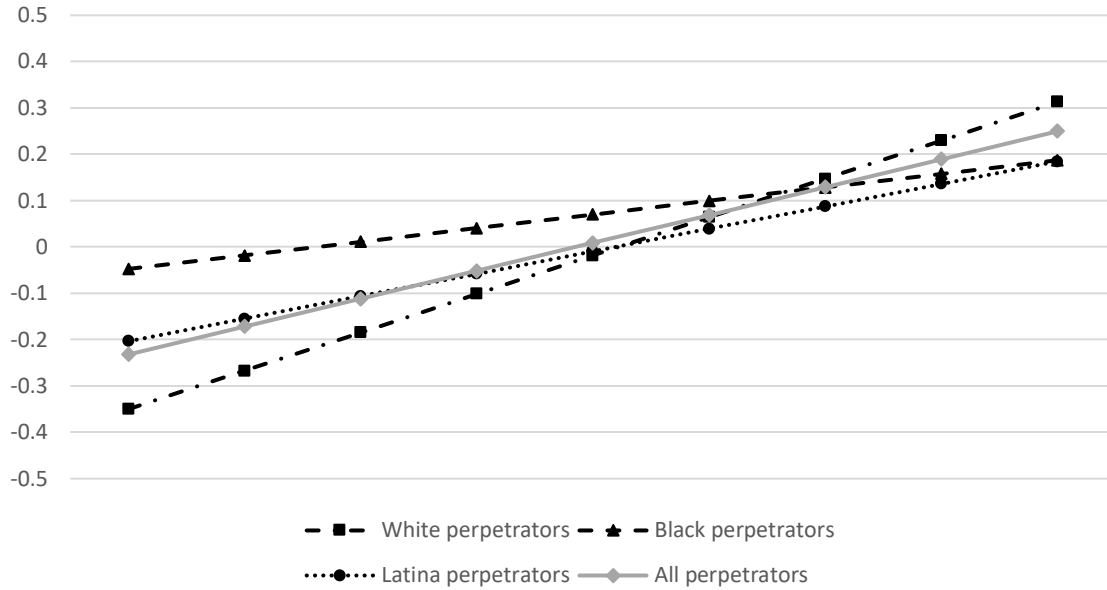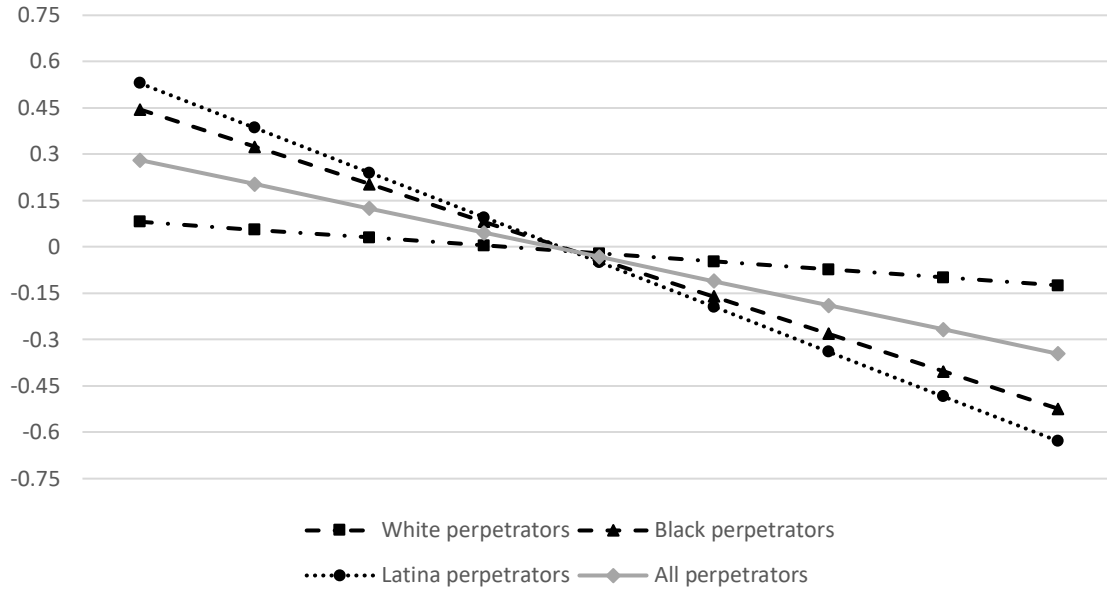

Figure 2.16

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Skepticism (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Individual Interaction Model
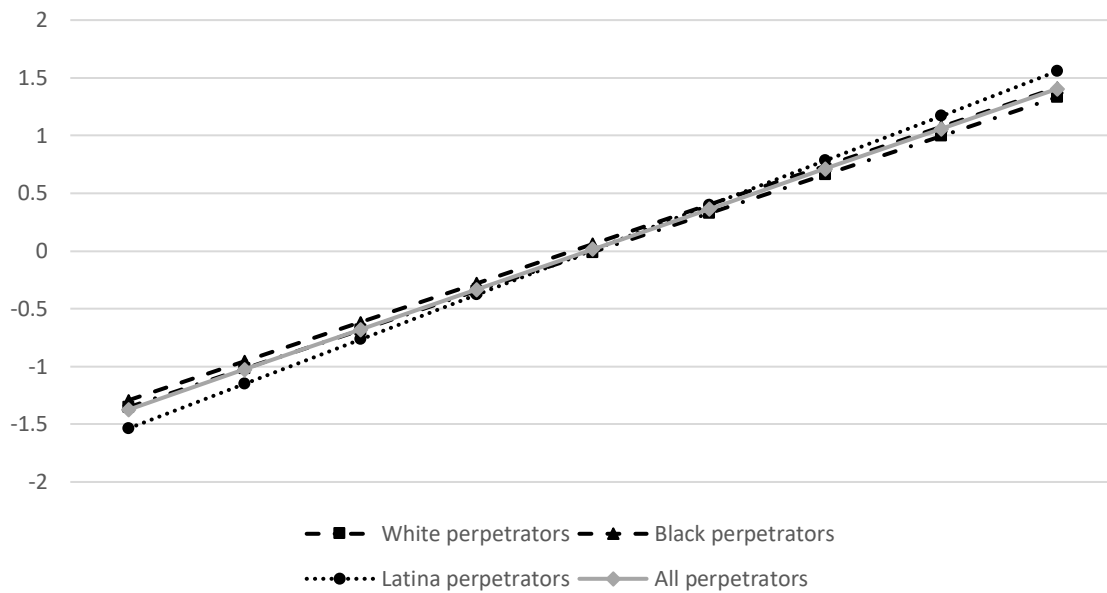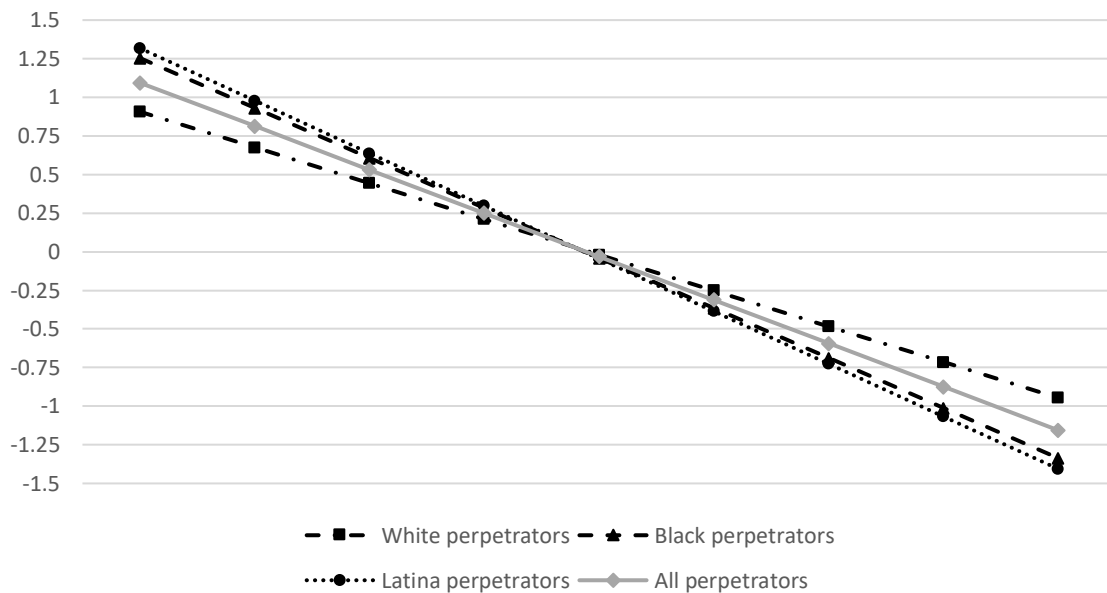
Figure 2.17

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Real Rape Consistency (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Individual Interaction Model
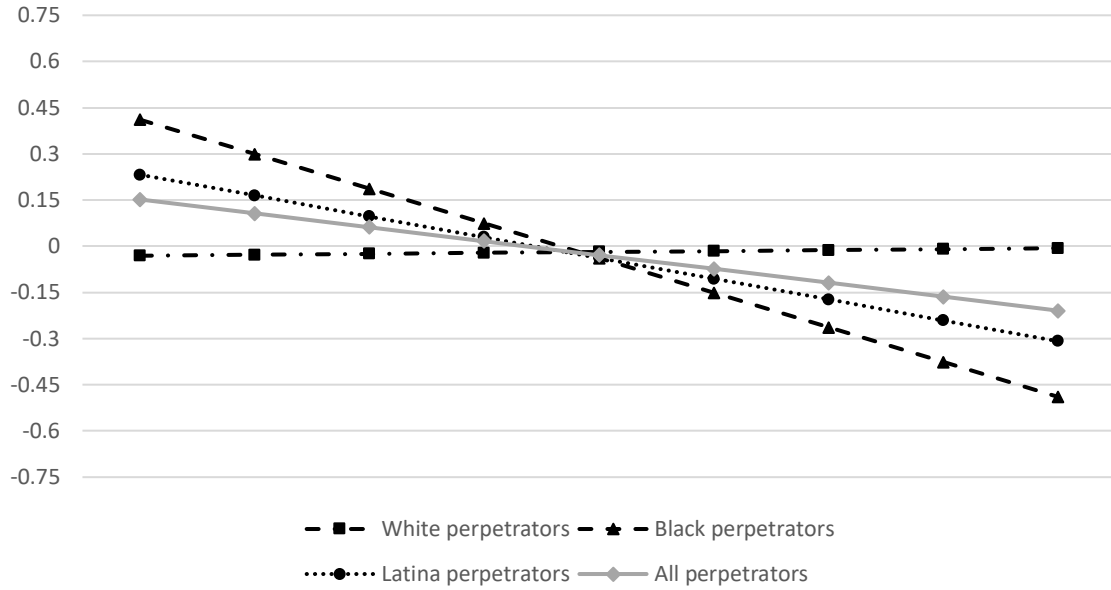
Figure 2.18

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Precipitation (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Combined Interaction Model
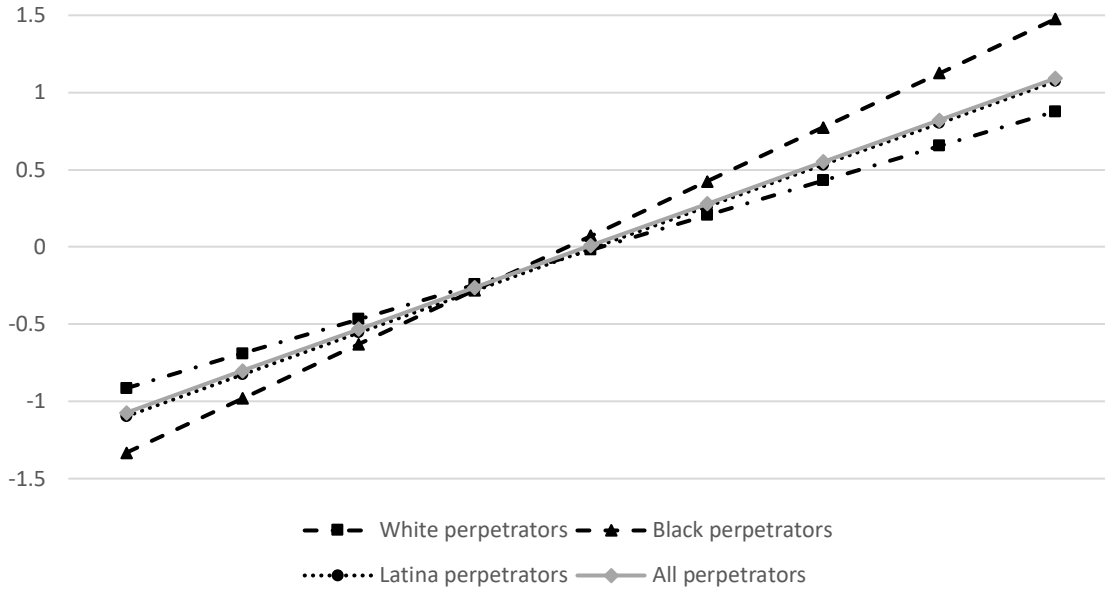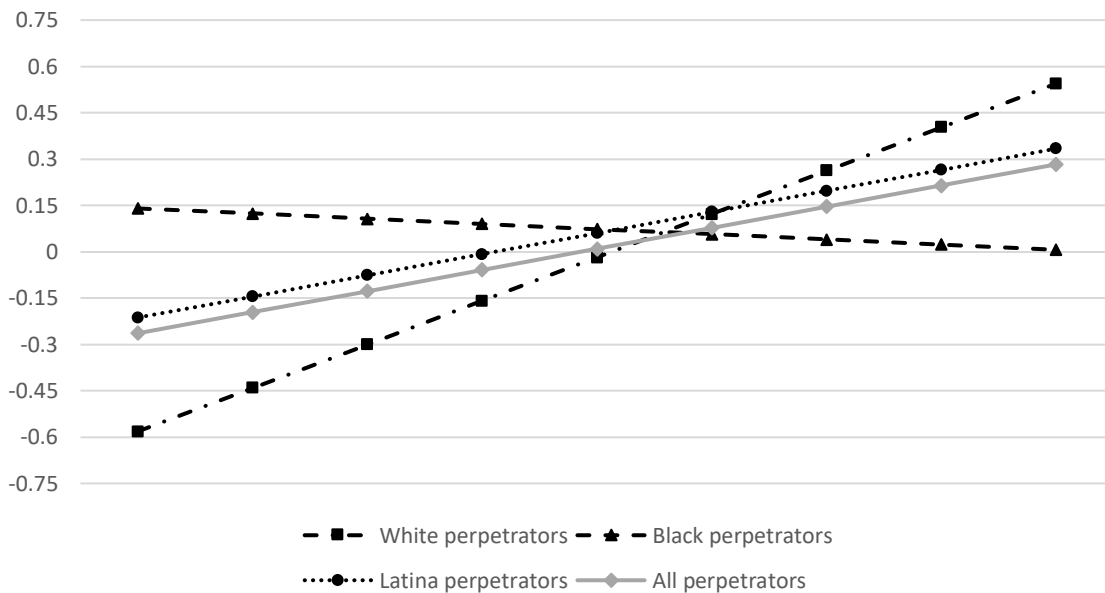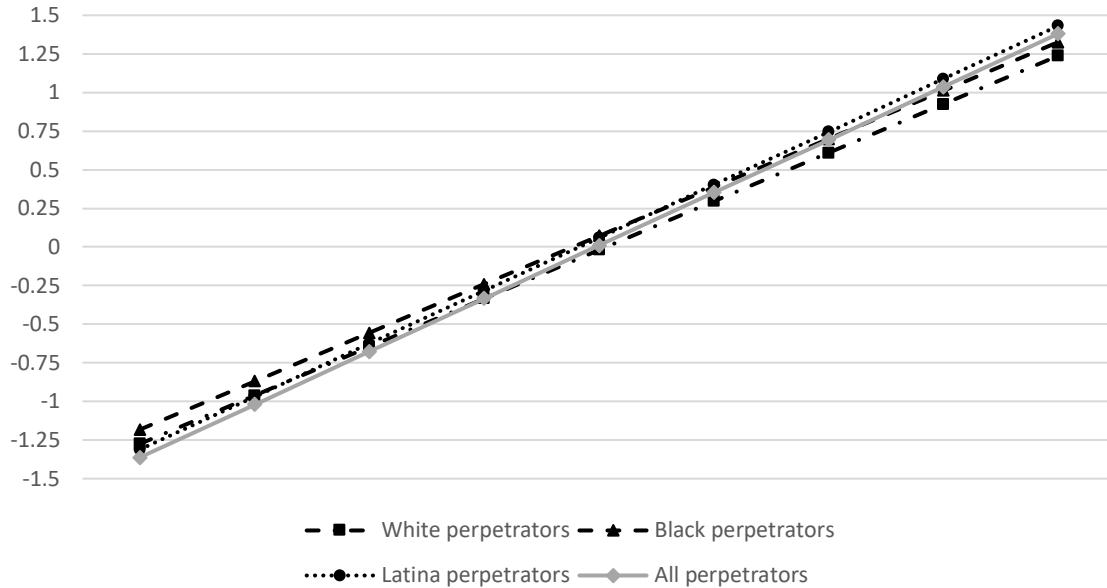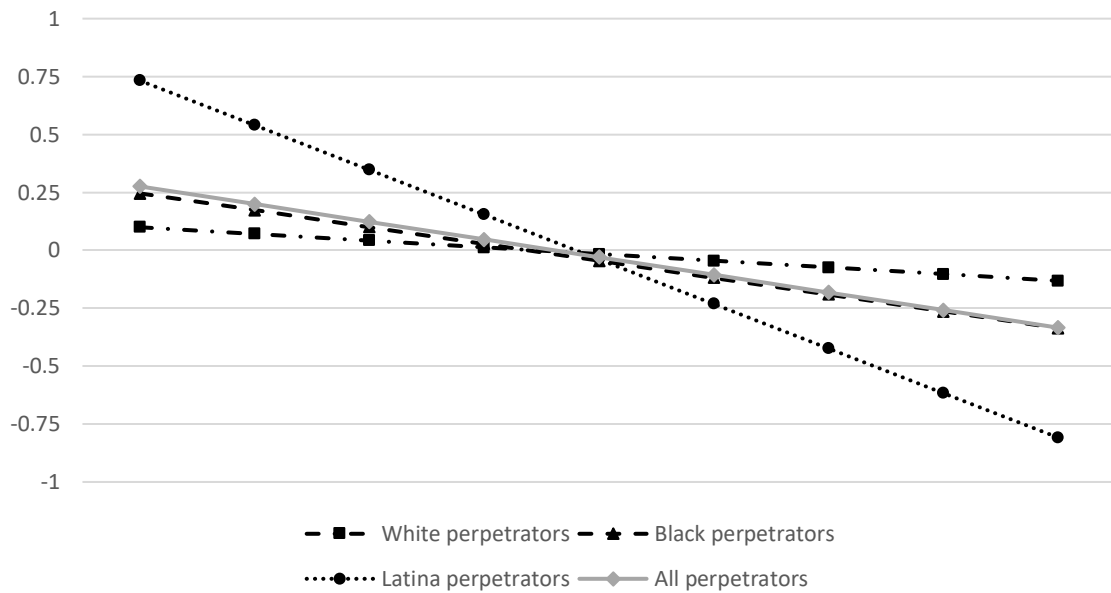
Figure 2.19

Predicted Values of Perpetrator Blame over Values of Real Rape Consistency (-4 SD to 4 SD) for White, Black, and Latinx Perpetrators: Combined Interaction Model (Effect of Black is Significant at p < .10)
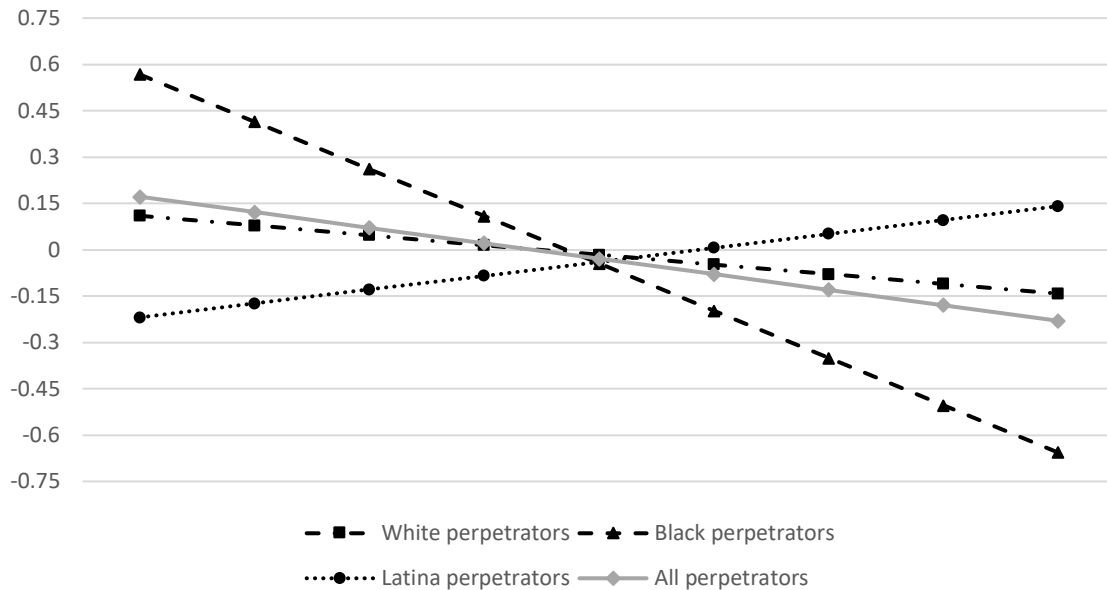
the combined interaction model, the interaction between *Black perpetrator* and *real rape consistency* trended toward significance (*B* = -.122, *se* = .07, *p* = .09), and the predicted values of perpetrator blame across real rape consistency suggested a statistically significant interaction (figure 2.19). As agreement with real rape consistency increased, perpetrator blame decreased, but only when the perpetrator was Black. Real rape consistency was not statistically significantly associated with perpetrator blame when the perpetrator was White or Latinx.

Results Summary

The results described above reveal that victim and perpetrator race influence rape perceptions in complex ways. Specifically, models assessing the direct effects of victim and perpetrator race on rape myth factors revealed that perceiving the victim as Latinx,

compared to White, was associated with more perceived victim precipitation, less agreement that the assault was accidental, and more agreement that real rape consistency would have made the incident more serious. Also, perceiving a Latinx perpetrator was associated with less perceived victim precipitation. Models assessing blame attributions revealed that all four rape myth factors were associated with more victim blame and less perpetrator blame, while only perceiving a Black perpetrator increased victim blame.

Interaction models, however, revealed important differences across victim and perpetrator race in the effects of rape myth factors. Specifically, more victim precipitation and more real rape consistency increased victim blame for all victims. Likewise, more skepticism increased victim blame for all victims, but the effect of skepticism was amplified when the victim was Latinx. Additionally, perceiving the incident as accidental increased victim blame, but only when the victim was White. Victim race also influenced the relationships between rape myth factors and perpetrator blame. More perceived precipitation, more agreement the incident was an accident, and more skepticism, all decreased perpetrator blame. However, the effects of precipitation and skepticism were amplified when the victim was Black or Latinx. Furthermore, more real rape consistency decreased perpetrator blame, but only when the victim was Black.

Perpetrator race also moderated the relationships between rape myth factors and blame attributions. More precipitation, skepticism, and real rape consistency increased victim blame in all incidents, but perceiving a Black perpetrator amplified the effect of precipitation, while perceiving a Latinx perpetrator amplified the effect of skepticism. Additionally, accident had no effect on victim blame when the perpetrator was Black, had a positive effect when the perpetrator was Latinx, and had a positive and amplified effect

when the perpetrator was White. Looking at perpetrator blame, accident and skepticism were negatively associated with perpetrator blame in all cases, but the effect of skepticism was amplified when the perpetrator was Black or Latinx. Additionally, precipitation had no effect on perpetrator blame when the perpetrator was White, had a negative effect on perpetrator blame when the perpetrator was Black, and had an amplified effect when the perpetrator was Latinx. Finally, more real rape consistency decreased perpetrator blame, but only when the perpetrator was Black.

Altogether, the results described above revealed that rape myths have race-specific effects on rape perceptions. Importantly, except for the effect of Black perpetrator on victim blame, the direct effects of victim and perpetrator race on blame attributions failed to reach statistical significance. However, victim and perpetrator race *moderated* the relationship between some rape myth factors and victim and perpetrator blame. These findings suggest that the influence of rape myth factors on assessments on rape perceptions varies depending on the race of the victims and perpetrators involved. Below, I discuss these findings and their implications for future researchers and practitioners.

Discussion

In the current study, I assessed the race-specific effects of rape myths on rape perceptions. I suggested that the rape myth literature to date has failed to consider the role of racial stereotypes in the specification of rape myths and their effects. This oversight has resulted in theory and measures that discuss rape myths and their effects in race-neutral ways. However, guided by intersectionality theory, which emphasizes that race and gender stereotypes are entangled, I suggested that rape myths are not race-neutral;

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Table 2.10

Summary of Effects of Rape Myths Factors on Blame Attributions by Victim and Perpetrator Race: Relationship, Significance, and Amplification

	Precipitation	Accident	Skepticism	Real rape consistency
	Victim Blame			
Victim Race				
Black victim	+	n.s.	+	+
Latinx victim	+	n.s.	+*	+
White victim	+	+	+	+
	Perpetrator Blame			
Black victim	–*	–	–*	–
Latinx victim	–*	–	–*	n.s.
White victim	–	–	–	n.s.
	Victim Blame			
Perpetrator Race				
Black perpetrator	+*	n.s.	+	+
Latinx perpetrator	+	+	+*	+
White perpetrator	+	+*	+	+
	Perpetrator Blame			
Black perpetrator	–	–	–*	–
Latinx perpetrator	–*	–	–*	n.s.
White perpetrator	n.s.	–	–	n.s.

Notes. "+" indicates positive relationship with rape myth factor; "–" indicates negative relationship with rape myth factor. "n.s." indicates non-significant relationship; "*" indicates effect was amplified compared to effect for all victims/perpetrators.

rather, race-specific gender stereotypes manifest in race-specific rape myths, which influence how observers assess rape victims, perpetrators, and incidents. Some research supports this assertion: several studies have identified race-specific gender stereotypes and race-specific rape myths and assessed their effects on rape perceptions (Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019). However, these studies focused on only a few rape myths (e.g., Jezebel/victim precipitation; hypersexuality/the Black male rapist). Additionally, research assessing the role of race on rape perceptions has focused on Black-White comparisons (Gravelin et al., 2019; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014); studies assessing comparisons with racial identities, like Latinx, are lacking (though see Genna, 2017; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Miller, 2019; Piatak, 2015). Furthermore, I know of no study to date to assess how victim's and perpetrator's racial identities—including White, Black, and Latinx—moderate the effects of rape myths on rape perceptions.

The current study addressed these gaps. Specifically, I suggested that the rape myths currently articulated in the literature are associated with racialized gender stereotypes, and, therefore, rape myths should have race-specific effects on rape perceptions. Importantly, I explored several different rape myths, including victim precipitation, rape is accidental, skepticism of rape reports, and real rape consistency. Additionally, I assessed differences in the effects of rape myths across White, Black, and Latinx victims and perpetrators. I speculated that victim and perpetrator race influence the perceived contribution of different rape myths to the described incident, and that victim and perpetrator race would moderate the influence of rape myth factors on assessments of victim and perpetrator blame.

Overall, these expectations were supported. The results described above reveal

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that victim and perpetrator race influence rape perceptions in complex ways. The primary take-aways are twofold: 1) Victim race and perpetrator race moderated *which* rape myth factors influenced perceptions of victim and perpetrator blame, as well as the amount of influence (effect size). It is therefore important to consider victim and perpetrator race when assessing rape myths and their effects on rape perceptions. 2) Perceiving victims and perpetrators as Latinx influenced rape perceptions differently from Black or White victims and perpetrators, which emphasizes the need to expand comparisons beyond Black and White. Below, I explain these findings in the context of prior work, and I discuss their implications for criminal justice responses to sexual violence and future researchers studying rape myths.

Race-Specific Effects of Rape Myths

Taken together, the findings described above reveal that rape myths have race-specific effects on rape perceptions. The effects of all four rape myth factors varied somewhat depending on perceived victim or perpetrator race. First, the effect of victim precipitation on victim blame was amplified when perpetrators were perceived as Black. Additionally, the effects of precipitation on perpetrator blame were amplified when victims were perceived as Black or Latinx, and when perpetrators were perceived as Latinx; precipitation had no effect on perpetrator blame when perpetrators were perceived as White. Collectively, these findings suggest that the Black and Latinx victims' clothing, drinking, and foreplay are perceived as more provocative or risky than the clothing and behavior of White victims. Stereotypes that portray black and brown bodies as hypersexual and hypersexualized—like the Jezebel and the Marianismo (Ahrens *et al.*, 2010; Arrizón, 2008; Bracero, 1998; Donovan, 2007; Donovan &

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Williams, 2002; Wyatt, 1982)—may frame Black and Latinx victims' actions as particularly arousing to perpetrators. Likewise, stereotypes that portray Black and Latino men as sexually aggressive (Hardin, 2002; Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019) may contribute to less blame for Black and Latinx perpetrators who may be perceived as easily aroused by victims' precipitative behavior. Miller (2019), for example, found that Black men were perceived as more hypersexual, compared to White and Hispanic men. Furthermore, participants perceived victims as more culpable for a hypothetical rape when the perpetrator was Black, compared to White or Latinx, and this effect was mediated by the "rape propensity stereotype" associated with Black men's hypersexuality. Miller concluded that victims were blamed more when the perpetrator was Black, because they were perceived as putting themselves at risk when choosing to spend time with a (hypersexual) Black man. My findings support Miller's assertion. I found that victim precipitation—or provocative and risky behavior—had a larger effect on victim blame when the perpetrator was perceived as Black. Unlike Miller, however, I also found that this stereotype of hypersexuality may extend to Latinx perpetrators, whereby more perceived precipitation decreased perpetrator blame more for Black perpetrators *and* Latinx perpetrators relative to White perpetrators. This finding suggests that Black and Latinx perpetrators may be perceived as less responsible for rape when victims are perceived as putting themselves at risk by drinking, flirting, and engaging in foreplay with them.

Second, I found evidence that the rape as accident myth uniquely applies to incidents involving White victims and perpetrators. Specifically, in models assessing the direct effect of accident on blame attributions, agreement that the perpetrators' actions

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were accidental was positively associated with victim blame and negatively associated with perpetrator blame. However, the interaction models revealed that the effect of accident on victim blame was primarily restricted to incidents involving White victims and perpetrators. Perceiving the assault as an accident had no effect on victim blame when the victim was perceived as Black or Latinx. Similar, victims were blamed more as accident increased but only when perpetrators were perceived as Latinx and White, but not Black, and this effect was amplified when the perpetrator was White. These findings suggest that the rape as accident myth applies almost exclusively to rapes involving White victims and perpetrators.

This result was surprising, given stereotypes associating hypersexuality with Black and Latino men. Black men in particularly have been stereotyped as sexually aggressive and having high sex drives (Hardin, 2002; Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019). Indeed, Miller (2019) found that Black men were perceived as more hypersexual than White or Hispanic men. I would expect, therefore, that rapes involving Black and Latinx perpetrators would result in more blame for victims and less blame for perpetrators due to the perception that their behavior was accidental. Instead, neither victim nor perpetrator race moderated the effect of accident on perpetrator blame, and accident only influenced victim blame when victims were White and perpetrators were White or Latinx. One possibility is that while rape due to hypersexuality may be associated with Black and Latinx men and women, "accidental" rape involving acquaintances and intoxication may align more with stereotypes about hook up culture, which center White women. Indeed, based on a survey of college students across 22 universities, Spell (2017) found that White women reported twice as many hook-ups as Black and Latina women; White,

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Black, and Latino men reported similar numbers of hookups while in college.

Additionally, drawing on interviews with students at one university, Spell found that

some students, particularly Black and to some extent Asian students, felt excluded from

hookup culture on campus due to their higher visibility relative to White peers.

Furthermore, frequency of hookup experiences and endorsement of hookup culture are

associated with partying, alcohol use, and RMA (Aubrey & Smith, 2016; Reling et al.,

2018; Spell, 2017). Observers, therefore, may perceive White victims as more at risk, or

more responsible for, "accidental" rapes that share characteristics with a hookup (e.g.,

acquaintances, date, intoxication).[26]

The finding that the "accidental rape" myth was especially damaging for victims

in cases involving White perpetrators may also draw on broader racial stereotypes and

their effects. For example, perceiving rapes involving White perpetrators as accidental,

but rapes involving Black perpetrators as intentional draws on stereotypes associating

Blackness and Brownness with aggression and criminality (MacLin & Herrera, 2006;

Steffensmeier et al., 1998; Welch, 2007). Black people, historically, have been held to a

higher standard of behavior than White people, as evident in the well documented

fundamental attribution error where observers attribute White people's bad behavior to

external circumstances, but attribute Black people's bad behavior to internal, even

genetic characteristics (Pettigrew, 1979; Trahan & Laird, 2018). Perceiving rape as

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[26] To explore this possibility further, I assessed differences in means across victim and perpetrator race for each of the accident scale items (see Appendix E). Participants indicated more agreement with every item when the victims and perpetrators were White, followed by Black, and then Latinx, and all pairwise tests of differences between group means were statistically significant. So contrary to expectations, participants agreed that both the perpetrators' sex drive and their intoxication contributed to the incident more when the victims and perpetrators were White, compared to Black or Latinx. These findings further support the possibility that stereotypes about hookup culture centering White women, and to some extent White men, may contribute to the race-specific myth of "accidental rape."

accidental when the victim and perpetrator are White, compared to Black or Latinx, may likewise be a function of externalizing the causes of White people's bad behavior or misfortune.

Third, I found that more skepticism increased victim blame and decreased perpetrator blame, and that these effects were amplified when victims and perpetrators were Black and Latinx, compared to White. Specifically, perceiving a Latinx victim or perpetrator amplified the effect of skepticism on victim blame, and perceiving a Black or Latinx victim or perpetrator amplified the effect of skepticism on perpetrator blame. In other words, the myth that "women cry rape" seems particularly damaging in cases involving Black and Latinx victims and perpetrators. For the case of Black women, this makes sense, as stereotypes about Black women like the "welfare queen" frame Black women as deceitful and untrustworthy. The data suggest that this heightened skepticism extends to Latinx victims as well. Some stereotypes about Latinx and Hispanic people overlap with stereotypes about Black people. The nanny/housekeeper and the sacrificing single mother stereotypes associated with Latinx women (Rodriguez, 2018), for example, are similar to the Mammy and matriarch stereotypes about Black women. Furthermore, assumptions of deceitfulness and exploitation are embedded in stereotypes associating Latinx identities with immigrants who enter the United States illegally and use a disproportionate share of social welfare resources (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Gilens, 1996; Infante et al. 2019). In the current study, findings suggest that these racial stereotypes influence assessments of Black and Latinx victims' credibility in rape case, resulting in less perceived perpetrator blame, and for Latinx victims, more perceived victim blame, compared to incidents involving White victims and perpetrators.

Finally, I found some evidence that the "real rape" stereotype only affects rape perceptions in cases involving Black victims and perpetrators. Specifically, in the individual interaction models assessing *perpetrator blame* (tables 2.7 and 2.9), *Black victim* and *Black perpetrator* interacted with *real rape consistency*, whereby more real rape consistency decreased perceived perpetrator blame, but only when the victim and perpetrator were Black.[27] In other words, participants who agreed that real rape characteristics would have made the incident more real or serious perceived perpetrators more positively, but only in scenarios with Black victims and Black perpetrators. This means that participants perceived perpetrators as responsible for harming the victim, regardless of real rape consistency, when victims and perpetrators were White or Latinx, but in incidents involving Black victims and perpetrators, participants who indicated that more real rape consistency would make the incident more serious perceived perpetrators as less culpable.

This finding demonstrates the enduring legacy of racist laws and discourses that portray "hypersexual" Black men as rapists and "hypersexual" Black women as "unrapeable" (Donovan, 2007; Hamid, 2020; Miller, 2019; Pokorak, 2006). On the one hand, if observers draw on stereotypes of Black women's hypersexuality (e.g., Jezebel) and strength (e.g., Mammy/matriarch), they may perceive rapes involving Black victims as less serious or harmful, and by extension, perpetrators as less blameworthy; "real rape"

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[27] The individual interaction model also revealed that Latinx victims and perpetrators decreased perceived perpetrator blame, but this effect was not statistically significant in the combined interaction model, and a review of the figures suggested the effect of real rape consistency on perpetrator blame was not statistically significant. The effect of Black victim- and Black perpetrator-real rape interactions also failed to reach statistical significance at $p < .05$ in the combined interaction models, though these effects approached significance at $p < .10$.

characteristics may help observers recognize that rapes involving Black victims are as serious, harmful, and "real" as rapes involving White and Latinx women. On the other hand, observers may not perceive force and resistance as indicative of rape if they endorse stereotypes that suggest both parties are sexually aggressive and promiscuous (Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019; Wyatt, 1982). Furthermore, the real rape stereotype may interact with other stereotypes about Black people, like stereotypes of Black women's deceitfulness (e.g., the welfare queen, Roberts, 1997). Belief in Black women's deceitfulness may promote skepticism of Black victims' reports—as evidenced by the amplified effect of skepticism on perpetrator blame when the victim was Black. This skepticism may persist, or even be amplified, when incidents lack the real rape characteristics frequently used to differentiate true from false reports.

The Effects of Latinx

Beyond the race-specific effects described above, the findings in the current study demonstrate a need to consider racial comparisons beyond Black and White. I know of only four studies to date to assess perceptions of hypothetical rapes involving Latinx or Hispanic victims (Genna, 2017; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Miller, 2019; Piatak, 2015). Only one study reported a statistically significant effect of victim ethnicity on perceptions of victims, whereby White female observers reported more sympathy toward White victims than Latina victims; victim ethnicity had no effect on male or Latinx observers' perceptions (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). Nevertheless, prior studies were limited in their use of all student samples (Genna, 2017; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Miller, 2019; Piatak, 2015) which lacked diversity (Genna, 2017; Miller, 2019; Piatak, 2015). More importantly, these studies assessed the direct effects of victims' racial identities on rape

perceptions. No study I know of has assessed how Latinx identities moderate the effects of rape myths on rape perceptions. The current study addressed these gaps and explored the direct and indirect effects of Latinx identities on victim and perpetrator blame. Doing so revealed important differences in rape perceptions for Black, White, and Latinx victims and perpetrators. First, perceiving the victim as Latinx, compared to White, directly influenced perceived victim precipitation, accident, and real rape consistency, while perceiving a Black victim, compared to White, had no direct effects on rape perceptions. Perceiving the victim or perpetrator as Latinx also moderated the relationship between several rape myth factors and victim and perpetrator blame. Specifically, perceiving a victim or perpetrator as Latinx amplified the effects of victim precipitation and skepticism on perpetrator blame even more than perceiving a Black victim or perpetrator. So, it appears that some rape myths exert more of an influence on rape perceptions when the victim or perpetrator is Latinx compared to White *and* Black. These findings highlight a need to continue exploring the effects of rape myths on perceptions of rapes involving Latinx victims and perpetrators, as well as how stereotypes associated with Latinx gender and sexuality may align with Latinx-specific rape myths.

Implications for Victims and Legal Actors

Taken together, the findings of the current study support my assertion that rape myths are not race-neutral. Victim and perpetrator race moderated the effects of rape myth factors on assessments of victim and perpetrator blame. The victim precipitation myth and the myth that "women cry rape" may pose greater barriers for Black and Latinx victims than for White victims. By contrast, the "accidental rape" myth, poses a unique

challenge for White victims and victims of White perpetrators, while the real rape stereotype poses a unique challenge for Black victims and victims of Black perpetrators. These perceptions may have real world consequences for victims and how their cases are handled in the criminal legal system.

Overall, rape myths seem to be more damaging for Black and Latinx victims, compared to White victims. Except for perceiving the rape as an accident, the effects of rape myth factors on rape perceptions were amplified when the victims and perpetrators were perceived as Black and Latinx, compared to White. This is a problem, as researchers have found that Black and Latinx victims are less likely than White victims to disclose to family and friends, seek medical or psychological attention, or report rape to the police (Amstadter et al., 2008; Ahrens et al., 2010; Kaukinen, 2004; Maier, 2008; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011a,b). Black and Latinx women note a fear of being blamed as a reason to not disclose or seek help (Ahrens et al., 2010; Maier, 2008). This fear is justified: Results of the current study show that skepticism increased Latinx victim blame more than White victim blame. Also, precipitation increased victim blame more when perpetrators were Black, which may be a particular problem for Black victims, who are usually raped by Black perpetrators (Koch, 1995). To the extent that Black and Latinx victims are perceived as precipitating their assaults, or their disclosures are perceived with more skepticism, then Black and Latinx victims will continue to suffer the harms of rape without the social support, medical attention, or justice they deserve.

Additionally, the rape as accident myth only influenced assessments of victim blame when victims and perpetrators were perceived as White. This suggest that White victims will struggle to get justice even if they report and their reports are believed, as

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their rapes are likely to be understood as accidental. So, while Black and Latinx victims may struggle with victim blaming attitudes and having their reports believed, the reports of White victims may be disregarded as regrettable misunderstandings. Debunking rape myths, therefore, is necessary to improve responses to all victims, even if the effects of myths differ depending on victim and perpetrator characteristics.

In addition to reporting and help seeking behavior, the findings in the current study indicate that rape myths may make it especially difficult for Black and Latinx victims to get justice. Prior research has found that rape myths influence jury deliberations and verdicts (Ellison & Munro, 2013; Dinos et al., 2015; Leverick, 2020). Importantly, jurors consider rape myths like victim precipitation, credibility, and prior relationship when assessing defendants' guilt (Ellison & Munro, 2009a,b, 2013; Leverick, 2020; St. George et al., 2020). These rape myth factors also influence police and prosecutor decisions (Acquaviva et al., 2022; LaFree, 1981; Morabito et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; St. George & Spohn, 2018; St. George et al., 2022; Tellis & Spohn, 2008), in part because police and prosecutors consider the downstream decisions of juries when deciding to arrest suspects and file charges (St. George et al., 2022; Spohn et al., 2001). Findings in the current study suggest that jury considerations may be moderated by victim and perpetrator race. That is, jurors may consider victim precipitation and credibility more in cases involving Black and Latinx victims and perpetrators. Prosecutors, therefore, may have a harder time overcoming precipitation and credibility concerns in court when victims and defendants are Black or Latinx, which could influence earlier case processing decisions like charging and arrest.

At the same time, my findings suggest that jurors may be particularly prone to

perceiving assaults as accidental, and therefore not worthy of criminal sanction, when

victims and perpetrators are White. Even if jurors convict defendants in cases perceived

as accidental, consequences for White perpetrators may be minimized.[28] Furthermore,

while arrests, charges, and convictions may be less likely when victims are Black and

Latinx, compared to White—due to more perceived victim precipitation and skepticism

when victims and perpetrators are Black or Latinx—harsh punishment may be reserved

for Black and Latinx perpetrators. Indeed, White defendants convicted of rape receive

shorter prison sentences than Black defendants, for example, with the most extreme

punishments reserved almost exclusively for Black men who rape White women

(Bardaglio, 1994; LaFree,1980a; Wiggins, 1983; Williams et al., 2007; Wolfgang &

Riedel, 1975). Rape myths like precipitation and skepticism, therefore, may influence

early case processing decisions, like the likelihood of arrest, charges, and conviction for

Black and Latinx victims. By contrast, the "accidental rape" myth may influence later

decisions, like sentencing, whereby White men who rape when intoxicated are provided

leniency in punishment.

Collectively, these findings reveal manifestations of both sexism and racism in

criminal justice responses to sexual violence. Black and Latinx victims—who are

disproportionately women—seem to suffer the consequences of myths that blame victims

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[28] The sexual assault case involving Brock Turner in California demonstrates this problem. Turner, a White man and college athlete at Stanford University, was convicted of raping an unconscious woman. At sentencing, the judge sentenced Turner to six months in county jail, noting several mitigating circumstances, including Turner's young age and intoxication at the time of the incident. The judge also described evidence of Turner's good character and concern about the impact of incarceration, stating: "I think you have to take the whole picture in terms of what impact imprisonment has on a specific individual's life. And the impact statements that have been – or the, really, character letters that have been submitted do show a huge collateral consequence for Mr. Turner based on the conviction" (Levin, 2016, para. 37).

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for precipitation and induce skepticism in their reports, as they are less likely to seek help, report, or have cases successfully adjudicated (Amstadter et al., 2008; Ahrens et al., 2010; Kaukinen, 2004; LaFree, 1980b; Maier, 2008; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011a,b). However, once convicted, Black and Latinx defendants suffer harsh penalties, while the actions of White men are dismissed as accidental and lightly sanctioned. Rape myths, therefore, may influence victims and legal actors (e.g., prosecutors, juries) in race-specific ways that ultimately help maintain both racial and gender oppression.

Implications for Researchers

Beyond potential impacts for victims and how sexual assault cases are processed in the criminal legal system, the current study has implications for researchers studying rape myths and their effects. Findings show that rape myths are not race-neutral. Rather, rape myths have different effects for victims and perpetrators of different racial groups, which suggests that rape myths draw from race and gender stereotypes, or more specifically, racialized gender stereotypes. The extant rape myth literature, therefore, is incomplete.

First, rape perception studies that ignore victim and perpetrator race may overlook the disparate effects of rape myths on rape perceptions. Prior work has documented the negative impact of rape myths and RMA on rape perceptions (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hockett et al., 2016; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Findings in the current study suggest that these negative impacts are not felt equally by all victims. Instead, different rape myths influence perceptions depending on victim and perpetrator race. Furthermore, the effect of some rape myths on perceptions was masked in models that did not account for race-specific effects. Specifically, the "accidental rape" myth was only statistically

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significantly associated with victim blame when the race-myth interactions were introduced into the model; the effect revealed that this myth only influenced victim blame when victims were perceived as White. Similarly, interactions revealed that real rape consistency only influenced perpetrator blame when the victim and perpetrator were perceived as Black. So, identifying if rape myths influence rape perceptions, and the size of their effects, will require attending to the race of victims and perpetrators in the cases involved.

Second, the current study revealed unique effects of rape myths for Latinx victims and perpetrators. This is important, as prior work has focused on comparisons between Black and White victims and perpetrators (Donovan, 2007; Foley et al., 1995; Gravelin et al., 2019; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Varelas & Foley, 1998; Willis, 1992; but see Genna, 2017; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Miller, 2019; Piatak, 2015). The unique effects of Latinx identities found in the current study demonstrate a need to expand the racial categories of interest in rape myth literature to include a variety of racial groups. While the current study explored Black, White, and Latinx differences, other racial identities also deserve attention, particularly Asian and Indigenous identities.

Finally, I suggested that rape myths are not race-neutral because gender stereotypes are not race-neutral. While my analyses support this assertion, they were limited to assessing the race-specific effects of rape myths already identified and measured in the extant literature. However, it is likely that there are race-specific rape myths that remain unarticulated and unmeasured. Even the Black male rapist myth, whose origins can be traced to the 1700s (Davis, 1983; Hamid, 2020; Wallace-Sanders, 2002), is noticeably absent from the RMA scales most frequently used in the rape myth

and rape perception literature. The ability of current research tools to assess the full range of rape myths and their effects is limited. Race-specific rape myths need to be clearly identified and measured in validated scales. Doing so will also require identifying racialized gender stereotypes and the discourses that link these to sexual behavior and rape. While some scholars have explored how race and racial stereotypes influence sexualization, sexual risk taking, perceptions of body image, and other sex-related phenomena (Biefeld et al., 2021; Bond et al., 2021; Grower et al., 2021; Newcomb et al., 2015), studies assessing the role of race in the construction and effects of rape myths are lacking. The current study demonstrates that the rape myth literature needs to reconsider race. Otherwise, the original goals of rape myth researchers, which no doubt involved identifying and debunking myths that harm victims of sexual violence, will continue to disadvantage victims who are multiply marginalized.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusions

In the current study, I drew on intersectionality to think about how race may moderate the effects of rape myths on rape perceptions. I hypothesized that racialized gender stereotypes would result in racialized rape myths. However, rather than assessing the effects of race-specific rape myths, I assessed if rape myths that have hitherto been described in race-neutral ways had race-specific effects. Specifically, I generated my rape myth measures from the Subtle Rape Myths scale, which assesses subtle rape myth attitudes without specifying victim or perpetrator race. While some of the rape myths I explored overlap with race-specific rape myths—the Jezebel stereotype is consistent with the victim precipitation myth and the "accidental rape" myth overlaps somewhat with the myth of the hypersexual Black man (Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019; Payne et al., 1999)—I

did not test if race-specific rape myths have race-specific effects. I was somewhat limited by the dearth of literature articulating race-specific rape myths, especially myths associated with Latinx victims and perpetrators, as well as a lack of validated scales measuring race-specific attitudes toward sexual violence. Overcoming this limitation will require future researchers to identify and articulate a greater range of race-specific rape myths and to create measures that assess individuals' race-specific RMA. Then future work can use assessments of RMA that include race-specific rape myths. Scholars could also draw on race-specific RMA scales to assess the race-specific impacts of rape myths on rape perceptions.

In the current study, I also limited my analyses to the effects of rape myths among three racial groups: Black, White, and Latinx. By adding the Latinx category, I expanded the literature on rape perceptions, which to date, has focused on comparisons of White and Black victims and offenders. However, there are gender stereotypes associated with other racial groups, like Asian and Indigenous people, that may contribute to unique effects of rape myths on rapes involving Asian and Indigenous victims and perpetrators. Future research should assess how these other racial identities influence rape perceptions directly and indirectly. Furthermore, while race has been an important source of inequality in the United States, in countries with more racially homogeneous populations, other identity markers may play a larger role than race in the formation of rape myths and their effects. For example, Rozmann and Levy (2021) assessed rape perceptions in Israel, finding that victims blamed African perpetrators more than Arab or Jewish perpetrators. Similarly, Sjöberg and Sarwar (2020) explored the role of victims' and perpetrators' immigration status on rape perceptions in Sweden, finding that participants blamed

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immigrant perpetrators more when the victim was native, than when the victim was an immigrant.

In this same vein, I considered the intersection of race with binary gender stereotypes, and stereotypes that frame victims as female and perpetrators as male. Yet other, nonbinary gender identities, and non-heterosexual formations, may likewise contribute to rape myths uniquely about White gay men, or Black trans women, or Latino heterosexual male victims.[29] Some scholars have identified rape myths associated with male victims (Melanson, 1998; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Turchik & Edwards, 2012) and non-binary victims (Schulze et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is some evidence that rape myths vary by victim age, with unique myths associated with child sexual abuse (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Prior research, therefore, demonstrates that rape myths may intersect with multiple markers of structural inequality, including nonbinary genders (Schulze et al., 2019), sexual orientation (Melanson, 1998; Schulze et al., 2019), age (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010), class (Black & Gold, 2008; Spencer, 2016), and disability (Wehbi, 2002), as well as subcultural experiences like college athletes (McMahon, 2007) and Greek culture on campus (Martinez et al., 2018). While exploring the effects of these other intersections on rape perceptions was outside the scope of the current study, researchers should attend to how rape myths intersect with other forms of marginalization, beyond race.

In conclusion, my study supports my assertion that rape myths are not race

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[29] Even the stereotype that victims are female and perpetrators are male is a rape myth with origins in the social privileging of heterosexual relationships and the stereotype that men are innately more sexually aggressive than women. This stereotype has harmful consequences for non-heterosexual victims, and male victims of female perpetrators (Schulze et al., 2019).

neutral. The myths I explore in the current study had different effects on victim and perpetrator blame depending on the perceived race of the victims and perpetrators involved. This indicates that observers draw on different rape myths—that different rape myth schemas are activated—when assessing scenarios with White, Black, and Latinx victims and perpetrators. That victim and perpetrator race moderates the effect of rape myths on blame attributions suggests that rape myths come from the intersections of race and gender stereotypes. Extrapolating the racialized effects of rape myths on rape perceptions beyond hypothetical scenarios, the findings in the current study suggest that some rape myths only pose barriers for some victims. Future research should assess if victim and perpetrator race do indeed moderate the effects of rape myths on criminal justice responses in real cases, and if they do so in the ways indicated here. Still, the current study suggests that sexist attitudes that blame victims for rape, minimize the harm and prevalence of rape, and justify male sexual aggression against women are more damaging for Black and Latinx victims than White victims of sexual violence. Furthermore, the study supports Kimberlé Crenshaw's assertion that the way gender oppression is experienced—in this case, which rape myths influence perceptions of and responses to rape—depends on the intersections of individuals' identities, including their race. Ultimately, findings demonstrate that racial and gender oppression cannot be untangled: rape myths come from, and perpetuate, both racial and gender oppression.

CHAPTER 3

RACE- AND ETHNICITY-SPECIFIC EFFECTS OF RAPE MYTHS ON POLICE

RESPONSES TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

Chapter Summary

Researchers have consistently shown that rape myths influence perceptions of rape, rape victims, and rape perpetrators, as well as the decisions of victims and criminal justice actors, contributing to attrition. Much of the rape myth literature is colorblind, ignoring the how the entanglement of race with gender, structurally, representationally, and experientially, influences the content of rape myths and their effects on perceptions and decision-making. If rape myths vary by race, then rape myths may have race-specific effects on how criminal justice actors treat rape reports. In the current study, I apply an intersectional framework to the focal concerns perspective to assess if victim race moderates the effects of rape myths—victim precipitation, victim credibility, and real rape consistency—on police decisions. Using data from the Los Angeles Sexual Assault Study (Spohn & Tellis, 2014), I examined 726 cases of reported sexual assault and sexual battery involving White, Black, and Latina women, to assess the interactive effects of rape myths and victim race on the decisions to unfound the report and arrest a suspect. Victim race did not directly affect decisions, but models revealed that rape myths had unique effects on unfounding and arrest when the victim was Black. Findings show that the effect of race on sexual assault case processing is nuanced and manifests in ways not identified by single-axis thinking. Reforms intended to improve treatment of victims and successful case processing will have limited impacts if they ignore how manifestations of gender oppression, like rape myths, are entangled with racial oppression.

Introduction

Sometimes the failure to discriminate is discriminatory; where there are real differences, failure to recognize and take account for them is the proof of unfairness.
          —Susan Estrich (1987, p. 25).

Research on racial disparity in the criminal legal system typically follows two theoretical approaches. At the macro level, conflict theory claims that "the criminal legal system acts as a further tool of the ruling class by more severely punishing and providing less protection to those who belong to less powerful groups" (Maxwell et al., 2003, p. 524). At the micro level, the uncertainty avoidance theory (Albonetti, 1991) and focal concerns perspective (Steffensmeier et al., 1998) propose a mechanism through which this inequality is reproduced and maintained. Individual actors, constrained by scarce resources, uncertainty, and bounded rationality, draw on cultural stereotypes of criminals to assess the suspect or defendant's blameworthiness, dangerousness, and rehabilitate-ability (Albonetti, 1991; Steffensmeier et al., 1998). This "perceptual shorthand" presumably increases efficiency of decision-making, but because criminal stereotypes are racialized, it also results in disparities in the arrest, conviction, and sentencing of non-White suspects and defendants, particularly those who are Black and Latino (Maxwell et al., 2003; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000; Steffensmeier et al., 1998). These processes reproduce and maintain structural racial and ethnic inequality.

Similarly, feminist scholars have identified sexual violence and social responses to it as tools to maintain women's structural oppression in society (Armstrong et al., 2018; Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987). Scholars have also applied the focal concerns framework to criminal justice responses to sexual violence. Instead of criminal

stereotypes, criminal justice decision-makers draw on myths and stereotypes about "real" rape and "genuine" victims to inform assessments of victim credibility, offense severity, and defendant dangerousness, blameworthiness, and convictability (Ellison & Munro, 2013; Frohmann, 1991; Venema, 2016). Scholars have shown that these "rape myths" are constructed discursively from traditional gender role norms (Estrich, 1987),[30] and they influence criminal justice responses to sexual violence in ways that limit victim's access to justice (Campbell & Fehler-Cabral, 2018; Estrich, 1987; St. George & Spohn, 2018). As St. George and Spohn (2018) asserted, by "disproportionately ignoring and rejecting cases involving women who violate traditional gender norms, the criminal justice system effectively permits violence against women, reinforces rape myths, and maintains gender inequality" (p. 27). These processes maintain women's structural subordination to men.

Both conflict theory and the focal concerns framework, therefore, have been used to explain how criminal justice responses to crime replicate and perpetuate racial and gender oppression. However, theoretical and empirical analyses of criminal justice responses have not interrogated how multiple membership in different subordinated groups produces unique manifestations of discrimination and amplifies inequality. According to the Black feminist scholars' theory of intersectionality, when axes of oppression like sexism and racism intersect, they result in unique forms of discrimination and marginalization that may be masked or understated in analyses that examine a single axis (May, 2015; Crenshaw, 1990; Collins & Bilge, 2016). In the context of sexual

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[30] Discursive processes are processes that produce and reinforce knowledge through systems of symbolic representation, such as language (Foucault, 1972; Karlberg, 2012; Schneider, 2013). For example, Estrich's (1987) examination of appellate decisions showed how judges drew on their "knowledge" of women's nature and sexuality to define which rapes were "real" and which victims "credible."

violence, at the macro level, criminal justice responses to sexual assault reports may produce and maintain not just gender oppression but also racial oppression. At the micro level, if rape myths associated with gender stereotypes are also racialized, then the particular rape myths that pose barriers to successful adjudication may be different for Black women, Latina women, and White women (as well as other minority women). Furthermore, racialized rape myths may result in even more negative and discriminatory consequences for women of color than for White women.

In the current study, I use intersectionality as an analytic tool or heuristic (Cho et al., 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016) to examine the ways that rape myths associated with gender oppression may simultaneously perpetuate racial oppression, or more accurately, racialized gender oppression. Specifically, I examine if incident and victim characteristics associated with rape myths affect police decisions in sexual assault cases differently for White, Black, and Latina women. If rape myths have race- and ethnicity-specific effects on criminal justice responses to sexual violence, then policies developed to combat rape myths must consider how rape myths perpetuate not just gender oppression but also racial oppression. Otherwise, such policies may improve outcomes for White victims, but not for Black and Latina victims.

Intersectionality and the Structure of Violence

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) coined the term "intersectionality" to describe how structures of oppression, such as racism and sexism, intersect and mutually reinforce each other, which results in unique and often overlooked manifestations of oppression for multiply marginalized individuals. Scholars have used intersectionality as a theory and framework to "expose how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary

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knowledge production, and struggles for social justice" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787).

Initially, intersectional analyses emphasized how organizing social structures like gender, race, and class mutually constituted the gender, race, and economic inequality experienced by poor Black women (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1990). Since then, intersectionality as a framework has been used and adapted in research and practice across disciplines, within and outside academia, to expose the effects of entangled structural conditions and the limits of single-axis thinking (Cho et al., 2013).

Used as an "analytic sensibility," intersectional thinking also highlights the multiplicity, permeability, and overlap of social categories. Importantly, multiple membership in social categories mutually and dynamically generates privilege and oppression, constitutes identity, and shapes experience (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795). In single-axis scholarship, structures of inequality such as gender or race are often characterized as monolithic, as are the social groups marked as subordinate (e.g., "women" or "the Black community"). But these groups are composed of individuals who are both similar to and different from the single axis marker defining that group. As such, addressing oppression associated with one characteristic but not another reproduces subordination. As Crenshaw (1992, p. 1468) explains, "race cannot be separated from gender in Black women's lives. Race in many ways both shapes the kinds of gender subordination Black women experience and limits the opportunities to successfully challenge it."

In studies of sexual violence, intersectionality frameworks emphasize that sexual violence is rooted not just in gender inequality, but also race, class, and other structures of inequality (Armstrong et al., 2018; Freedman, 2013; Hine, 1989; Smith, 2015).

Analyses emphasizing structure reveal the limitations of individual-level and gender-focused explanations of sexual violence (e.g., rape myths) and associated solutions (e.g., self-defense training for women) that rely on neoliberal assumptions about choice and responsibility (Crenshaw, 1990; Miller, 2008; Richie, 1996). Neoliberal theories and responses hold individuals accountable for their own actions and trauma, and they ignore the ways that social structures make women more vulnerable to sexual violence than men (Armstrong et al., 2018). They also ignore the ways that some women are more vulnerable than *other women.* For example, Black women's socialization into hegemonic gender roles and patriarchal structures within the Black community—structures that historically privilege concern with Black men's discrimination and safety over that of Black women—makes some Black women particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual violence in their intimate relationships (Richie, 1996). Other women more resilient to violence in the private sphere may be vulnerable to other sources of sexual violence if they live in neighborhoods characterized by poverty, crime, limited housing and employment, and limited institutional resources (Miller, 2008; Shannon et al., 2009).

Intersectional frameworks also reveal how activism and reforms intended to improve institutional responses to sexual violence reproduce inequalities when they only address *gender* oppression. Though not always intentional, race-neutral laws and policies created to combat *gendered* violence have often exacerbated racial oppression (Armstrong et al., 2018; Crenshaw, 1990). In the United States, early legal statutes defined rape narrowly. Under the law, certain people (e.g., men, noncitizens, Black, Native, Latina women, spouses) could not legally be raped, while others (e.g., women, husbands, White men) could not legally be held accountable as perpetrators (Estrich,

1987; Feinstein, 2017; Freedman, 2013). Laws also provided differential punishment for rape depending on the race of victims and suspects (Bardaglio, 1994; Wiggins, 1983). When new laws were enacted to combat gendered violence, they were often enforced in ways that perpetuated racial inequality (Armstrong et al., 2018; Mahan, 2017). These statutes functionally enabled and authorized the "use of sexual violence as a tool of White racial domination" (Armstrong et al., 2018, p. 105). Furthermore, programs and policies developed to combat *gendered* violence without accounting for variation in women's needs, motivations, and access to resources related to race, parenthood, immigration status, or class leave the needs of many women unmet (Crenshaw, 1990; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2016).

Although current laws, policies, and organizations provide more legal recourse and social resources for previously excluded victims, remnants of their oppressive intentions remain in practice. The same race, gender, and sexuality norms that structured earlier sexual violence laws inform the rape myths that define some victims as not "genuine" or their rapes as not "real." As "instruments of inequality" (MacKinnon, 2013), intersectional representations and stereotypes of multiply marginalized individuals affect intra- and interpersonal behavior in ways that perpetuate structural inequality in social institutions like the criminal legal system. In the current study, I argue that criminal justice responses to sexual violence perpetuate racial inequality, because racialized gender stereotypes influence how police and prosecutors perceive and respond to rape and rape victims. Specifically, I suggest that representations and stereotypes of rape or *rape myths*—which scholars have conceptualized and measured as race-neutral—may have race- and ethnicity-specific effects on criminal justice responses to sexual assault.

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Rape Myths and Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Violence

Rape myths are "attitudes and beliefs [about rape] that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). Rape myths are based on hegemonic gender norm expectations and sexuality stereotypes (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). For example, traditional gender norms dictate that women be passive, dependent on men, and chaste, while men be assertive and aggressive, independent, and sexually promiscuous. Despite expectations of sexual passivity and chastity, female sexual stereotypes often portray women as sexually voracious and manipulative, while men are easily sexually aroused and incapable of controlling their sexual urges (Basow, 1992; Estrich, 1987). These gender stereotypes converge into specific stereotypes and myths about rape that influence assessments of victim responsibility and credibility, and the seriousness and harmfulness of sexual assault (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

The *victim precipitation* myth suggests that victims provoke rape when they go out alone at night, drink, or wear revealing clothing, because according to traditional gender norms, these behaviors indicate sexual intent to men (Amir, 1971; Estrich, 1987; Payne et al., 1999). The *victim credibility* myth suggests that women often "cry rape" to cover up consensual sexual encounters, for revenge, or for personal gain (Estrich, 1987; Payne et al., 1999).[31] Promiscuous women, rejected lovers, and women with questionable

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[31] While scholars have found that revenge and covering up transgressive sex sometimes motivate women to falsely report sexual assault (O'Neal et al., 2014), victim credibility myths are myths in that they exaggerate the frequency of such false reports. McMillan (2018), for example, found that some police officers in the United Kingdom estimated false reports as high as 90%, although scholars have shown that the actual frequency of false reports is closer to 5% (Lisak et al., 2010; Spohn et al., 2014).

moral character (e.g., prostitutes, habitual drug users) are defined as inherently lacking

credibility (Orenstein, 2007). The "real rape" stereotype suggests that circumstances of

the alleged assault can be used to differentiate between cases that do and do not deserve

criminal justice intervention and sanction. When the rape matches the "real rape"

stereotype, in which the victim is raped by a stranger with a weapon, resists vigorously,

sustains visible injury, and reports immediately, allegations are perceived as credible and

serious (Estrich, 1987; Freedman, 2103). However, characteristics like knowing the

alleged perpetrator, failing to resist, or delaying the report draw suspicion. While the

victim precipitation myth represents gender-role violating women as deserving of and

responsible for rape, the victim credibility myth stereotypes women as untrustworthy.

Only in the rarest circumstances, in cases consistent with "real rape," can women who

allege rape be believed and exonerated from blame (Estrich, 1987; Orenstein, 2007).

Many scholars have shown that rape myths influence perceptions of and

responses to sexual assault allegations. Rape perception studies consistently find that

respondents with higher rape myth acceptance (RMA) perceive hypothetical victims

more negatively and blame them more for the assault (Dinos et al, 2015; Grubb &

Turner, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Victims of sexual assault who endorse rape

myths are more likely to engage in self-blame and are less likely to report the incident to

police (Heath et al., 2013), and rape myths are implicated in police and prosecutors' focal

concerns when processing sexual assault cases (Campbell & Fehler-Cabral, 2018;

Frohmann, 1991; O'Neal, 2019; Spohn et al., 2001; Shaw et al., 2017; Venema, 2016).

Although studies assessing the direct effect of RMA on police and prosecutors' responses

to sexual assault are lacking, research on case processing decisions consistently finds that

victim and incident characteristics associated with rape myths affect the police decision to unfound reports (Spohn et al., 2014) and arrest suspects (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Morabito et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2012, 2014; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017) and prosecutors' decisions to file charges (Beichner & Spohn, 2012; Spohn et al., 2001; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; St. George & Spohn, 2018). For example, Morabito and colleagues (2019) found that police were more likely to arrest suspects in cases involving victim injury and an attack with a weapon ("real rape" characteristics), but they were less likely to arrest suspects when the victim was using drugs or alcohol at the time of the incident (victim precipitation).

Cumulatively, the research described above shows that rape myths derived from traditional gender role norms and stereotypes influence perceptions of sexual assault victims and interpretations of their behavior in ways that result in case attrition. As such, the criminal legal system's response to sexual violence functionally polices and sanctions gender performances that violate traditional gender norms, which perpetuates gender inequality (St. George & Spohn, 2018). What is missing from this literature, however, is the recognition that race and gender are entangled. More specifically, racial stereotypes and gender stereotypes are entangled, so rape myths, which are traditionally understood as deriving from gender stereotypes, may also derive from racial stereotypes, or *racialized gender stereotypes*. Rape myths, therefore, may perpetuate racial inequality as well as gender inequality.

I propose that race may contribute to racial inequality in criminal justice outcomes, by influencing criminal justice responses to sexual assault in nuanced ways. Specifically, entangled race and gender stereotypes may produce race-specific rape

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myths, which in turn affect police and prosecutors' perceptions of sexual assault victims and cases, particularly their assessments of victims as "genuine" and rapes as "real." I know of no study to date, however, that examines theoretically or empirically how rape myths are associated with racial stereotypes, or how rape myths generate racial disparities in criminal justice responses to sexual assault. In fact, the extant literature describing and measuring rape myths and their effects is conspicuously race-neutral (Burt, 1980; Payne et al., 1999; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Numerous studies, however, have shown that racialized gender stereotypes affect how *victims* interpret and respond to sexual violence (Ahrens et al., 2010; Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2014; Donovan & Williams, 2002; Littleton et al., 2007; McGuffey, 2013; Neville et al., 2004). I discuss these stereotypes and their effects below.

Race- and Ethnicity-Specific Gender Stereotypes

Traditional stereotypes of Black women like the Jezebel, as well as more the contemporary stereotypes of the Gold Digger, Gangster Bitch, and Baby Mama, portray Black women as promiscuous, deceitful, and irresponsible (Brennan, 2006; Crenshaw, 1990; George & Martinez, 2002; Stephens & Few, 2005; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; Wyatt, 1982). Black women socialized into these "Black promiscuity" gender roles or who recognize them as pervasive stereotypes often blame themselves for rape or fear blame and negative treatment by criminal justice officials, family members, and their community (McGuffey, 2013; Neville et al., 2004). Similarly, when Black women internalize stereotypes of Black women's strength and resilience or expect that others, such as law enforcement, doctors, or peers endorse them, they may be less likely to seek help from friends and family, health services, and the police (Donovan & Williams, 2002;

McGuffey, 2013; West et al., 2016). Their concerns are not unfounded: based on interviews with rape victim advocates, the majority of whom had experienced rape or attempted rape themselves, Shana Maier (2008) found that Black women were more likely to be victimized than women of other racial/ethnic groups, and that Black victims engaged in more self-blame, experienced more blame by their community, remained silent to protect Black men, and were provided less legal protections than victims of other racial/ethnic groups. Black women, therefore, use stereotypes about Black women to appraise their sexual assault experiences, form expectations about how others will view them, and decide how to respond, including whether to disclose to family and friends, report to law enforcement, and seek mental and physical health services (Donovan & Williams, 2002; Maier, 2008; McGuffey, 2013).

Like Black women, socialization into stereotypes and expectations about Latina women structure Latina victims' perceptions of and responses to rape. The Marianismo gender expectation dominant for Latina women idealizes sexual purity, while the Machismo gender expectation for Latino men portrays men as hypersexual, aggressive, and dominant (Ahrens *et al.*, 2010; Arrizón, 2008; Bracero, 1998). At the same time, Latina women's bodies are stereotyped as hypersexual and hyperfeminine (Arrizón, 2008). Emphasis on women's purity despite sexual attractiveness and men's uncontrollable sex drive likely affects which rape myths Latinas endorse, which in turn affects their vulnerability to sexual violence, rape acknowledgement, and responses to sexual victimization (Ahrens *et al.*, 2010; Lefley et al., 1993; Maier, 2008). Relative to White women, Latina women have higher RMA (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003), and their rape scripts are more consistent with the "real" rape stereotype (Littleton et al., 2007). Given

evidence that higher RMA and more stereotypical rape scripts increase women's risk of sexual assault (Turchik et al., 2010), Latina women's attitudes toward rape may increase their risk of sexual violence victimization. Importantly, scholars have found that among Latinas, stronger socialization into the Marianismo and Machismo gender expectations is associated with more stereotypical rape scripts and vulnerability to sexual violence in intimate relationships (Ahrens *et al.,* 2010; Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2014; Littleton et al., 2007). These studies show that gender stereotypes specific to Latinx culture shape Latina women's beliefs about rape in ways that make them vulnerable, especially in intimate relationships where they are least likely to expect or acknowledge it.

Stereotypes may also affect Latina women's responses to sexual violence. Their higher RMA and more stereotypical rape scripts may influence their willingness to report crimes, as RMA is negatively associated with likelihood of reporting incidents of sexual violence to the police (Heath *et al*., 2013). To the extent that Latina women endorse or expect Machismo from their Latino partners and endorse the uncontrollable male sex drive myth, they may minimize the perpetrator's responsibility and blame themselves for rape. Latina women may be reluctant to disclose or report sexual violence if they believe their lost purity due to rape will bring dishonor on their families (Ahrens *et al.*, 2010; Lefley *et al.,* 1993; Maier, 2008). How women appraise themselves and their victimizations, therefore, depends on the race and ethnicity-specific gender stereotypes into which they are socialized. These appraisals in turn affect women's ability to access support from friends and family, health services, and the criminal legal system.

Researchers also have found that attorneys draw on racialized gender stereotypes to support their arguments at trial. Powell and colleagues (2017) found that among

victims testifying about child sexual abuse as adolescents, defense attorneys drew on stereotypes about the hypersexuality of black and brown female bodies to impeach the credibility of Black and Latina victims, but not White victims. Prosecutors, rather than attacking and debunking the Jezebel myth, counteracted this tactic by emphasizing the victim's youth (Powell et al., 2017). Furthermore, when children are involved in sex-trafficking or survival sex, Black victims are more likely than White victims to be prosecuted for prostitution (Phillips, 2015). Apparently, the myth that Black and Latina women are hypersexual and promiscuous is so strong that even Black and Latina child victims are blamed for sexual violence.

Present Study

The research described above shows that race- and ethnicity-specific stereotypes of Black and Latina women's sexuality, or race- and ethnicity-specific rape myths, generate unique concerns about credibility for Black and Latina victims in ways that limit their access to justice. Furthermore, scholars examining the direct effects of race on criminal justice outcomes in sexual assault cases also have shown that race matters. For example, researchers have found that prosecutors are less likely to file charges in sexual assault cases when the victim is Black compared to White (LaFree,1980b; Maxwell et al., 2003). I expect that racialized rape myths also inform the assessments and decisions of other criminal justice actors, like police. Unfortunately, no study to date has examined if the effects of rape myths on case processing decisions are conditioned by victim race. In the current study, I explore this possibility by assessing if rape myths influence police responses to sexual assault cases differently, depending on victims' race or ethnicity.

Consistent with the focal concerns perspective, I argue that rape myths influence

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case processing decisions by affecting how police assess victim credibility and suspect culpability, as well as expectations about the likelihood that prosecutors will file charges, or chargeability. However, guided by intersectionality theory, I take this a step further, suggesting that the racial identities of victims, and representations of these identities, condition which rape myths are most salient in these assessments. I propose that victim race activates race-specific gender stereotypes when police assess victim credibility and responsibility, suspect culpability, and chargeability. To the extent that Black and Latina gender stereotypes violate dominant (White) gender role expectations, police perceive Black and Latina victims as less "genuine" or credible and their rapes as less "real" or chargeable, as compared to White women. These assessments in turn, influence police decision-making, including to unfound the report and arrest a suspect, which results in more attrition and less justice in cases involving Black and Latina women. In this way, micro-level decisions influenced by representations of intersecting social status characteristics reinforce and perpetuate structural inequalities across race and gender.

Using this theoretical framework, I examined if the gender inequality perpetuated by the institutionalization of rape myths is more pronounced among Black and Latina victims than White victims. Specifically, I examined if victim precipitation, credibility issues, and consistency with the "real rape" stereotype had different effects on police decisions (i.e., to unfound the complaint or to arrest the suspects) when victims were Black or Latina, compared to White. I explored several hypotheses. First, I expected that police would perceive cases as more chargeable when they involved White victims. So, I hypothesized that *police would be less likely to unfound (H1a) and more like to arrest (H1b) in cases involving White victims, than in cases involving Black or Latinx victims.* I

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also expected that victim race would affect how police interpreted victims' pre-, peri-, and post-assault behavior, so that the extralegal *criteria* that police used to assess chargeability—including victim precipitation, victim credibility, and real rape consistency—would vary depending on the race or ethnicity of the victim. Specifically, drawing on findings from Chapter 2, I hypothesized that *the effects of precipitation (H2a), credibility issues (H2b), and real rape consistency (H2c) on unfounding and arrest would be amplified for Black victims. Likewise,* I hypothesized that *the effect of precipitation (H3a), credibility issues (H3b), and real rape consistency (H3c) on unfounding and arrest would be amplified for Latinx victims.*

Addressing these questions is important. If the effect of rape myths on criminal justice responses to rape are race-specific, then race-neutral research on rape myths will fail to reveal the nuanced ways that rape myths result in racially disparate treatment of sexual assault victims. Furthermore, policies implemented to combat the effects of rape myths on police decisions may not improve responses to Black and Latina women if they fail to interrogate how rape myths reproduce racial inequality as well as gender inequality.

Methods

Data Source

The current study used data from the Los Angeles Sexual Assault Study (Spohn & Tellis, 2014). In order to examine how police and prosecutors process sexual assault cases, the authors collected data on a stratified random sample of sex crimes reported to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) in 2008. All cases (N = 944) involved female victims ages 12 and

older, and male suspects. The data are uniquely suited for this study because the authors used the case files—which included information about each decision point from the victim's initial report to the prosecutor's reasons for not filing charges—to glean detailed information about the characteristics of the assaults. Importantly, the reports included information on the variety of evidence types, aggravating circumstances, the victim's credibility, and pre-, peri- and post-assault behavior. Such detailed information is not typically included in studies on police and prosecutors' decisions, yet it is critical for assessing how factors associated with rape myths affect police responses to sexual assault.

The Sample

The Spohn and Tellis (2014) sample included 944 cases of rape, attempted rape, and sexual battery. I excluded four cases that police identified as statutory rape between consenting age-mates and 105 cases in which the investigation was ongoing at the time of data collection. I also dropped 44 cases (5.27%) due to missing information on victim or suspect age or race. Additionally, there were too few cases involving Asian and other race victims (N = 41) and suspects (N = 24) to examine meaningfully in the analyses, so only cases involving White, Black, and Latina victims and suspects were included. Of the final sample of 726 cases, 51% involved Latina victims, 26% involved White victims, and 22% involved Black victims. Suspect race followed a similar trend, with 55% involving Latino suspects, 17% involving White suspects, and almost 28% involving Black suspects. Consistent with other violent crimes, most sex offenses in the sample were intra-racial, ranging from 46% among White victims to almost 85% among Black and Latina victims. Most victims were willing to cooperate with the investigation (70%),

most of their cases involved penetration (69%) and 40% were investigated by LAPD. The police unfounded 16% of reported cases, sought a prearrest case evaluation with a prosecutor in 38% of cases, and arrested the suspect without an evaluation in 46% of cases. Sample characteristics are displayed in table 3.1.

Variables and Measures

The primary goal of this study was to investigate if "real" rape and "genuine" victim stereotypes have different effects on police responses to sexual assault reports when victims are White, Black, or Latina. I focused on police responses, because police are typically the first point of contact between victims and the criminal legal system. Their assessments determine which cases pass through the "gateway" to justice (Kerstetter, 1990). Generally, police assess the merit of a victim's report, and if they believe the report is false or baseless, they unfound the case. Then, if police determine they have probable cause to make an arrest, they arrest the suspect and refer the case to the prosecutor for charging. Additionally, in the jurisdiction from which the data for this study were drawn, police detectives commonly sought a pre-arrest charge evaluation with prosecutors in cases they perceived as ambiguous or problematic. So, after determining the victim's report had merit, police either solicited a pre-arrest charge evaluation, or they arrested the suspect. I examined these two decision points: the decision to *unfound* (yes = 1), and among founded cases, the decision to *arrest* (yes = 1). The decision to arrest or solicit a pre-arrest evaluation is particularly interesting, because the pre-arrest charge evaluation indicates a degree of uncertainty about the prosecutors' charging decision downstream. These data, and this decision point, therefore, provide a unique opportunity

to assess how victim race and rape myth factors influence police assessments of chargeability.

To examine the effects of rape myths, I used three variety scales developed by St. George and Spohn's (2018) study on prosecutors' charging decisions. These scales correspond to myths associated with victim precipitation, victim credibility, and the real rape stereotype. The *precipitation* scale ($M = 1.02$; *alpha* = .62) is the sum of 12 behaviors that could be perceived as risky or precipitating the assault (e.g., victim was intoxicated at time of incident). The *credibility issues* scale ($M = .64$; *alpha* = .42) is the sum of nine items that indicate issues with the victim's credibility or moral character (e.g., victim was a prostitute). Finally, the *real rape consistency* scale ($M = 4.01$; *alpha* = .44) is the sum of eight case characteristics consistent with the real rape stereotype (e.g., victim and suspect were strangers).[32] See table 3.2 for a list of items in each scale and their frequency in the sample.

To reduce multicollinearity in models with multiple interactions, I mean-centered all three rape myth variables. *Precipitation* and *credibility issues* were skewed, so I included squared terms to assess their non-linear relationships with the police response variables. In diagnostic models, *precipitation* and *credibility issues* had non-linear relationships with *unfound,* but not with *arrest*, so I only included squared terms in the models assessing the unfounding decision.

Victim race was categorized as *White victim* (reference)*, Black victim*, or *Latina*

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[32] St. George and Spohn's (2018) "real rape consistency" scale contained seven items: victim and suspect were strangers, no verbal resistance, no physical resistance, assault occurred outside, victim reported promptly, no risky behavior, and no credibility issues. In the current study, I added, perpetrator used force, as a real rape characteristic.

victim. To assess if victim race conditioned the effects of the rape myth variables on police decisions, I assessed the effects of interactions between *Black* or *Latina victim* and the three rape myth factors. I examined six interactions: *Black-Precipitation, Black-Credibility, Black-Real rape, Latina-Precipitation, Latina-Credibility, and Latina-Real rape*. Additionally, because *precipitation* and *credibility issues* had non-linear relationships with *unfound*, I explored the effects of the interactions between victim race and the squared terms of *precipitation* and *credibility issues*. Interactions with these squared terms were not statistically significant in the interaction models and created multicollinearity issues, so they were dropped from the final models.

I controlled for victim age and suspect age and race.[33],[34] I also controlled for legally relevant factors that influence criminal justice responses to sexual assault reports. E*vidence strength* (*M* = 3.05, *alpha* = .72) was the sum of 15 types of evidence, such as eyewitness and photographs of injuries. I also controlled for penetration, if the report included an identified suspect, and if the victim was willing to cooperate with the investigation after the initial report. Finally, because LAPD and LASD had different procedures for responding to cases, I controlled for the investigating agency.[35]

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[33] *Victim age* and *suspect age* were skewed, so I included squared terms in diagnostic models to check for nonlinear relationships. Only *suspect age* had a non-linear relationship with *unfound*, so this squared term was retained for analysis. Victim age-squared was dropped.

[34] Although studies on case processing decisions often find that the suspect's criminal history affects decisions, information about the suspect's past arrests, convictions, and incarcerations was not consistently recorded in the data, so I was unable to control for suspect criminal history in the analyses.

[35] LASD detectives investigated all types of crimes, while LAPD detectives only investigated sex offenses. Additionally, LASD used a bifurcated system where cases involving victims under 18 years old were assigned to the Special Victims Bureau.

Table 3.1

Sample Characteristics, Variables, and Coding Scheme

Variable	Coding scheme	Total Sample	White Victims	Black Victims	Latina Victims
		N (% of 726)	N (% of 190)	N (% of 163)	N (% of 373)
Dependent Variable					
Unfound	Yes = 1	116 (15.98)	30 (15.79)	29 (17.79)	57 (15.28)
Pre-arrest evaluation	Yes = 1	274 (37.74)	74 (38.95)	68 (41.72)	132 (35.39)
Arrest	Yes = 1	336 (46.28)	86 (45.26)	66 (40.49)	184 (49.33)
Independent Variables					
Precipitation	12 items summed	1.02 (1.37)	1.36 (1.54)	1.02 (1.29)	.83 (1.28)
Credibility issues	9 items summed	.64 (.95)	.62 (.97)	.67 (1.04)	.64 (.90)
Real rape consistency	8 items summed	4.01 (1.62)	3.76 (1.63)	4.02 (1.59)	4.12 (1.62)
Victim Characteristics					
Race	Black = 1	163 (22.45)	-	-	-
	Latina =2	373 (51.38)	-	-	-
	White = reference	190 (26.17)	-	-	-
Age	age in years	25.21 (11.76)	26.57 (13.55)	24.42 (10.99)	24.86 (11.06)
Suspect Characteristics					
Race	Black = 1	206 (28.37)	36 (18.95)	137 (84.05)	33 (8.85)
	Latina = 2	396 (54.55)	70 (36.84)	16 (8.82)	310 (83.11)
	White = reference	124 (17.08)	106 (55.79)	10 (6.13)	30 (8.04)
Age	age in years	32.87 (14.88)	33.79 (15.36)	33.51 (16.71)	32.12 (13.75)
Case Characteristics					
Evidence strengthº	15 items summed	3.05 (2.55)	2.89 (2.54)	3.17 (2.61)	3.07 (2.54)
Penetration	Yes = 1	498 (68.60)	127 (66.84)	129 (79.14)	242 (64.88)
	Unknown = 2	40 (5.51)	11 (5.79)	7 (4.29)	22 (5.90)
	No = reference)	188 (25.90)	52 (27.37)	27 (16.56)	109 (29.22)
Suspect identified	Yes =1	660 (90.91)	173 (91.05)	140 (85.89)	347 (93.08)
Victim cooperated	Yes = 1	505 (69.56)	137 (72.11)	100 (61.35)	268 (71.85)
Agency	LAPD = 1	291 (40.08)	88 (46.32)	58 (35.58)	145 (38.87)
	LASD = reference	435 (59.92)	102 (53.68)	105 (64.42)	228 (61.13)

Table 3.2

Rape Myths and Evidence Scale Items and Frequency

	Items used in scale	N (% of 726)
Precipitation (alpha=.62)	Victim was walking alone at night=1	48 (6.61)
	Victim accepted a ride from a stranger=1	28 (3.86)
	Victim went to suspects home=1	111 (15.29)
	Victim invited suspect to her home=1	23 (3.17)
	Victim was alone in a bar=1	4 (.55)
	Victim was in an area where drugs are sold=1	17 (2.34)
	Victim was drinking=1	174 (23.97)
	Victim was using drugs=1	52 (7.16)
	Victim was drunk=1	128 (17.63)
	Victim was unconscious=1	79 (10.88)
	Victim engaged in consensual foreplay with suspect=1	52 (7.16)
	Victim was on a date or at a party with the suspect=1	23 (3.17)
Credibility issues (alpha=.43)	Victim has pattern of alcohol use=1	35 (4.82)
	Victim has pattern of drug use=1	41 (5.65)
	Victim had a disreputable job (e.g., stripper)=1	9 (1.24)
	Victim is a prostitute=1	18 (2.48)
	Victim has a criminal record=1	42 (5.79)
	Victim is a gang member=1	6 (.83)
	Victim had prior sexual relationship with suspect=1	156 (21.49)
	Victim had motive to lie=1	94 (12.95)
	Officer questioned victim's credibility=1	65 (8.95)
Real rape consistency (alpha=.44)	Suspect was a stranger=1	192 (26.45)
	The assault occurred outside=1	184 (25.34)
	Victim reported within one hour=1	178 (24.52)
	Victim resisted verbally=1	479 (65.98)
	Victim resisted physically=1	420 (57.85)
	Suspect used force=1	498 (68.60)
	There were no victim credibility issues=1	529 (72.87)
	There we no risky behaviors=1	428 (58.95)
Evidence strength (alpha=.70)	There is an eyewitness=1	104 (14.33)
	A witness corroborates the victim's testimony=1	113 (15.56)
	SART exam performed=1	317 (43.66)
	DNA matched suspect=1	24 (3.31)
	Genital injuries=1	164 (22.59)
	Photographs of injuries=1	231 (31.82)
	Injuries were visible at time of report=1	262 (36.09)
	Victim ID'd suspect in photo or line-up=1	160 (22.04)
	Suspect was interviewed by police=1	376 (51.79)
	Presence of fingerprints=1	13 (1.79)
	Presence of hair=1	62 (8.54)
	Presence of blood=1	21 (2.89)
	Presence of skin=1	23 (3.17)
	Presence of clothing/bedding=1	276 (38.02)
	Presence of semen=1	65 (8.95)

Analytic Framework

Before assessing my hypotheses in multivariate models, I explored the bivariate relationships between the three rape myth variables and police responses, the rape myth variables and victim race, and victim race and police responses. *Credibility issues* was statistically significantly related to the decision to unfound a report, and *precipitation* and *real rape consistency* were statistically significantly related to the decision to make an arrest (see t-test results in table 3.3). Additionally, *precipitation* ($F = 9.66$, $p<.001$) and *real rape consistency* ($F = 3.23$, $p < .05$), but not *credibility issues* ($F = .15$, $p = .86$), were statistically significantly related to *victim race*. Cases involving Hispanic victims had the fewest number of risky behaviors, followed by cases involving Black victims, and then White victims. Cases involving Latina victims had the largest number of real rape factors, followed by cases involving White victims, and then Black victims. *Victim race,* however, was not statistically significantly related to the decision to *unfound* ($X^2 = .54$, $p = .76$) or *arrest* ($X^2 = 3.22$, $p = .20$). A similar proportion of cases resulted in unfounding and arrest for White, Black, and Latina victims. So, while victim race did not have a direct relationship with police decisions, victim race was associated with two of the three rape myth factors, and all three rape myth factors were related to police decisions.

Next, I explored these relationships using multivariate models. It is important to note that, while both *unfound* and *arrest* are binary outcomes, the second decision-point, to arrest or solicit a pre-arrest evaluation, depends on the outcome of the first, to found or unfound a report. I used binary logistic regression to predict the unfounding decision. Then, I estimated Heckman's bivariate probit to model the arrest decision, while

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controlling for selection effects of unfounding. To construct the selection model, I

identified five instrumental variables that were either theoretically relevant to the

unfounding decision (e.g., victim recanted), or correlated with the unfounding decision

(e.g., victim requested a female officer), but were not statistically significantly correlated

with the arrest decision. *Rho* was statistically significantly different from zero in all five

diagnostic models—base model and four interaction models—indicating that the

unobserved variances of unfound and arrest were correlated. So, in the final analyses I

used Heckman bivariate probit models to predict the arrest decision while controlling for

the selection effects of the unfounding decision. This study was exploratory, and the

sample size is small, so, I was more concerned with overlooking important effects of

victim race and rape myth factors (Type I error), than misidentifying null effects (Type II

error). Hence all tests for statistical significance are based on alpha at .10.

I estimated five models for each outcome variable. To test my first hypothesis

predicting that victim race would affect unfounding and arrest, I estimated a base model

for each outcome, assessing the direct effects of rape myth factors and victim race on

unfound (table 3.4) and *arrest* (table 3.5) while controlling for victim, suspect, and case

characteristics. Then, to test my next three hypotheses that rape myth factors would have

larger effects on unfounding and arrest for Black and Latina victims, I estimated four

additional models for each outcome, assessing how victim race moderated the effects of

each rape myth factor. The "Precipitation interactions" models included interactions

between victim race and precipitation. The "Credibility issues interactions" models

included interactions between victim race and credibility issues. The "Real rape

interactions" models included interactions between victim race and real rape consistency.

Table 3.3

Bivariate Relationships between Rape Myth Factors and Police Responses

	Unfounded (n=116)	Founded (n = 610)	Difference of means two-tailed t-tests across case outcome (*df* = 724)				Overall (n = 726)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M difference (SE)	95% CI: lower, upper	*t*	*p*	M (SD)
Precipitation	1.11 (1.23)	1.00 (1.40)	-.11 (.14)	-.39, .16	-.81	.42	94 (1.32)
Credibility issues	1.03 (1.13)	.57 (.90)	-.47 (.10)	-.65, -.28	-4.91	<.001	.68 (.97)
Real rape consistency	4.00 (1.67)	4.01 (1.61)	.01 (.16)	-.32, .33	.04	1.00	4.06 (1.56)
	Pre-arrest evaluation (n = 274)	Arrest (n = 336)	Difference of means two-tailed t-tests across case outcome (*df* = 608)				Overall (n = 610)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M difference (SE)	95% CI: lower, upper	*t*	*p*	M (SD)
Precipitation	1.24 (1.47)	.89 (1.33)	.25 (.11)	.03, .47	2.21	<.05	.91 (1.32)
Credibility issues	.62 (.94)	.53 (.86)	.09 (.07)	-.05, .23	1.23	.22	.57 (.90)
Real rape consistency	3.61 (1.56)	4.33 (1.59)	-.71 (.13)	-.97, -.46	-5.57	<.001	4.10 (1.56)

Note. Difference of means between pre-arrest evaluation and arrest includes only cases that were founded.

The "All interactions" models included all the interaction terms. The interaction models for unfound are displayed in table 3.6. The interaction models for arrest are displayed in table 3.7.

Results

Intersectionality theory suggests that stereotypes about women vary by race and ethnicity. In the current study, I argued that race- and ethnicity-specific gender stereotypes highlight certain rape myths, so that different rape myths affect sexual assault case processing for White, Black, and Latina victims. I hypothesized victim race would directly affect the likelihood of unfounding and arrest (H1). I also hypothesized that each of the rape myth factors would have larger effects on unfounding and arrest in cases involving Black and Latina victims, compared to White victims (H2-4). My hypotheses were only partially supported, as I describe below.

Hypothesis 1

I hypothesized that police would be less likely to unfound (H1a), and more likely to arrest (H1b) when the victim was White compared to Black or Latina. Results from the base models presented in tables 3.4 and 3.5 did not support this hypothesis. The effects of *Black victim* and *Latina victim* failed to reach statistical significance in either model. Police, therefore, were not more likely to unfound reports or make arrests in cases involving White victims, compared to cases involving Black or Latina victims.

The base models revealed other important findings. First, all three rape myth factors—*precipitation, credibility issues,* and *real rape consistency*—were statistically significantly associated with *unfound. Precipitation* and *credibility issues* were positively associated with the decision to unfound. Additionally, both *precipitation*^{2} and *credibility*

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issues[2] were statistically significantly and negatively associated with *unfound*, indicating nonlinear relationships between these two variables and the likelihood of unfounding the report. So as precipitation and credibility issues increased, the likelihood of unfounding also increased, but these effects diminished at higher levels of precipitation and credibility issues. *Real rape consistency* was also positively associated with *unfound*, indicating that as the number of real rape characteristics in the case increased, the likelihood of unfounding increased. *Credibility issues* and *real rape consistency,* but not *precipitation,* were also statistically significantly and positively associated with *arrest*.

Second, the control variables had varied effects across the two decision points. E*vidence strength, penetration*, and *suspect identified,* but not *victim cooperated*, were statistically significantly associated with the likelihood of unfounding, while *evidence strength, penetration,* and *victim cooperation* were statistically significantly associated with the likelihood of arrest. Specifically, as the amount of evidence increased, the likelihood of unfounding the case decreased and the likelihood of arresting the suspect increased. In addition, police were more likely to unfound the report when penetration occurred or was unknown; they were less likely to arrest when penetration occurred. Moreover, when the suspect was identified, police were more likely to unfound, and when the victim cooperated, they were more likely arrest a suspect.

Other factors also influenced police decisions, including *agency*, and *suspect age* and *race*. LAPD detectives were more likely to unfound reported sexual assaults than LASD detectives, but they were also more likely to arrest suspects. Additionally, as suspects got older, police were less likely to unfound the report, and this relationship was

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Table 3.4

Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Unfounding: Base Model (N = 726)

Variable	Unfounding		
	B	SE	OR
Precipitation	.463***	.15	1.59
Precipitation^2	-.191***	.07	.83
Credibility issues	.697***	.21	2.01
Credibility issues^2	-.152*	.08	.86
Real rape consistency	.205**	.09	1.23
Black victim	.134	.42	
Latina victim	.201	.33	
Victim age	-.001	.01	
Black suspect	.151	.45	
Latino suspect	.198	.39	
Suspect age	-.020	.01	
Suspect age^2	.001**	.00	1.00
Evidence strength	-.297***	.06	.74
Penetration occurred	.920***	.35	2.51
Penetration unknown	1.893***	.61	6.64
Suspect identified	-1.906***	.39	.15
Victim cooperated	.281	.26	1.32
LAPD	2.280***	.30	9.78
Constant	-1.528***	.59	.22
Log Likelihood	-229.938		
X^2	178.010***		
Pseudo R^2	27.90%		

Note. *p≤.10; **p≤.05; ***p≤.01. Precipitation, credibility issues, real rape consistency, victim age, and suspect age are mean-centered.

Table 3.5

Heckman Bivariate Probit Predicting the Likelihood of Arrest: Base Model (N = 726)

Variable	Arrest	
	B	SE
Precipitation	-.049	.05
Credibility issues	.145**	.06
Real rape consistency	.172***	.04
Black victim	.246	.21
Latina victim	.206	.16
Victim age	-.007	.01
Black suspect	-.457**	.22
Latino suspect	-.389**	.18
Suspect age	.000	.00
Evidence strength	.141***	.03
Penetration occurred	-.380***	.14
Penetration unknown	-.356	.30
Victim cooperated	1.165***	.13
LAPD	.522***	.12
Constant	-.707***	.22
Rho	-1.00	.00
X^2 test Rho > 0	17.36***	
Censored observations	115	
Wald X^2	151.27***	
Log Likelihood	-492.09	

Note. *p≤.10; **p≤.05; ***p≤.01. Precipitation, credibility issues, real rape consistency, victim age, and suspect age are mean-centered. See appendix F for effects of selection model.

non-linear. Finally, police were less likely to make arrests in cases involving Black and

Latino suspects, compared to White suspects.

Overall, the results that emerged from the base models reveal that police decisions are influenced by a variety of legal and extralegal factors. Additionally, while some factors influenced both decisions, others influenced only one decision point, indicating that police consider somewhat different criteria for assessing the veracity of a report and the presence of probable cause. Furthermore, some of these effects were counterintuitive. Conceptually, greater consistency with the real rape stereotype should contribute to the perception that the report is more serious and the victim more credible, so the likelihood of unfounding the case should decrease. Likewise, more credibility issues should be associated with a lower likelihood of arresting a suspect. I discuss these unexpected findings in the discussion. Most importantly for the current study, victim race was not directly related to the decisions to unfound a report or arrest a suspect, so my first hypothesis was not supported.

Hypotheses 2 and 3

Next, my hypotheses that *different rape myth-related factors would affect police decisions in cases involving White, Black, and Latina victims* were partially supported. Examining the interactions between victim race and the rape myth variables in tables 3.6 and 3.7 revealed that *Latina victim* did not moderate the effects of *precipitation, credibility issues*, or *real rape consistency* on either police decision. *Black victim*, however, moderated the effects of all three rape myth factors on *unfound*. The predicted probabilities of *unfound*, based on the "All Interactions" model, displayed in figures 3.1-3.3, reveal complex and unique relationships between the rape myth factors and *unfound* when the victim was Black. As the number of risky behaviors increased, the likelihood of unfounding increased, and this effect was amplified for Black victims. While the

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predicted probability of unfounding peaked around the mean for White victims and around one standard deviation above the mean for Latina victims, the predicted probability for Black victims was higher across all levels of precipitation, peaking around two standard deviations above the mean (figure 3.1). Similarly, as the number of credibility issues increased, the likelihood of unfounding increased, and this effect was amplified for Black victims (figure 3.2). Finally, *real rape consistency* increased the likelihood of unfounding, but only when the victim was Black (figure 3.3).

Black victim* also moderated the effect of *precipitation* on the arrest decision. Looking at the "Precipitation interactions" model, more precipitation increased the likelihood of arrest, but only when the victim was Black. The "All interactions" model likewise shows that more precipitation increased the likelihood arrest for Black victims. Additionally, the direct effect of precipitation was statistically significant in the "All interactions" model, with more precipitation *decreasing* the likelihood of arrest. Figure 3.4 displays the predicted probabilities of arrest across levels of precipitation from the "All interactions" model and helps to clarify this effect. More precipitation decreased the likelihood of arrest for White and Latina victims; for Black victims, however, more precipitation increased the likelihood of arrest. No other interaction terms reached statistical significance in the arrest models. These non-significant effects are displayed in figures 3.5 (credibility issues) and 3.6 (real rape consistency).

Overall, results from the interaction model partially support the second hypothesis, that the effects of rape myth factors would be amplified in cases involving

Table 3.6

Logistic Regression Models of Effects Predicting the Likelihood of Unfounding: Interaction Models (N=726)

Variable	Precipitation interactions		Credibility issues interactions		Real rape consistency interactions		All interactions	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Interactions								
Black-Precipitation	.602**	.28					.930***	.33
Latina- Precipitation	.354	.25					.426	.27
Black-Credibility			.387	.31			.573*	.34
Latina- Credibility			-.136	.27			-.101	.29
Black-Real rape					.266	.22	.746***	.27
Latina-Real rape					-.015	.18	.125	.21
Main effects								
Precipitation	.163	.22	.473***	.15	.472***	.15	.108	.24
Precipitation^2	-.201***	.07	-.209***	.07	-.193***	.07	-.240***	.08
Credibility issues	.719***	.21	.722***	.28	.699***	.21	.715**	.29
Credibility issues^2	-.167**	.08	-.189**	.08	-.151*	.08	-.219**	.09
Real rape consistency	.216**	.09	.207**	.09	.153	.16	.010	.17
Black Victim	-.034	.42	-.009	.44	.151	.42	-.284	.47
Latina Victim	.130	.33	.212	.34	.215	.33	.148	.34
Constant	-1.480**	.59	-1.424**	.60	-1.508**	.60	-1.345**	.62
Log Likelihood	-227.46		-228.05		-228.80		-221.41	
LR X^2	182.95***		181.77***		180.28***		195.04***	
Pseudo R^2	.29		.29		.28		.31	

Note. *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01. The effects of control variables were not statistically significantly or substantively different from the base model in table 3.4, so results are not shown here. See appendix G for effects of control variables.

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Table 3.7

Heckman's Bivariate Probit Models Predicting the Likelihood of Arrest: Interaction Models (N=726)

Variable	Precipitation interactions		Credibility issues interactions		Real rape consistency interactions		All interactions	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Interactions								
Black-Precipitation	.282**	.12					.284**	.13
Latina-Precipitation	.003	.09					.067	.10
Black-Credibility			.059	.16			-.042	.16
Latina-Credibility			-.125	.14			-.110	.15
Black-Real rape					-.107	.10	-.014	.12
Latina-Real rape					.111	.09	.128	.10
Main effects								
Precipitation	-.101	.07	-.048	.05	-.052	.05	-.129*	.08
Credibility issues	.129**	.06	.186	.12	.126*	.06	.174	.12
Real rape consistency	.180***	.04	.175***	.04	.141**	.07	.121	.08
Black Victim	.224	.21	.246	.21	.234	.21	.192	.21
Latina Victim	.183	.16	.195	.16	.213	.16	.171	.16
Constant	-.721***	.22	-.723***	.22	-.755***	.22	-.782***	.23
Rho	-1.000	.00	-1.000	.00	-1.000	.00	-1.000	.00
X^2 test Rho > 0	17.69***		17.13***		16.33***		15.85***	
Censored observations	115		115		115		115	
Wald X^2	151.85***		147.52***		147.15***		151.17***	
Log Likelihood	-487.93		-489.44		-488.40		-481.83	

Note. *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01. The effects of control variables were not statistically significantly or substantively different from the base model in table 3.5, so results are not shown here. See appendix H for effects of control variables and selection model.

Figure 3.1

Predicted Probabilities of Unfounding across Levels of Precipitation
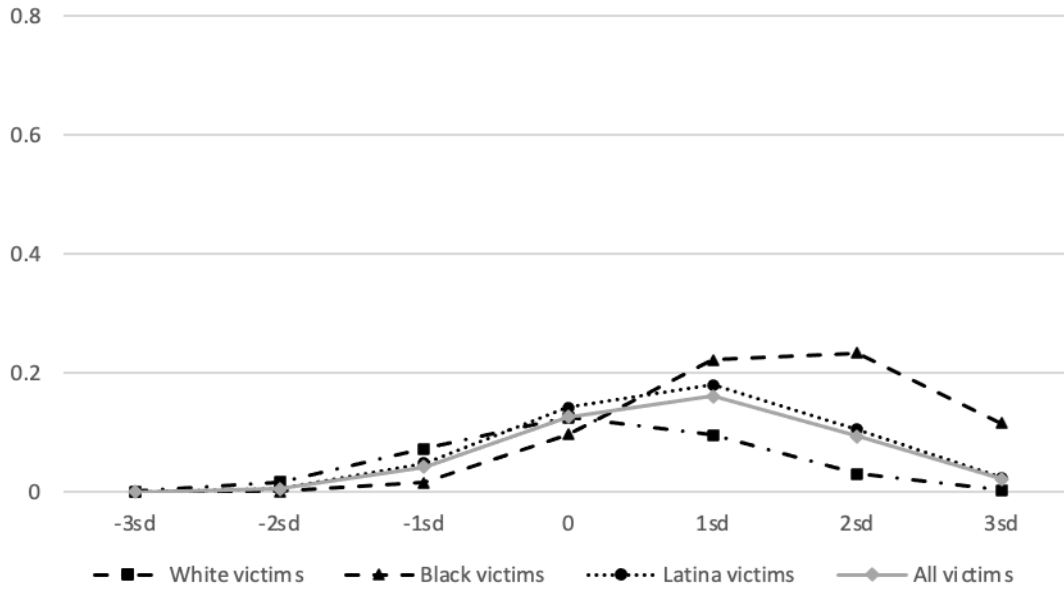
Figure 3.2

Predicted Probabilities of Unfounding across Levels of Credibility Issues
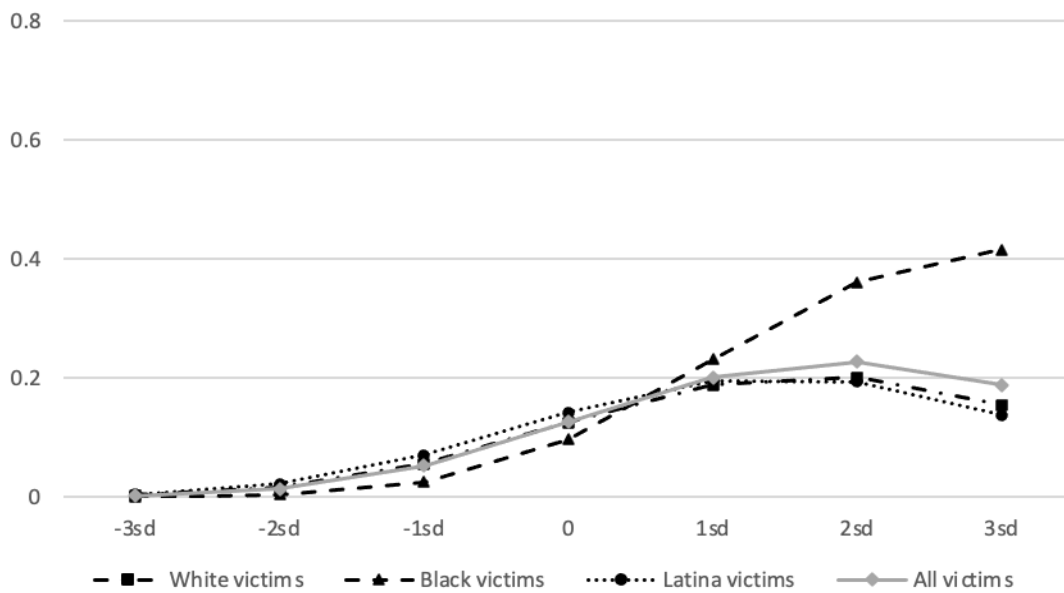
Figure 3.3

Predicted Probabilities of Unfounding across Levels of Real Rape Consistency
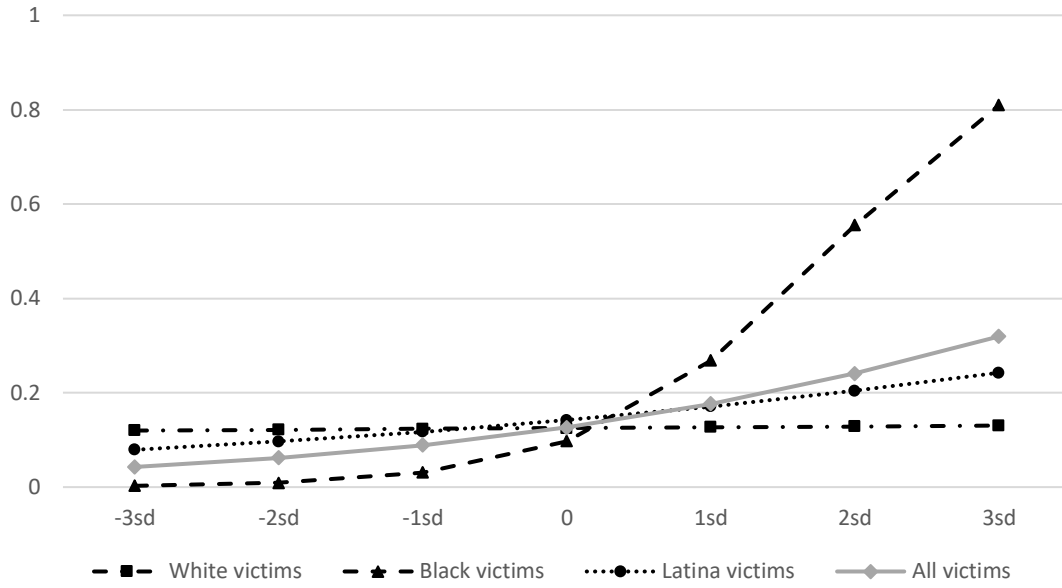
Figure 3.4

Predicted Probabilities of Arrest across Levels of Precipitation
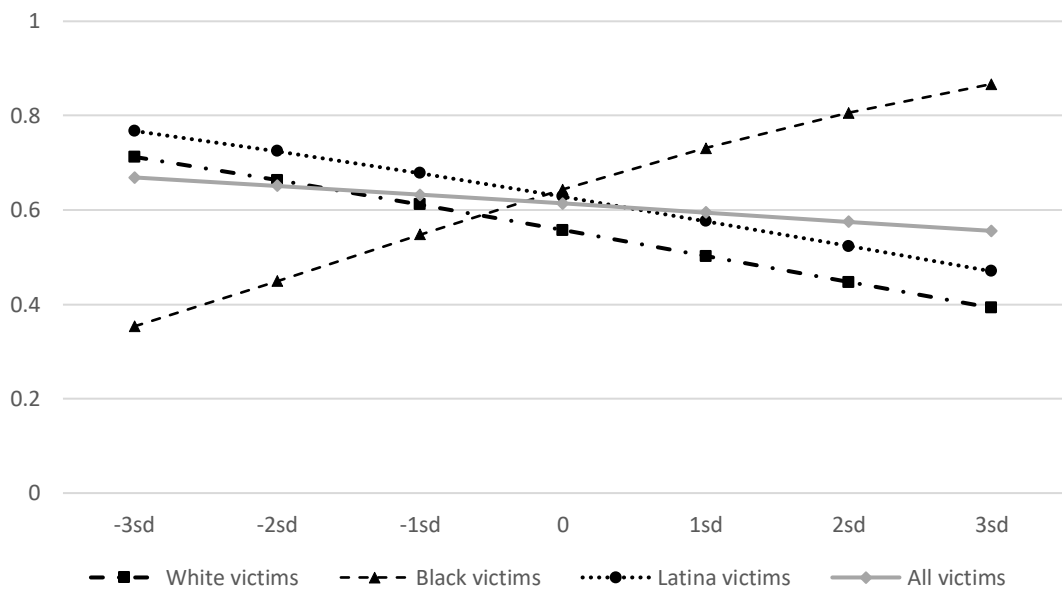
Figure 3.5

Predicted Probabilities of Arrest across Levels of Credibility Issues
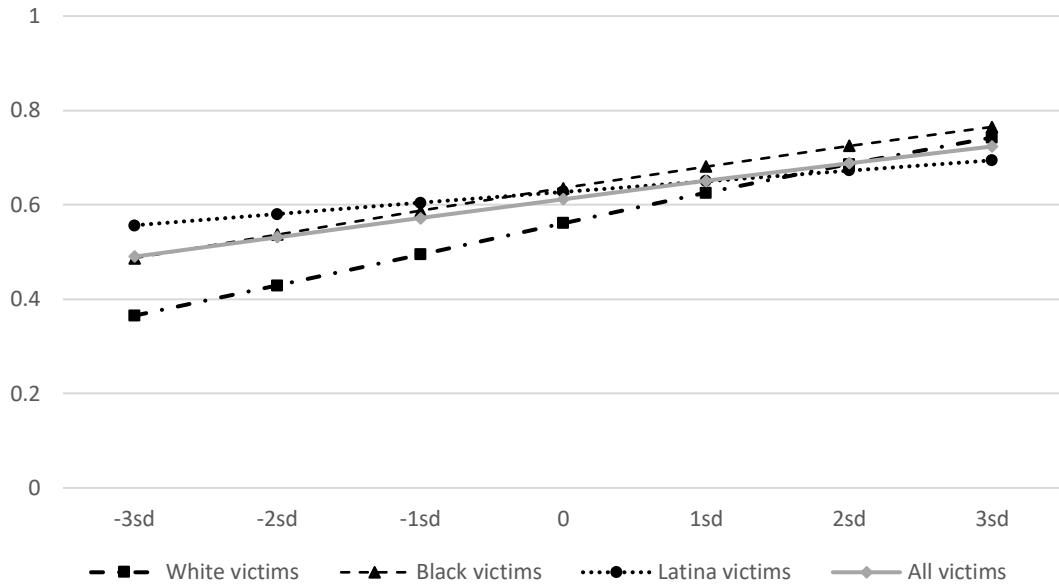
Figure 3.6

Predicted Probabilities of Arrest across Levels of Real Rape Consistency
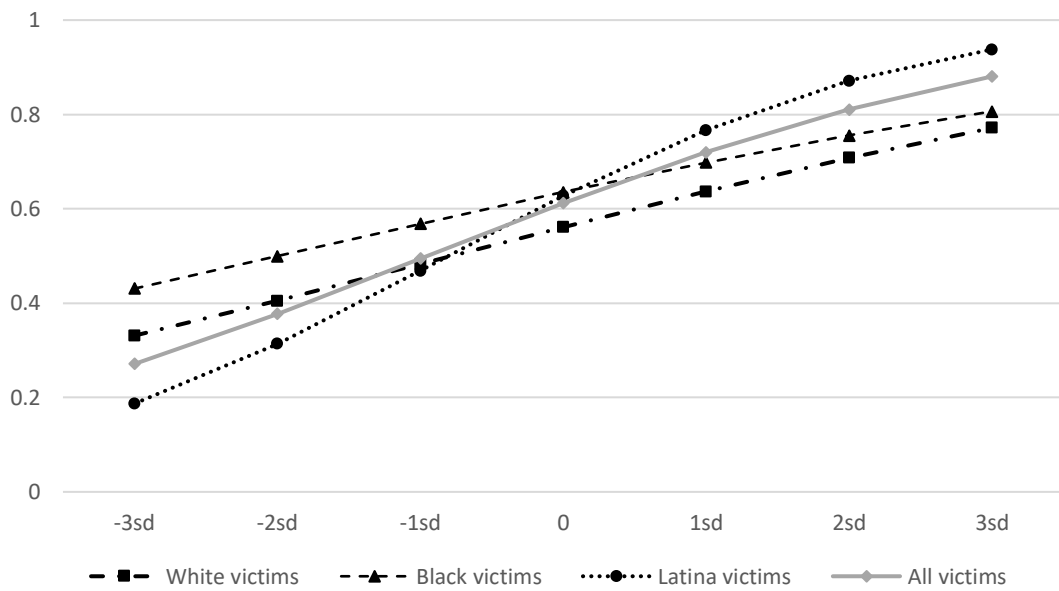
Black victims. *Black victim* amplified the effects of all three rape myth factors on the decision to unfound; Black victim also amplified the effect of precipitation on the decision to arrest. The third hypothesis, that the effects of rape myth factors would also be amplified in cases involving Latina victims, was not supported. None of the interactions with *Latina victim* were statistically significantly associated with either decision. Furthermore, though hypothesis 2 was supported the interactions between *Black victim* and *real rape consistency* on unfounding and *Black victim* and *precipitation* on arrest revealed counterintuitive effects. Rape myth theory suggests that as consistency with the real rape stereotype increases, unfounding should decrease, because the rape is perceived as more real or serious. Likewise, as victims engage in more behaviors that could be perceived as risky, the likelihood of arrest should decrease, because victims are perceived as more responsible for the assault. The counterintuitive effects, which only occur in cases involving Black women, suggest that police assess and interpret these rape myth factors differently for Black women compared to White or Latina women. Below, I discuss the implications of these findings.

Discussion

Researchers have shown that continued and widespread endorsement of rape myths by criminal justice decision-makers and the public contributes to sexual assault case attrition (Dinos et al., 2014; Estrich, 1987; Orenstein, 2007; St. George & Spohn, 2018). Rape myths affect how people respond to sexual violence, including their decisions to report, arrest, file charges, and convict, so that only cases involving the "genuine" victims of "real" rape enter the criminal legal system and are successfully adjudicated (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Dinos *et al.*, 2014; Heath *et al.*, 2013; Morabito et

al., 2019; Spohn et al., 2001; St. George & Spohn, 2018). The current study addresses what scholarship on rape myths has largely overlooked: that rape myths are shaped by gender stereotypes that are inherently entangled with racial stereotypes. Consistent with the expectations proposed by intersectional thinking, I predicted that rape myths would have race and ethnicity-specific effects on police decisions in sexual assault cases. I argued that this process is one way that criminal justice responses to sexual violence perpetuate not just gender inequality, but also racial inequality. The findings described above partially support these expectations, and they indicate a need to examine race-specific effects of rape myth-related factors on case processing decisions.

The Racialized Effects of Rape Myths on Police Decisions

Importantly, my hypothesis that police would be less likely to unfound the report and more likely to make arrests in cases involving White victims was not supported. Victim race was not directly associated with either of the police decisions examined. Prior research on the direct effects of victim race on police responses to sexual assault cases reveals mixed findings. For example, some scholars have found that the victim-suspect racial dyad influences the decision to arrest suspects in ways that disadvantage Black victims (O'Neal et al., 2019; Stacey et al., 2017) and Latina victims (O'Neal et al., 2019). Others have found that neither victim race nor the victim-suspect racial dyad affect the decision to unfound or arrest after controlling for other case characteristics, like victim-suspect relationship (Bouffard, 2000; Briggs & Opsal, 2012; Tasca et al., 2013; Tellis & Spohn, 2008; Ylang & Holfreter, 2020). These mixed findings highlight the need to explore other, nuanced ways through which victim race may influence police

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responses to sexual assault reports. Intersectional frameworks are particularly useful for exploring these nuances because they shift attention away from outcomes toward processes and experiences (Bauer, 2014; Bauer & Scheim, 2019; Hancock, 2019). Crenshaw (1992, p. 1468), for example, emphasized that race "shapes the kinds of gender subordination Black women experience." In sexual assault cases, race may not determine *if* women receive justice, but *how* that justice is achieved, including how police treat victims and the extralegal factors they use to assess their reports. This intersectional thinking guided my second and third hypotheses, that victim race would influence which rape myth factors police use to assess victim credibility and responsibility.

Results mostly supported my second hypothesis that the effects of rape myth factors on police decisions would be greater in cases involving Black victims, compared to White victims. Specifically, four of the six interactions with *Black victim* were statistically significant, and showed larger effects for Black victims than White victims. My third hypothesis that the effects of rape myth factors would also be greater for Latina victims compared to White victims was not supported. The interactions displayed in figures 3.1-3.6 revealed complex effects. The effects of all three rape myth factors on the likelihood of unfounding, and the effect of precipitation on the likelihood of arrest, were amplified when the victim was Black. Furthermore, models revealed several counterintuitive relationships between rape myth factors and police decisions; some of these counterintuitive effects were unique to cases involving Black victims. Taken together, findings suggest that how police assess extralegal criteria like rape myths, and the influence of rape myths on their decision-making, varies somewhat by victim race.

Specifically, precipitation and credibility issues had stronger relationships with the unfounding decision when the victim was Black, compared to White. In other words, the influence of these factors on police assessments of reports as false or baseless was amplified when the victim was Black. Stereotypes of the hypersexual or promiscuous Jezebel (Crockett, 2013; Donovan, 2007; Donovan & Williams, 2002; Hamid, 2020) may draw attention to Black women's risky behavior; or police may interpret Black women's behavior as more provocative and intentional, resulting in a perception that they could have avoided the incident, provoked the assault, or even consented. Similarly, stereotypes like the Welfare Queen, which frame Black women as deceitful and always trying to take advantage of State services (Roberts, 1997), may draw attention to Black women's credibility issues, or heighten skepticism in their reports. Stereotypes about Black women's promiscuity and deviousness, therefore, may amplify concern with victim's precipitation and credibility in cases involving Black victims, relative to White victims. Indeed, some scholars have found that Black victims are perceived more negatively than White victims in hypothetical rape cases (Willis, 1992; Foley et al., 1995). Foley and colleagues (1995), for example, found that observers were less likely to agree the hypothetical scenario was a crime when the victim was Black compared to White. Additionally, Donovan (2007) found that participants perceived hypothetical Black victims as more promiscuous than hypothetical White victims. Furthermore, Powell and colleagues (2017) found that defense attorneys drew on stereotypes associating Black women with hypersexuality to impeach the credibility of Black victims, but not White victims, testifying about child sexual abuse. Police may likewise draw on these

stereotypes to assess credibility and chargeability. Police may be less likely to perceive

Black women as "genuine" and credible victims, especially if they behaved in ways that

could be perceived as risky before the assault or if they have credibility issues, and these

perceptions may in turn increase the likelihood of unfounding Black victims' reports.

Additionally, real rape consistency only affected the decision to unfound in cases

involving Black victims, and in an unexpected way. Counterintuitively, police were more

likely to unfound cases with more real rape factors, but only when the victim was Black.

This effect is inconsistent with rape myth theory, therefore difficult to explain. Perhaps

police are so suspicious of Black victims that they perceive reports consistent with the

"real rape" stereotype as particularly likely to be fabricated. O'Neal and colleagues

(2014) found that women, particularly teenagers, sometimes fabricated a stranger rape to

provide an alibi or to avoid getting in trouble, such as for missing curfew or cheating on a

partner. Perhaps when victims are Black, police are particularly suspicious of these "real

rape" narratives. Alternatively, rape myth factors may interact with each other in complex

ways. The same risky behaviors (e.g., being intoxicated) and credibility issues (e.g.,

engagement in sex work) that contribute to the decision to unfound may also increase

victims' risk of assaults consistent with "real rape"—assaults by strangers, on the street,

without resistance.

There also was a unique and counterintuitive effect of precipitation on arrest in

cases involving Black victims. As figure 3.4 shows, more precipitation *decreased* the

likelihood of arrest in cases involving White and Latinx victims. However, more

precipitation *increased* the likelihood of arrest for Black victims. Like the effect of real

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rape consistency, this effect is inconsistent with rape myth theory and prior research suggesting that precipitation decreases the likelihood of arrest (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Morabito et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2012, 2014; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017). Perhaps precipitation is most relevant at the unfounding stage, particularly for Black women. If police are able to look past Black victim's precipitation and see their reports as valid and justified, they may be able to overcome their precipitation at the arrest stage.

Furthermore, there may be cultural changes in how police understand victim precipitation. Specifically, St. George (2021) has suggested that the relationship between victim intoxication and perceived victim and perpetrator responsibility may be changing. Much of the early rape myth literature framed victim intoxication as an indicator of victim irresponsibility or sexual interest (Abbey & Harnish, 1995; Gravelin et al., 2018; Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Schuller & Stuart, 200; Sleath & Bull, 2017). More recently, a focus on "date rape" drugs and the legal recognition of incapacitation rape, may have shifted observers' understanding of victim intoxication as vulnerability to would-be perpetrators (Girard & Senn, 2008; Hockett et al., 2015; Littleton et al., 2009; Lorenz & Ullman, 2016). In sexual assault cases, once police determine that a report is valid, they may perceive a cumulation of "risky" behaviors as evidence that the suspect exploited the victims' vulnerability to danger. Furthermore, given Black women are usually raped by Black men (Koch, 1995), police may draw on stereotypes of Black men's criminality to assess culpability. That is, police may perceive Black men who rape intoxicated or vulnerable women as particularly dangerous and culpable, while White men who rape intoxicated (White) women may be perceived as acting accidentally.

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Findings from Chapter 2 support this assertion, though more work is needed to test these speculations.

While the effects of rape myth factors were amplified in cases involving Black victims, rape myth factors had the same effects on cases involving Latina victims as White victims. These null findings are surprising, given the findings in Chapter 2. Additionally, stereotypes about Latina women, like the Marianismo (Ahrens *et al.*, 2010; Arrizón, 2008; Bracero, 1998) and the (immigrant) nanny/housekeeper (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Gilens, 1996; Infante et al. 2019; Rodriguez, 2018) that frame Latina women as hyperfeminine and exploitive, overlap more with stereotypes about Black women (the Jezebel and Welfare Queen, respectively) than stereotypes about White women. I expected therefore, that the negative impacts of rape myths on police decisions would be amplified for Latina victims, like they were for Black victims. Perhaps stereotypes about Black women are more accessible than stereotypes about Latina women, resulting in quicker assessments of credibility and chargeability in cases involving Black victims. That is, the "perceptual shorthand" (Steffensmeier et al., 1998) that guides police decision-making in sexual assault cases may incorporate stereotypes about Black women, but not White or Latina women, resulting in more "efficient" assessments and decisions when victims are Black.

These findings and my interpretations deserve further investigation, both in qualitative and quantitative research. Nevertheless, they provide some evidence that the effects of rape myth factors on police decisions were unique and amplified in cases involving Black victims, which suggests that police may assess victim credibility

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differently when the victim is Black. Additionally, rape myth factors seem to be particularly damaging for Black women at the point of unfounding. While cases involving White and Latina victims may be dismissed at later stages in the case processing pipeline, unfounding may be the critical hurdle that Black victims must overcome to get justice, particularly victims who have credibility issues or engaged in behavior that could be perceived as risky.

Implications

Taken as a whole, the results from this study show that the effect of victim race on police responses to sexual assault is more nuanced than previously shown. This study, therefore, demonstrates the importance of investigating the complex ways that race and gender jointly influence criminal justice responses to sexual assault reports. Furthermore, although these findings do not inherently indicate racial *discrimination*—in multivariate analyses there was no statistically significant difference across White, Black, and Latina victims in the likelihood of different case outcomes—they do indicate that the criminal legal system responds somewhat differently to victims of sexual violence depending on their race. That is, the extralegal *criteria* that police used to assess whether or not reports were false and suspects chargeable, and the impact of this criteria, were different when the victim was Black compared to White. These differences call into question how fair, equal, and just the criminal legal system really is when responding to sexual violence.

In addition, the findings from this study have important implications for policies implemented to improve criminal justice responses to sexual violence and sexual violence victims. Many reform efforts, like rape shield laws, are spearheaded by feminist

scholars and are attuned to manifestations of gender biases, but are colorblind (Jamel, 2010; Jordan, 2002; Lonsway & Welch, 1999; Spohn & Horney, 1992; Spohn & St. George, 2020). Race-neutral attempts to improve responses to sexual violence may be ineffective if the extralegal factors influencing police decisions in sexual assault cases vary by victim race. For example, specialized sexual assault training among police officers often incorporates discussions of victim blaming attitudes associated with (colorblind) rape myths (Darwinkel et al., 2013; Lonsway & Welch, 1999; Sleath & Bull, 2012). Scholars have found that specialized training does not improve responses to sexual assault victims or reduce attrition (Beichner & Spohn, 2005; Jordan, 2002; Sleath & Bull, 2012). Addressing rape myths among officers may be ineffective precisely because such training does not account for the racialized effects of rape myths, or the way responses to sexual violence simultaneously perpetuate gender *and* racial inequality. Attempts to address gender biases in the form of rape myths will not fix or prevent bias if the race-specific manifestations of these myths are not also addressed. In the future, sexual assault response training that includes debunking rape myths should also address how racialized gender stereotypes inform rape myths and condition their effects.

It is important to note that the potential impact of criminal justice reforms surrounding sexual violence will be attenuated by the meso- and macro-level mechanisms of discrimination that make women of color more likely to experience sexual violence and less likely or able solicit criminal justice interventions. To the extent that Black (and Latina, and poor, and sick, etc.) women's marginalized positions in society are perpetuated by social institutions and hegemonic norms, then choices that put women in

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positions of sexual vulnerability are equivalent to structural rape (Hine, 1989). For example, social arrangements that limit multiply marginalized women's viable alternatives to staying in abusive relationships or engaging in sex work for survival functionally coerce them into unwanted sex. Given only 23% of sexual assaults were reported to police in 2020 (Morgan & Truman, 2021), assessing and addressing racialized gender discrimination must start with reorganizing structural arrangements that place women, particularly women of color, at risk and without recourse.

Even when victims report, seemingly neutral organizational policies and practical constrains, like limited investigative resources and measures of job performance (e.g., conviction rates), structure criminal justice responses to sexual violence in ways that systematically reproduce gender and racial inequality, even if they do not intend to (Comack, & Balfour, 2004; Eitle, 2005; St. George et al., 2022). By restricting resources to chargeable and winnable cases—narrowly defined in practice as those involving "real" rapes and "genuine" victims—the criminal legal system denies justice to women who violate traditional gender roles (Estrich, 1987; St. George & Spohn, 2018). The findings in this study revealed that the consequences of gender role violations are greatest for Black women. According to the proposed mechanism, racialized gender stereotypes defining Black women as hypersexual, promiscuous, and deviant highlighted the risky behaviors and credibility issues present in cases involving Black victims, resulting in assessments of Black victims as not "genuine," and their rapes as not "real." This resulted in a greater likelihood of unfounding their reports. So, the process that generates gender inequality also generates racial inequality. Attempts to combat the influence of racialized

gender stereotypes and racialized rape myths on police responses to sexual violence will have little impact on gender or racial disparity if these structural barriers are not also addressed. Therefore, while it is helpful to identify how intersectional representations of White, Black and Latina women affect sexual assault case processing, a radical solution to sexual violence, and the gender and racial (and other forms) of inequality it produces, will require addressing the political and structural intersectionality of affected individuals as well as.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with all research, this study has limitations. First, given recent public and political attention surrounding both sexual violence and racial disparities in policing, the data used for this study may be limited. Future researchers should collect more recent data and data from other jurisdictions on sexual assault case processing that include the detailed victim and incident characteristics necessary to construct comprehensive rape myth variables. Second, the sample lacked sufficient numbers of Native, Asian, and other race victims, and male victims, to examine how racial and gender stereotypes unique to these groups condition the effects of rape myth factors on case processing decisions.

Third, I could not directly assess the mechanism through which racialized gender stereotypes influenced police decisions. I proposed that racialized gender stereotypes generate race-specific rape myths, and these myths in turn influence police assessments of victim credibility and responsibility, and suspect chargeability. However, the quantitative nature of the data and its source in case files made the operationalization of these concepts imperfect. I operationalized chargeability, or certainty about the case, as

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the decision to arrest, but this may not comprehensively represent how police think about chargeability. I also used victim race-rape myth interactions to assess if rape myths have race-specific effects on credibility and chargeability assessments. But racialized gender stereotypes should translate into race-specific *rape myths*, not just race-specific *effects* of (colorblind) rape myths. Future research could benefit from qualitatively examining how different victim and incident characteristics associated with racialized gender stereotypes and rape myths affect police assessments of victim credibility and case viability, and especially how such assessments vary across victim race/ethnicity. Additionally, rape myth scholars should address the colorblindness in their work; they should identify race-specific rape myths and develop race-specific RMA scales.

Finally, as this is the first study to identify race-specific effects of extralegal rape myth factors on police responses to sexual assault, the proposed reasons for these effects are speculative. More work is needed to untangle how race-specific gender stereotypes influence police assessments of victim credibility and responsibility and case chargeability, and why. Future research could benefit from in depth qualitative interviews with police, as well as other criminal justice actors like prosecutors and jurors, to determine how rape myths influence their decisions in race-specific ways, and quantitative studies are needed to replicate findings. Researchers should also explore if victim race and ethnicity moderate the effects of legally relevant factors on case processing decision. Perhaps the role of evidence in overcoming credibility issues, or the importance of victim cooperation, vary depending on the victim's race and associated racialized gender stereotypes. Furthermore, victim race may moderate how rape myths

influence other decisions and assessments, such as the victim's decision to report or cooperate as the case moves forward, and police perceptions of victims' motives to lie or reasons for noncooperation.

In conclusion, the current study demonstrates the importance of attending to intersectionality when examining criminal justice responses to gendered crimes. Importantly, my analyses were guided by the understanding that representations of race intersect with representations of gender, sexuality, and rape, and I was able to show that victim race influences police responses to sexual violence in complex ways. Specifically, I found that rape myths uniquely damage cases involving Black victims and do so early in the case processing pipeline. Notably, prior research assessing the direct effects of victim race (Bouffard, 2000; Briggs & Opsal, 2012; Tasca et al., 2013; Tellis & Spohn, 2008; Ylang & Holfreter, 2020) failed to identify such complex manifestations of disadvantage.

The current study also reveals how colorblind analyses can overlook sources and mechanisms of disparity. Likewise, colorblind remedies to gender discrimination will fail to address the unique forms of discrimination experienced by women of color (Armstrong et al., 2018). As Kimberlé Crenshaw artfully explained, "The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color" (1990, p. 1241). Future research on sexual assault case processing and racial disparities should continue to examine the indirect and nuanced ways that race affects the decisions of criminal justice actors. Only after research has revealed the nuanced ways that race and gender simultaneously influence responses

to sexual violence can we implement solutions that protect, rather than harm, the most

marginalized individuals.

CHAPTER 4

THE OVERLAP BETWEEN RAPE MYTHS AND DETECTIVES' FOCAL

CONCERNS

Chapter Summary

Increasing just responses to sexual assault requires understanding how police perceive sexual assault and which legal (e.g., evidence), extralegal (e.g., suspect characteristics), and practical (e.g., convictability) concerns influence their responses. Using data from interviews with 52 detectives, I qualitatively analyzed 611 comments responding to questions about case processing decisions (e.g., what it takes to arrest) to examine the factors detectives described as relevant to their assessments of allegations as legitimate, victims as credible, and cases as chargeable. Results revealed overlap between rape myths and legal, extralegal, and practical concerns. Comments referenced rape myths in relation to suspect culpability and dangerousness, evidence, victim cooperation, and prosecutors' decisions. Comments also revealed some detectives lacked knowledge of relevant legal statutes and case processing guidelines (e.g., unfound criteria). These results suggest that sexual assault case attrition stems from an orientation to prosecutors' charging criteria, rather than probable cause, and organizational factors, such as deprioritization of sex crimes investigations. I recommend that departments: incentivize sex crimes assignments; screen applicants for quality and bias; regularly train detectives on unfounding and probable cause criteria; adequately staff and equip sex crimes units with investigatory resources; and prioritize sex crimes investigations over non-violent crimes; and required detectives to make arrests when they have probable cause to do so.

Introduction

While law's concern is ostensibly with making judgements on legal matters (such as culpability, admissibility or reasonableness), there is more at work. Extracting the legally relevant facts of a case from the messiness of people's lives involves...making judgements on the legal subjects themselves, in terms not only of what they have done, but also of who they are.
—Elizabeth Comack and Gillian Blafour (2004, p. 9)

In 1990, Kerstetter suggested that prosecutors control the gateway to justice. Accordingly, scholars studying attrition in sexual assault cases primarily have focused on the decisions of prosecutors. Police, however, arguably contribute even more to sexual assault case attrition than prosecutors. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (2018a,b), police arrest suspects in only 14% sex offenses reported to them. Furthermore, the decisions to unfound reports, arrest suspects, and refer cases to prosecutors for charging determine which cases arrive on prosecutors' desks. Police investigative decisions—such as how they interview complainants or interrogate suspects or whether to conduct a pretext phone call—also likely influence prosecutors' case assessments and charging decisions. If prosecutors control the gateway to justice, police control the flow of traffic pressing against the gate.

Scholars studying police responses to sexual assault cases have shown that legal (e.g., evidence strength, victim cooperation) and extralegal (e.g., suspect race, victim risk-taking behavior) factors contribute to attrition. Importantly, extralegal factors associated with "rape myths"—false stereotypes about rape that blame victims and minimize harm (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994)—influence how police perceive sexual assault victims and classify their reports. Relying on rape myths to

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differentiate true or viable cases from false or difficult ones is a problem; it disadvantages female victims of crime and injects gender discrimination into criminal justice processes. It remains unclear, however, if police are aware of their reliance on extralegal factors, the relative weight they place on them compared to legal factors, and their justifications for doing so. Importantly, the role of rape myths in police decision-making may not stem from officers' implicit or explicit sexism. The purpose of the study was to elucidate this complexity. Using qualitative data obtained from interviews with sexual assault detectives in the Los Angeles Police Department (see Spohn & Tellis, 2014), I examined how detectives talked about rape cases and rape victims and categorized their focal concerns to identify how rape myths affect these perceptions. In doing so, I hope to improve our understanding of the concerns that guide police responses to sexual assault reports and to provide practical recommendations for improving these responses and reducing attrition.

Focal Concerns and Case Processing Decisions

Steffensmeier and colleagues (1998) proposed the focal concerns framework to explain racial disparities in sentencing outcomes. They suggested that judges consider defendants' culpability (e.g., degree of injury to the victim) and dangerousness (e.g., likelihood of reoffending), and weigh these against the practical concerns of administering punishment (e.g., availability of jail beds and defendants' ability "to do time,") when determining the appropriate sentence. As judges have limited time and information when making decisions, they often rely on criminal stereotypes (e.g., young Black males) to assess focal concerns. In this "perceptual shorthand," defendants'

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demographic characteristics become proxies for culpability, dangerousness, and practical concerns.

Scholars have applied the focal concerns framework to decision-making by other criminal justice actors, including prosecutors and police. For example, Spohn and colleagues (2001) argued that the focal concerns guiding prosecutors' charging decisions are similar, but not identical, to those that judges consider at sentencing. They suggested that prosecutors' concerns about the practical consequences of their decisions focused on the likelihood of conviction rather than the social costs of punishment. Prosecutors, then, have a downstream orientation to the decisions of actors (i.e., judges and jurors) farther down the case processing pipeline, and this downstream orientation "forces them to predict how the victim, the suspect, and the incident will be viewed and evaluated by the judge and the jury" (Frohmann, 1991; Spohn et al., 2001, p. 208). In making these convictability assessments, prosecutors, like judges, rely on perceptual shorthand (Frohmann, 1991; Spohn et al., 2001). As a result, prosecutors consider the legally relevant indicators of case seriousness and offender culpability and dangerousness, as well as the background, character, and behavior of the victim, the victim and offender relationship, and the victim's willingness to cooperate as the case moves forward.

Scholars have also used the focal concerns framework to explain police decisions to stop, use force, and perform various enforcement acts (Crow & Adrion, 2011; Epp et al., 2014; Ishor & Dabney, 2018). For example, scholars have found that decisions to stop or pull over and search suspects are influenced by stereotypes of the "symbolic assailant"—suspects who were young, Black, and male (Epp et al., 2014; Skolnick,

2011). Ishor and Dabney (2018) also suggested that police enforcement decisions are akin to judges' sentencing decisions; police in their study were influenced by suspect culpability and dangerousness, and by practical concerns, but these manifested in unique ways. Importantly, officers' practical concerns emphasized departmental factors, like how making an arrest would remove the officer from the street and so influence the safety and surveillance of their beat. Police, therefore, consider suspect culpability and dangerousness and practical concerns when making decisions, and they draw on criminal stereotypes related to suspects' demographic characteristics to inform these decisions.

Rape Myths and Police Decision-Making

Researchers applying the focal concerns framework in sex offense cases have shown that criminal justice officials' perceptions of culpability, dangerousness, and threat are influenced more by *rape myths* than by criminal stereotypes (LaFree, 1981; O'Neal et al., 2019; Tellis & Spohn, 2008). Rape myths are "false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" that: 1) deny the prevalence of rape; 2) minimize the harm of rape; and 3) blame victims for rape (Burt, 1980, p. 217; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Importantly, rape myths shift focus from perpetrators to victims, so the victim's character and behavior replace suspect characteristics as proxies for culpability and dangerousness.[36] "Victim credibility" myths, for example, suggest that women often lie about rape to cover up consensual but regrettable sex, to explain away a pregnancy or sexually transmitted

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[36] Many studies of sexual assault case processing do not even assess the effects of suspect characteristics on case processing decisions, focusing entirely on victim and case characteristics. Studies that do examine suspect characteristics often theorize their importance in relation to victim characteristics, such as associating suspect race with the "real rape" stereotype (O'Neal et al., 2019; Tellis & Spohn, 2008).

disease, or to exact revenge on an ex-intimate partner. They also suggest that individuals with moral character issues, such as engaging in sex work, chronic drug use, or criminal activities, are likely to lie. People who believe these myths may believe most rape reports are false; they may be skeptical of reports involving people who are acquaintances or current or former intimate partners and victims with character issues. "Victim precipitation" myths suggest that women who act and dress provocatively invite rape, as these behaviors may confuse men who interpret flirting, drinking, or skimpy clothing as signifying consent. Those who endorse this myth may perceive incidents involving people who know each other and victim and/or suspect intoxication as unfortunate misunderstandings. They may perceive the alleged suspects in these "he said-she said" incidents as less culpable or dangerous than the "sexual predators" who prey on strangers. Finally, the "real rape" myth suggests that the true rape allegations involve a stranger who uses force and a victim who resists, suffers injury, and reports immediately. Those who endorse this myth may perceive victim-suspect intimacy, a lack of force, resistance, or injury, and a delayed report as indicators that the report is false (Burt, 1980; Estrich, 1987; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Researchers assessing police decision-making in the United States have shown that rape myths manifest in various ways. First, studies using surveys and hypothetical scenarios have shown that police officers tend to be suspicious of rape victims and overestimate the prevalence of false reports (Ask, 2010; Page 2008). Additionally, RMA among officers is associated with victim blaming attitudes (Parratt & Pina, 2017), misperceptions about how victims respond to trauma (Franklin et al., 2020), and self-

reported preparedness to respond to sexual assault complaints (Garza & Franklin, 2021).

Second, qualitative studies of police interviews and case files illustrate how police draw on rape myths to explain case processing decisions. Using the same interview data used in the current study, O'Neal and Hayes found that sex crimes detectives described victims as "problematic" when they engaged in risk-taking behavior or sex work (2020a), and they were particularly skeptical of sexual assaults reported by teenagers (2020b). Similarly, Campbell and Fehler-Cabral (2018) linked victim blaming comments in case files to officers' refusals to submit sexual assault kits for forensic testing. Comments suggested that resources should not be wasted on testing the kits of prostitutes involved in deals gone bad, teenagers covering up misbehavior, or in acquaintance and intimate partner rapes where the suspect was already identified. Other scholars have shown that rape myths influence the criteria police use to differentiate between genuine and false reports (Shaw et al., 2017; Venema, 2016).

Finally, scholars examining police case processing decisions have shown that myth-related factors influence the likelihood of unfounding, arrest, and investigative decisions. For example, in their comprehensive study of police and prosecutors' decisions in Los Angeles, Spohn and Tellis (2014) found that police were less likely to arrest suspects when the victim had mental health issues (credibility) or used drugs or alcohol at the time of the assault (precipitation), but they were more likely to arrest suspects when the victim suffered injury ("real" rape). Other scholars have similarly found that factors associated with victim credibility (e.g., mental health issues), victim precipitation (e.g., victim intoxication), and "real" rape (e.g., stranger suspect, prompt report) influence the

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likelihood of unfounding reports, identifying and arresting suspects, and referring cases to prosecutors for charging (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Alderden & Ullman, 2012; LaFree, 1981; Kerstetter, 1990; Morabito et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2019; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; Tasca et al., 2013). [37]

Other Considerations in Police Decision-Making

Although extralegal rape myth factors clearly play a role, they are not the only factors that influence police responses to sexual assault. In addition to other extralegal factors like victim and suspect race (Epp et al., 2014; Kochel et al., 2011; Lapsey et al., 2021; O'Neal et al., 2019; Shaw & Lee, 2019; Skolnick, 2011; Smith et al., 1984; Stacey et al., 2017), legally relevant factors like evidence, offense seriousness, and victim cooperation also matter. Tasca and colleagues (2013) and Wentz (2020), for example, found that the presence of forensic evidence had a larger impact on the decision to arrest than victim credibility or a stranger perpetrator. Likewise, Morabito et al. (2019) found that police were more likely to arrest suspects when the case had a witness (evidence) and when the suspect used a weapon (aggravation). Spohn and Tellis (2014) found that victim cooperation was the only factor that affected all of the case outcomes they examined. Similarly, looking only at assaults involving intimate partners, O'Neal and Spohn (2017) found that the arrest decision was influenced by various practical constraints, like presence of physical evidence and victim cooperation, but not by the perceptual shorthand associated with rape myths (e.g., motive to lie).

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[37] Similar trends have been found in studies of police outside the United States, for example, the effects of police officers' rape myth acceptance in South Korea (Lee et al., 2012), how police in New Zealand categorize rape reports (Jordan, 2004), and how myth-related factors influence case processing decisions across Europe (Lovett & Kelly, 2009).

Police decisions are also influenced by the anticipated downstream decisions of prosecutors and the availability of resources. Page (2008) found that 47% of the police officers and sheriffs surveyed across seven departments reported that the anticipated actions of the prosecuting attorney influenced their decision to pursue rape investigations; 34% said department resources influenced their decision. These findings suggest that the role of rape myths in police decision-making may be more utilitarian than nefarious. Police may use rape myths as a categorization tool to facilitate the distribution of resources to cases they perceive as most likely to result in successful prosecution (Spohn & St. George, 2020).

Spohn, White, and Tellis (2014) further noted that although decisions to unfound the complaint or arrest the suspect technically do not rest directly on assessments of convictability, as a practical matter, police take this into consideration. Police view the decision to arrest as the first step in securing a conviction in the case; as a result, they are reluctant to make arrests that are unlikely to lead to the filing of charges. Thus, the downstream orientation of detectives investigating cases is to the prosecutors who make filing decisions. In sexual assault cases, in which the victim's testimony is crucial, these assessments rest squarely on an evaluation of the victim's credibility. As a result, if the victim's allegations are inconsistent with detectives "repertoire of knowledge" (Frohmann, 1991, p. 217) about the typical sexual assault, or if the detective believes that the victim has ulterior motives for reporting and will not cooperate as the case proceeds, the odds of unfounding will increase and the odds of arrest will decrease. Reforms intended to decrease attrition must consider these various motives.

Present Study

Although the literature described above provides convincing evidence that rape myths influence police decision-making, how they do is unclear. The goal of the current study was to elucidate specifically how rape myths influence police decision-making. Perhaps officers who endorse rape myths are overly suspicious of victims' reports, blame victims for their assaults, or minimize the harm of rape and the danger of suspects. Alternatively, myth-related factors like delayed reporting may shape officers' assessments of legal factors like the presence of evidence. Moreover, in departments with limited resources, police may have to funnel resources to the most viable cases, and rape myths may affect their determinations of viability. In the current study, I examined how police described their own responses to sexual assault cases in order to assess the mechanisms through which rape myths influenced their decisions. Using the focal concerns framework, I qualitatively examined police comments and categorized the factors they identified as contributing to attrition and hindering successful case processing.[38]

Based on prior research, I expected that police would describe a range of focal concerns, including legal (e.g., evidence), extralegal (e.g., rape myths; suspect race), and practical (e.g., convictability) concerns. The goal of this study was to explore how frequently detectives mentioned these focal concerns and how different focal concerns overlapped. Additionally, I examined how, in their own words, detectives described the

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[38] The O'Neal and Hayes (2020a,b) studies that used the same interview data as the current study did not examine rape myths or their relationship to detectives' focal concerns. O'Neal and Hayes assessed officers' perceptions of and attitudes toward problematic victims (2020a) and examined officers' attitudes toward teenage victims (2020b).

factors that influence their responses to sexual assault reports and how rape myths manifested in their descriptions. This study makes an important contribution to the literature on sexual assault case processing. By providing a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing police decision-making, I hope to facilitate the development of practices that effectively and justly respond to sexual assault cases.

Methods

Case Processing in Los Angeles

The data were obtained as part of a mixed-methods study of the processing of sexual assaults reported to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in 2008 (Spohn & Tellis, 2014). For a more detailed discussion of the arrest and filing decision rules used by police and prosecutors in sexual assault cases in Los Angeles, see Spohn and Tellis (2014). Briefly, crimes reported to the LAPD are initially handled by a uniformed patrol officer in one of LAPD's 21 divisions. The responding officer prepares the initial crime report based on statements of the victim and witnesses, which include a description of the suspect and, if known, identifying information about the suspect. If the crime was reported promptly, the responding officer collects evidence from the crime scene and from the victim and, if they agree, transports the victim to a rape treatment center or medical facility for a forensic medical exam (referred to as a Sexual Assault Response Team exam or "SART exam.").

The case is then assigned to one of the detectives in the division who handles sex crimes. The detective conducts the follow-up investigation. They pursue leads, interview the victim and witnesses, and attempt to identify, locate, and interview the suspect. If the

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detective believes that the complaint is false or baseless, they can unfound the report. If

the detective has identified a suspect and has probable cause to arrest the suspect, they

can either arrest the individual and present the case to an assistant district attorney (ADA)

for a filing decision, or delay making an arrest and present the case to an ADA for a

prearrest charge evaluation. If the suspect has been arrested and the evidence in the case

meets the district attorney's standard for filing, which is proof beyond a reasonable doubt

and a strong likelihood of conviction at trial, the ADA will file charges against the

suspect. If the suspect has not been arrested and the ADA indicates that the case meets

their filing standard, the suspect will be arrested. If the case does not meet the DA's filing

standard, the ADA will send the case back to the investigating officer for further

investigation.[39] If a suspect has not been identified or there is not probable cause to make

an arrest, the case can be kept open until a suspect is identified or all leads are exhausted.

Data and Sample

The qualitative data for this study came from 52 face-to-face semi-structured

interviews conducted by Spohn and Tellis (2014) with LAPD detectives who had

experience investigating sexual assault cases.[40] Using the commanding officer in each

division as intermediaries, Spohn and Tellis invited all sex crimes detectives working in

LAPD at the time of the study to be interviewed. Detectives were not required to

participate. In some divisions all invited detectives participated, in others, only some

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[39] In these cases, the detective typically does not make an arrest, but instead clears the case by exceptional means (Spohn & Tellis, 2014).

[40] My goal is to describe the underlying relationship between rape myths and police decision-making. Hence, a smaller sample size is not only appropriate, but preferable, as it facilitates in-depth exploration of the topic under investigation (Creswell, 1998; Malterud et al., 2016).

participated. The LAPD detectives who were interviewed (ranging in rank from Detective I to Detective III) ranged from 10 to 33 years on the LAPD, and from 2 months to 25 years working sex crimes. About half the detectives reported that they did not specifically request to work sex crimes. The remaining detectives indicated they actively requested the assignment, commonly citing the in-depth nature of investigations as the reason for requesting the assignment, but there were two general qualifiers to this assertion: (1) sex crimes are an important pre-requisite to promotion; and (2) sex crimes are the most rewarding detective assignment due to the process of seeking justice for victims.

All of the interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and took place at one of the LAPD divisions. The interviews were not recorded; rather, the interviewers took detailed notes of detectives' responses to each question on the interview guide and to all follow-up questions. Interviewers were trained to record detectives' responses verbatim—using notations and abbreviations where applicable—so as to prevent interviewers from interpreting detectives' responses. Interviewers asked broad and open-ended questions about investigating sexual assault cases in general, including how officers established rapport with victims, responded to uncooperative victims, and assessed victim credibility. They also asked officers to describe the sexual assault cases most and least likely to result in arrest and prosecution and to discuss the decision rules they used in deciding to unfound complaints or to refer cases to the ADA for a prearrest charge evaluation.[41]

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[41] Detectives were asked questions about how detectives respond to sexual assault cases and victims, in general. They were not asked to describe specific cases or victims, or their own, specific, investigative methods or arrest/unfounding criteria. All questions were phrased in general terms. However, 16% of detectives' comments described a specific case or victim, so at least some detectives drew on examples from their own experience to answer questions. Also, as examining rape myths was not a goal of the original study, detectives were not asked about rape myths; nor were they asked about specific focal concerns, such as the importance of downstream decisions. Questions were open-ended, so the range of

After each interview was finished, the interviewers transcribed their notes; they did not interpret the detectives' comments, but rather transcribed verbatim what was said in response to each question. Then, they compiled detectives' responses into tables, grouping responses by interview question (e.g., "Sexual assaults least and most likely to be prosecuted"). Then, they organized responses to each question into themes (e.g., "Least likely—Unlawful intercourse;" "Miscellaneous responses"). This categorization scheme generated 611 unique "comments" that detectives made about their case processing decisions. These comments were the unit of analysis in the current study.

I received the 611 comments in the form of 12 Word documents. I imported the comments from the Word documents into Excel to facilitate coding. In the original documents, responses to specific questions and specific themes were grouped together in the excel sheet, so before beginning the content analysis, I alphabetized the comments (e.g., comments with "A" as the first letter of the first word appeared first in the sample). This was done to prevent the themes identified by the original investigators from contaminating analyses in the current study. Alphabetizing comments helped to randomize the comments and diminished the possibility that the coders could guess which question and theme the comment was originally related to. Below, I describe how the comments were analyzed.

Content Analysis

I conducted a content analysis of detectives' comments to identify their focal

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possible responses was neither prompted nor restricted by the questions asked (Backstrom & Hursh-Cesar, 1963). I do not believe, therefore, that the questions asked by the original interviewers encouraged references to rape myths or specific focal concerns that detectives would not have otherwise mentioned.

concerns. Analyzing the content of detectives' own words can reveal the factors that are most salient to them when making decisions. Though imperfect, I propose that the frequency with which detectives referenced a particular theme indicated the theme's cognitive availability, and therefore, its relative importance in their decision-making. The factors that detectives described should be the factors they believe contribute most to their decisions.

Coding occurred in steps. First, I read each comment, looking for references to rape myths and focal concerns. Themes and subthemes were identified based on prior research describing specific rape myths (e.g., motives to lie, issues of moral character), focal concerns (e.g., suspect dangerousness, convictability), and other factors that influence case processing decisions (e.g., evidence, victim cooperation). I flagged comments that referred to specific *rape myths* (e.g., described the victim drinking), *suspect culpability* (e.g., mentioned the suspect's motives), *suspect dangerousness* (e.g., referred to suspect as a "serial rapist"), *evidence* (e.g., mentioned DNA), *victim cooperation* (e.g., described the victim as "uncooperative"), the *downstream decisions* of prosecutors and juries (e.g., mentioned the likelihood that the prosecutor would file charges or a judge or jury would convict), *organizational constrains* (e.g., mentioned evidence processing times), and *victim* and *suspect demographic characteristics* (e.g., described a victim as a "young child;" mentioned a "Black" suspect). Then, I compiled examples from this initial coding to generate a coding guide with detailed inclusion criteria for each theme and subtheme (e.g., theme: rape myth; subtheme: "risky behavior"). Finally, myself and a second coder, who was blind to study expectations,

used the coding guide to independently code each comment. We reliably coded all themes and subthemes (K>.80) and resolved all discrepancies.[42] All coding was conducted in Excel, and reliability checks were performed in SPSS. Inclusion criteria and frequencies of each theme and subtheme are displayed in table 4.1. Examples of each theme and subtheme are displayed in table 4.2.

Findings

The analysis revealed that detectives' assessments of victims and their cases were influenced by a combination of extralegal ($n = 407$, 67%), legal ($n = 343$, 56%), and practical concerns ($n = 286$, 47%). Among extralegal concerns, more comments referenced rape myths ($n = 359$, 59%)—including myths related to victim credibility, character, and behavior ($n = 245$, 39%) and myths related to case characteristics ($n = 202$, 33%)—then suspect concerns ($n = 130$, 21%), such as suspect dangerousness ($n = 61$, 10%), demographic characteristics ($n = 39$, 6%), and culpability ($n = 38$, 6%). Additionally, more comments mentioned victim demographic characteristics (n = 129, 21%) than suspect demographic characteristics, though mentions of victim and suspect race were rare ($n_{victim\ race} = 4$, .7%; $n_{suspect\ race} = 9$, 1.5%). Among legal concerns, 45% ($n = 277$) of comments mentioned evidence, and 22% ($n = 136$) mentioned victim cooperation. Finally, among practical concerns, 33% ($n = 201$) of comments mentioned the downstream decisions of prosecutors and juries or trial concerns, and 20% ($n = 122$)

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[42] Most discrepancies were coding errors due to misreading or overlooking a relevant theme/subtheme. These discrepancies were resolved quickly. When coders disagreed on whether or not a comment referenced a theme/subtheme, they referred to the coding criteria, discussed differences in how they were interpreting the comment and how the comment did or did not fit within the coding criteria, and agreed upon the appropriate code.

Table 4.1

Police Focal Concerns: Inclusion Criteria and Frequencies of Comments Mentioning Each Concern

Concern	Inclusion Criteria	Frequency, n (%)
Extralegal Concerns		407 (66.6%)
Rape myths		359 (58.8%)
Victim myths		245 (40.1%)
Credibility of statements	suspicious behavior/demeanor; inconsistencies in statements; partial lying; memory concerns, implausible stories; victims' lying; believing/not believing the victim	112 (18.3%)
Motives to lie	motives to lie about being raped, some aspect of report, or recanting	104 (17.2%)
Risky behavior	drinking, drug use, partying, passing out/intoxication; prior sexual intimacy with suspect; revealing clothing; risky misbehavior (running away, ditching school)	78 (12.8%)
Character issues	references to the victim being a prostitute, transient, runaway, mental illness, habitual drug/alcohol use, criminal record, chronic rape reporter	68 (11.1%)
Real victim	references to victim as "genuine," "true," "real," "righteous," "good," "credible," "worst"	16 (2.6%)
Case myths		202 (33.1%)
Victim-suspect relationship	victim's relationship to the suspect (teacher-student); meeting or knowing the suspect; suspect being a stranger	110 (18.0%)
He said-she said	describes case as "he said-she said," or "one-on-one;" suspect claims act was consensual; weighing suspect's claims against victim's claims	70 (11.4%)
Force/resistance	assault was forced/forceful; the suspect used a weapon/force; victim resisted, struggled, fought	43 (7.0%)
Delayed report	references delayed report; victim reported right away/immediately or waited	35 (5.7%)
Suspect Concerns		130 (21.2%)

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Dangerousness	suspect's criminal record/priors; suspect being a gang member or on probation or parole; sexual predator; cold hit/DNA match; looking for or identifying multiple victims; references suspect not being a rapist/dangerous	61 (10.0%)
Suspect demographics	age, race/ethnicity, immigration status, marriage status, parent status, income, gender (female), mental illness/disability	39 (6.4%)
Suspect age	mentions suspect age; describes suspect as "young/old," "juvenile," or "teen/teenager;" compares age of suspect to age of victim, compares adult suspects to juvenile suspects	27 (4.4%)
Suspect race	mentions suspect race, ethnicity, immigration status/country of origin, speaking language other than English	9 (1.5%)
Culpability	concern for suspect; reluctance to arrest; being intoxicated; believing victim consented; planning or picking the right victim; suspect deserving punishment or arrest, or getting away with it	38 (6.2%)
Suspicious behavior	fleeing/escaping, failing polygraph, "incriminating statements," suspicious behavior or demeanor during interview	19 (3.1%)
Victim demographics	age, race/ethnicity, immigration status, marriage status, parent status, income, gender (male), mental illness/disability	129 (21.1%)
Victim age	mentions victim age; describes victim as "young/old," "juvenile," "child," "adolescent," "teen/teenager," or "boy/girl;" compares age of victim to age of suspect, compares adult victims to child/juvenile victims	115 (18.8%)
Victim race	mentions victim race, ethnicity, immigration status/country of origin, speaking language other than English	4 (.7%)
Legal Concerns		344 (56.3%)
Evidence		277 (45.3%)
Unspecified evidence	mentions "evidence," "corroboration," "substantiation," or "proof," that crime did or did not occur	139 (22.85)
Witness	witness, someone present at time of incident	67 (11.0%)
DNA	DNA; cold hit	52 (8.5%)
Confession	suspect confession or admission	42 (6.9%)

Physical evidence	fingerprints, hair, fibers, clothing; "physical"/"forensic" evidence	37 (6.1%)
Victim injury	victim injury, trauma, bruising, scratches	34 (5.6%)
Medical evidence	medical/SART exam, semen, serology, "biological" evidence	33 (5.4%)
Pretext phone call	pretext phone call	32 (5.2%)
Evidence of no crime	"proof" crime did not occur; evidence supporting victim lied	30 (4.9%)
Miscellaneous evidence	polygraph, search warrant, camera, video, surveillance, computer/phone/social media records	63 (10.3%)
Victim cooperation		136 (22.3%)
Recantation	victim recanted, admitted lying, claimed assault did not occur; reasons for recanting	78 (12.8%)
Cooperation	victim cooperation, persistence, insistence; victim noncooperation, disappearing, refusing medical treatment; reasons for not cooperating; detectives' attempts to encourage cooperation	77 (12.6%)
Practical Concerns		286 (46.8%)
Downstream decisions		201 (32.9%)
Prosecutor decisions	decision to reject/file charges; DA filing criteria; presenting or passing case to DA; police frustration with DA decisions	173 (28.3%)
Jury decisions	jurors' or juries' opinions/biases; reasonable doubt; conviction, "winning," what is needed to convict	44 (7.2%)
Trial concerns	competency to testify; admissibility of evidence; defense attorney tactics; trial/courtroom procedures	21 (3.4%)
Organizational constraints		122 (20.0%)
Resources	resource availability (manpower, caseloads, evidence processing, equipment); training; distribution of resources across divisions; prioritization of sex crimes	79 (12.9%)
Laws/procedures	departmental rules, manuals, guidelines, laws or statutes; references to supervisors; measures of success (clearance or arrest rates); duplicate reports; jurisdiction concerns	57 (9.3%)
Total		611 (100%)

Table 4.2

Police Focal Concerns: Examples

Concern	Example
	Extralegal Concerns
Rape myths	
Victim myths	
Credibility of statements	In my experience, *victims are not totally honest with the details of the case*. If they put it out there in the front—I am a prostitute and we were getting high—we can deal with it if she discloses up front. If not, it makes all of us wonder what else she is not disclosing.
Motives to lie	Often *victims are lying* more often than you would think *to get a free exam or get attention*.
Risky behavior	The victim plays a big role and we get a lot of *victims who participated in inappropriate behavior before the sex crime took place—drinking or using illegal drugs*. Suspects sometimes pick the right victim—the most vulnerable, the most mentally challenged. That makes it more difficult to investigate and gather additional evidence.
Character issues	*Background of the victim* is also important—has the victim reported before; if so have they been filed, unfounded, etc. What we're required to provide prosecution with exculpatory evidence that includes our victims and witnesses. Are they truthful, *have they been convicted of crimes involving moral turpitude/dishonesty*.
Real victim	Certain [DAs] are horrible. Unless [there is a] signed confession and [the suspect is] caught on video camera, they will not file. And that is not fair to the victim. 90% of the victims we get are not *perfect pristine citizens*. I had a 60-year-old woman sleeping with her husband when her suspect broke in. God forbid you are young and in college and drinking you are fair game. Prostitutes as well.

Case myths

Victim-suspect relationship	…No one likes to grade rapes, but we do. *Stranger* and child rapes being the worst; we don't see a lot of those, not that someone is not going to be traumatized in terms of being *raped by a friend [or] date or acquaintance* and that is where we have seen change. We have done a reversal where a majority of our cases were *stranger*.
He said-she said	Least [likely to be filed]—when the victim is not a child—an adult where alcohol is involved and *it is his word against [hers]* and it is either a dating relationship or an acquaintance. Difficult because no evidence. If he admits to having sex with her, DNA will be irrelevant because it does not prove that it was nonconsensual.
Force/resistance	I had a case, excuse my French, where the victim *got the shit beat out of her*. Her face was punched in. She was bruised all over and you could tell *she fought him off her*.
Delayed report	A lot of times, *one of the biggest issues is delay in reporting*. Becomes problematic in the identification and the filing process. It would be difficult to ID the individual if it is an unknown person—*with delay* we won't have DNA. Even if the individual is ID'ed *delay* becomes a problem with the DA's office.

Suspect concerns

Dangerousness	There is a lot of investigative stuff you can do. You can have the victim make a pretext phone call. Try to get the suspect to admit that he did what he did. We always look at those when you have a he said/she said case. Or start to *look at the suspect's past to see if there are any similar cases with other victims*. If you can tie the cases together you might be able to get the DA to file even if they were rejected before.
Suspect demographics	I don't feel compelled to arrest someone just based on the fact they were identified in a crime, depends on the totality of the circumstances, e.g. unlawful sex, 14-year-old and her *24-year-old boyfriend*. Is that a crime?
Culpability	You have the ones that report rape and they're with this person and they get together, hang out, go to dinner, spend the night, but at some point they're not sure, change their minds, or the person doesn't call them back or something where it's like ok *there's not enough to book this guy and put this on his rap sheet* when she just didn't know how to say no or changed her mind.
Suspicious behavior	Polygraph suspects [is] another investigative strategy; ask if they will volunteer; can *confront them if they [the suspect] are found to lie*; provides leverage.

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Victim demographics	*Young girls*-most unfounded cases the *young teenage girls* that say they were kidnapped and raped; I mean something that does happen but my experience states the *younger girls* will say anything to not get in trouble.

Legal Concerns

Evidence

Unspecified evidence	Basically, it is how much *evidence* do you have. Is there enough to suggest the crime occurred. Often you run into problems with the he said/she said cases, these are very weak. I try myself to get as much as I can though…
Witness	One-on-one assaults with *no witnesses*; biggest thing is no corroboration; it's just the one-on-one. The [child] cases without any witnesses they will not file whatsoever.
DNA	Have a case now from 1999 where the victim did not know much, did not remember much, but I was able to link it to other cases using *DNA*. Sheriff got him and *his DNA* is what linked him to this case.
Confession	I've had cases prosecuted based on just her statement alone and just his *confession*. If you have no other evidence, no witnesses, no physical evidence other than her statement, *his admissions are critical*.
Physical evidence	*Physical evidence* can corroborate given there are rarely witnesses. It takes a long time to get *physical evidence*. They're difficult; even if there is a rape kit.
Injury	*Injury* to substantiate the testimony that the victim has given is important. Difficult to prove it wasn't consensual. It turns into a he said/she said situation.
Medical evidence	With one-on-ones I typically get a statement from her, then him, and I put those together, and I've had it where there is *no evidence on the SART exams* and I present it and the DA more than likely will reject it.
Pretext call	There are two things we do. The first is a *pretext call*. Let him admit that she was really drunk when they had sex.
Evidence of no crime	It is really tough for me to say that a case did not occur. You would have to have *corroborating evidence that it did not occur*.
Miscellaneous evidence	Cases with tons of evidence; i.e. *Cell phone records, GPS location, on video at the time*; eyewitnesses

Victim cooperation

    Recantation   Normally when a *victim completely recants* and we can say and prove that the crime did not occur. If the victim says I don't want to do anything [that] is different than saying it didn't happen at all. I have a couple cases where women have said you know in thinking about it, I didn't really tell him I didn't want to, and he probably felt this was consensual so it's consensual sex so crime did not occur.

    Cooperation   Rapes. The *victims are very noncooperative*. Initially they will speak with us because something has happened and once it starts taking its course with the DA's office it becomes hard to find them; they lose interest and/or are hard to find.

Practical Concerns

Downstream decisions

    Prosecutor decisions   Acquaintance rapes—DA doesn't like them. Difficult to prove for obvious reasons, consent is the issue, an obstacle that is difficult to overcome and the *DA's filing policy* without significant corroboration *they won't file it*.

    Jury decisions   *Jurors and people like to see evidence*—they like to see DNA and other evidence. Without any physical evidence and with conflicting stories from the victim and the suspect, it will probably be a reject.

    Trial concerns   [C]ases involving children—*hard to qualify as decent witness on the stand*. They can become easily confused and intimidated.

Organizational constraints

    Resources   Training—investigators need to be trained from both in and outside the department. *Crime labs could use more help in analyzing these sexual assault evidence kits*. I spoke with *criminalists and they need more assistance*. All of this would increase our arrest and prosecution rates.

    Laws/procedures   Bound by *UCR clearance guidelines*; sometimes very simple and straight forward; if found to not occur; *jurisdiction*; duplication; or, can show victim identifies person as suspect and can prove suspect is factually innocent/i.e. was in jail at the time of the report. Or through admission of victim.

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mentioned organizational constraints, like availability of resources (n = 79, 13%) and laws, guidelines, or procedures that constrained decisions (*n* = 57, 9%). See table 4.1 for frequencies of more subthemes and table 4.2 for examples.

I also found that references to different focal concerns overlapped in complex ways. Detectives commonly mentioned rape myths when describing suspect culpability and dangerousness, evidence, victim cooperation, downstream decisions, availability of resources, and victim and suspect demographic characteristics. Specifically, detectives mentioned rape myths in 75% of comments referencing suspect concerns, 68% of comments referencing legal concerns, and 51% of comments referencing practical concerns. Additionally, although victim and suspect demographic characteristics were mentioned less frequently than the other focal concerns—only 21% and 6%, respectively—78% of these comments also referenced a rape myth. Below, I describe how rape myths intertwined with other focal concerns.

Rape Myths and Suspect Concerns

Detectives often drew on rape myths to evaluate suspects' culpability and dangerousness. Their comments revealed an association between suspect culpability and "he said-she said" cases, as in the following response to a question concerning the evidence needed to make an arrest:

> We can't just go arrest anyone because they are being accused. We need evidence to substantiate what is being said. Biological evidence from her, him, DNA matches, obviously an arrest.... If it is a one-on-one consensual, we leave it up to the DA's office because I'm not going to arrest someone if he's saying it was consensual and she says it wasn't. And if I don't have bruising, and so on, then I am apprehensive to make an arrest in those cases…Unless I have some sort of evidence…something to indicate a struggle, then I am reluctant to just arrest someone based on someone's

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word, even if she is a righteous victim. I have had victims where people
have been falsely accused.

In the example, the detective justified a reluctance to arrest by suggesting that cases lacking "something to indicate a struggle" could be "consensual" incidents in which the suspect was "falsely accused." Similarly, in a comment describing the impact of the victim-suspect relationship on case outcomes, a detective raised concerns about suspect dangerousness:

> That [prior relationship] affects the case a lot. It obviously is taken into consideration that the two parties have had consensual sex. How long ago did this happen? I would assume that jurors are suspicious because actually I am kind of suspicious about these cases as well. If a girl wakes up with the guy having sex with her does that really make him a rapist? If there is some kind of violence involved, some type of restraint, that takes it to a different level.

The detective in this example perceived incidents involving current or prior intimate partners as non-violent, and therefore those suspects as less dangerous than (real) rapists.

Rape Myths and Evidence

Seventy-one percent of all comments mentioning evidence also mentioned rape myths, which suggests that rape myths influenced how detectives investigated cases. Detectives linked the availability of evidence to the timeliness of reports (e.g., *"Because many victims delay in reporting, we don't have the evidence that we need to clear the case. Victims who report immediately give us a better chance of getting DNA; with DNA we have a good chance of clearing the case by arrest."*). Detectives also revealed different approaches to cases depending on the victim's relationship to the suspect. For example, compare the following comments:

1. Stranger [cases]—injuries mean something. Her after actions mean

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more than with acquaintances. Often with acquaintances there is delayed reporting…. [With a case involving] strangers, there is an instant report, evidence is collected immediately; you can't argue consent if you don't know her…there is so much more to collect and so many fewer excuses a guy could give.

2. Evidence would be nice. Let's say you have absolutely no evidence, just victim's statement and a suspect stating it was consensual. Where to go? If we come back and there's DNA he says yes, it was consensual. No bruising or marks, no prior record of suspect, no prior reports with victim, how to make that call. If it gets to be that finite with no evidence whatsoever, I'm going to take it to the DA and let them make the decision, get them to reject it.

In the first comment, the detective suggested that stranger cases are easier to pursue, and the evidence collected more meaningful, than cases involving acquaintances. By contrast, the detective in the second comment portrayed cases involving acquaintances, spouses, or intimate partners as "he said-she said" cases that typically lacked evidence.

Importantly, some detectives' comments emphasized that evidence of force, resistance, or injury was *necessary* to prove non-consent in "he said-she said" cases (e.g., "*Husband/wife—those are so tough. Only a man and woman know what goes on in their bedroom. But there might be evidence of force...*"). However, detectives also sometimes noted the ambiguous meaning of evidence of injuries or force in "he said-she said" cases (e.g., "*[E]ven if you have evidence of sexual activity, proving consent is the hard part…Sometimes there is vaginal trauma with consensual sex and sometimes there is no trauma with forced sex, so [acquaintance rapes] are the most difficult.*"). These comments revealed that detectives knew how "real rape" factors influenced sexual assault case processing, even when they saw through the myth.

Rape Myths and Victim Cooperation

Sixty-two percent of comments describing victim cooperation also mentioned a rape myth. Detectives noted that non-cooperative victims often had credibility issues related to their character or behavior (e.g., "*Prostitution rapes...they do not give up their work to attend necessary appointments, screenings that it takes to prosecute a case, so they do not cooperate. Although probably legit—they have probably been assaulted by some type of predator—they do not play with the system well at all.*"). Other comments emphasized that intimate relationships between victims and suspects made it difficult for victims to pursue cases (e.g., "*Husband and wife testifying against one another. There are children involved, there is the long-term commitment…. Other family members get involved, and it makes it much more difficult to go forward.*"). Some comments associated victim (non)cooperation, particularly recanting, with motives to lie, false reports, and unfounding (e.g., "*The case will not be unfounded unless the victim denies that it occurred. The victim says she lied or made it up. In my experience, every case that I have had to unfound has been a case where the victim lied…*").

Some detectives recognized that not all recantations were false reports; detectives noted various reasons that victims ceased cooperating (e.g., "*She may be recanting for her own sanity in her recovery to make it go away.*"). However, comments also emphasized that cooperation was necessary to perform basic investigatory tasks (e.g., "*Most of the adults that I've had, the victims have been uncooperative. They give limited info about someone they met somewhere at some time, not even sure of the day. If you have nothing, the case can only go so far as the evidence you have.*"), and prosecuting a

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case in court (e.g., "*If the victim is not willing to testify, the suspect has a right to cross examine and the DA won't file.*").

Rape Myths and Downstream Decisions

Sixty-one percent of comments mentioning downstream decisions also mentioned a rape myth. Comments indicated that some ADAs refused to file charges in "he said-she said" cases (e.g., "*I wish that they would not have such strict rules with one-on-one cases, meaning that no matter what we will not file...*"), or in cases involving alcohol (e.g., "*We have an ADA who as soon as he hears alcohol, he is quick to reject...*"). Detectives also noted jurors' skepticism of victims' claims (e.g., "*[There could be] someone on the jury who believes that a husband cannot rape his wife (or rape a prostitute).*"). Myth-related concerns were also tied to the logistics of trying the case. For example, in the following comment, the detective suggested that victim intoxication may contribute to reasonable doubt:

> Acquaintance cases involving alcohol [are the most difficult to successfully prosecute]. There is a pre-existing relationship, usually a one-on-one, the victim has limited memory, and it is very difficult to prove that she did not consent because she can't remember. It is very easy to plant doubt about that in the minds of the jury.

Some comments showed that detectives understood which rape myth factors influenced downstream decisions and why; others revealed detectives' frustration with prosecutors' orientation to convictability. Some comments suggested employing a reasonable doubt standard at the filing stage was inconsistent with legal statutes (e.g., "*I wish that they would not have such strict rules with one-on-one cases.... Where does it say in the penal code that there must be a witness?*"), and that doing so takes power away from juries (e.g., "*Let's take a stand on these 50/50 situations and let the jury decide*

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rather than letting the DA decide and focusing instead on conviction rates."). In one

comment, a detective suggested that focusing on convictability disadvantaged victims

with credibility issues and put the community at risk:

> [O]ften the DA's office relies on evidence and things they can prove
> beyond a reasonable doubt. I don't like that, because they are going by
> putting themselves in front of a jury saying 'can we convince a jury?'
> Often, we have enough evidence to go to a preliminary hearing but they
> may not want to take a case…Rumor is they get rated based on
> convictions, so they hesitate unless it's a sure win…. I feel there is
> prejudice at the DA's office because unfortunately we have many victims
> with prior prostitution arrests and some ADAs will not go forward just
> when seeing a victim has that history. Often the victim will feel
> embarrassed and not say upfront that they were lying and often that is
> enough for ADAs to say they will not file. Problem is there are career
> serial rapists who go unnoticed because the DA isn't filing.

Comments also revealed, however, that some detectives use convictability standards in

their decisions, independent of prosecutors' directives and despite departmental

guidelines not to:

> [O]ur supervisors are pushing for more detective-initiated arrests based
> simply on the crime report but we need to weigh the totality of the
> circumstances; especially if it is a one-on-one situation and there are
> credibility issues, I would be reluctant to make an arrest…. When I arrest
> someone it is at the point where the case is strong enough to go through
> the criminal justice system and we are pretty confident we will get a
> conviction.

Rape Myths and Organizational Constraints

Thirty-seven percent of comments mentioning organizational constraints also

mentioned a rape myth. Comments revealed an association between rape myths and the

distribution of resources both by detectives and the department. For example, some

detectives noted that the victim-suspect relationship influenced which cases detectives

prioritized (e.g., "*Least amount of cases that are pursued adequately are spousal or*

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[domestic violence]-related because of prior relationship…. Many detectives have the tendency to make them lower priority."). Occasionally, detectives suggested that investigative resources were inconsequential when cases involved uncooperative victims or implausible stories (e.g., "*You have to have a great case in order to get a case filed. That is the main thing. If somebody comes in with a crazy story it doesn't matter if we have 20 detectives working on a case; it won't get filed.*"). More frequently, however, comments suggested that more resources would facilitate thorough investigations and increase arrests. For example, one detective suggested that high caseloads and insufficient personnel meant some cases could not get the attention they needed to be successfully prosecuted:

> [T]he fewer cases you have the more you can work…. If you're busy, sometimes it's crazy and you may not be able to do everything you need to do…. Sometimes we have cases that we know could be [great] cases that are just good cases, so if we had the resources, we [could] take a good case and make it a great one… Sometimes the damage is already done. Cases that have been sitting there. I know if we had the resources, we could have identified more victims...

Detectives conducting investigations with limited resources may try to increase efficiency by funneling resources to "real rape" cases that are most likely to result in charges and conviction.

Some comments indicated that department policies, rather than detectives themselves, prioritized stranger rapes (e.g., "*We don't have resources in our crime lab to process these cases in an expeditious manner. It takes forever to get it processed. Five days in stranger rape and 30 days for nonstrangers. LAPD's policy.*"). Detectives also noted that sex crimes, in general, were not prioritized in the department (e.g., "*More*

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value is put on auto cases than victims in sex cases."). Detectives associated lower

priority in the department with a lack of interested and qualified detectives available to

work in sex crimes. In one comment, for example, a detective highlighted the need for

standardized training and selection criteria for sex crimes detectives:

> Training and specific hiring of sex detectives. Detectives should have to
> apply to work in a sex unit. There should be standardized, specific
> training. A lot of cases are lost because detectives do not know enough
> about how to investigate sex crimes, the elements, etc. I had a new
> detective who made a comment after working at another division, saying I
> get these girls who drink and then they want to report rape and what am I
> supposed to do? She had never heard about rape by intoxication. A lot of
> divisions they just throw someone in there who isn't interested and won't
> do a good job.

Importantly, the detective in the example above suggested that some detectives

did not know the legal statutes defining sex offenses. Other comments similarly revealed

variation in detectives' understanding of laws and procedures guiding case processing,

such as unfounding criteria. For example, some detectives suggested that a recantation

was sufficient to unfound a case (e.g., "*If the victim recants, the detective will sometimes*

unfound the case based on the recanting even if there is physical evidence to counteract

the recanting."). Other comments indicated that recanting was not necessary but was

common among unfounded cases (e.g., "*A very small percentage of cases are unfounded*

because there is some kind of evidence that nothing happened. It is very rare that we

unfound a case. Not mandatory but probable that the victim will recant."). Still others

indicated distrust in recantations, suggesting that victims have various reasons to (falsely)

recant, or that recantations should be corroborated before unfounding a case (e.g., "*Many*

victims recant because of the attitude that is being perceived in dealing with the

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investigation; they are tired of dealing with it….A victim recant can be used [to unfound] but should be corroborated and followed up by the detective.”). This variation suggested that a lack of training on legal statutes, procedural guidelines, and investigative tactics resulted in less thorough or effective investigations and inappropriate responses.

Victim and Suspect Characteristics

Comments referencing victim and suspect demographic characteristics were less common than references to other focal concerns; 21% of comments referenced victim characteristics and 6% referenced suspect characteristics, compared to 59% of comments referencing rape myths, 56% of comments referencing legal factors, and 47% of factors referencing practical concerns. Nevertheless, given prior research showing that victim and suspect race influence police responses to sexual assault reports (Lapsey et al., 2021; O'Neal et al., 2019; Shaw & Lee, 2019; Skolnick, 2011; Stacey et al., 2016; Venema et al., 2021; Wentz, 2020; Ylang & Holtfreter, 2020), I also explored the frequency of comments mentioning victim and suspect demographic characteristics, and their overlap with comments about rape myths.

Notably, only 12 (2%) of all detectives' comments mentioned characteristics associated with the victim's or suspect's race or ethnicity (e.g., being "Black," "an immigrant," "Mexican," or "a Spanish speaker.") The rarity of detectives' comments about race and ethnicity suggests that they do not overtly consider race in their decision-making. Detectives' references to demographics most frequently regarded age (n = 118, 18% of all comments), and 80% of comments referring to age also referred to a rape myth. Detectives commonly associated credibility concerns with victim age,

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differentiating between cases involving children, teenagers, and adults. For example, detectives were often dismissive of cases involving teenage victims or suspects, suggesting that these cases were statutory, so consensual and not serious. Some detectives' comments also suggested that teenagers were particularly likely to lie (e.g., "*That is the most common scenario here: younger teenage girls who try to account for their time.*"). In contrast, detectives tended to describe cases involving children as more serious (e.g., "*Child molestations are the real cases, real victims, percentage of victims.*") and more believable (e.g., "*when I say kids I mean preteen. They generally don't lie about these things, and they don't have enough time on this earth to give you the details they're giving you so it's very believable that these things happen*"). However, detectives also noted challenges in child cases, including concern with custody disputes (motive to lie), delayed disclosures, getting children certified to testify in court, and the emotional toll of these investigations.

Collectively, the results described above reveal the variability of detectives' focal concerns. In describing the factors that influence their assessments of victims and cases and their case processing decisions, detectives described rape myths, evidence, prosecutor decisions, departmental resources, and suspect dangerousness, among others. Comments also revealed overlap between rape myths and focal concerns. I describe the implications of these findings below.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to examine and categorize the focal concerns that influence detectives' responses to sexual assault allegations, and to elucidate how

rape myths influence their decision making. Overall, my analyses revealed that LAPD detectives considered many factors when responding to sexual assault reports. Importantly, rape myths were mentioned more frequently than any other concern (59% of comments), and overlapped with comments about evidence and victim cooperation, downstream decisions and organizational constraints, and suspect concerns. Additionally, comments mentioning evidence and victim cooperation were nearly as frequent as comments referencing rape myths (56% of comments). Consistent with others who found large effects of evidence and victim cooperation on police decisions (Spohn & Tellis, 2014; Tasca et al. 2013; Wentz, 2020), this finding suggests legal concerns were as salient to detectives' decision-making as rape myths. Importantly, detectives were attentive to how evidence and victim cooperation would influence case viability, which supports Spohn et al.'s (2014) assertion that police see arrest as the first step toward securing a conviction in the case.

Also consistent with prior research (Page, 2008; Spohn et al., 2014), detectives' comments revealed concern with downstream decisions, particularly prosecutors' decisions, which suggests greater concern with "chargeability" than "convictability." Comments revealed an understanding of prosecutors' convictability concerns and a deference to their filing criteria rather than probable cause standards. They also indicated a preference to "pass the buck" to prosecutors in difficult cases, both to decrease caseloads and to resolve cases quickly without arrest when detectives believed charges were unlikely.

Detectives' comments also mentioned organizational constraints, suspect

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culpability and dangerousness, and victim and suspect demographic characteristics, though they did so less frequently than other focal concerns. Specifically, although references to organizational constraints were less frequent than references to rape myths, legal concerns, or downstream decisions, detectives nevertheless indicated that a lack of training, manpower, speedy evidence processing, and basic equipment hindered their ability to investigate reports effectively and thoroughly. They also sometimes linked a lack of resources and training to the lower priority of sex crimes in the department. So even though organizational constraints may be less salient than other focal concerns, to the extent that inadequate training and the lack of resources hinder detectives' ability to "take a good case and make it a great one," organizational constraints likely contribute to attrition.

Furthermore, I found twice as many comments mentioned victim factors as suspect factors, and detectives drew more on rape myths than criminal stereotypes to make assessments of suspect culpability and dangerousness. Consistent with the broader function of rape myths to shift focus from suspects to victims (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), concerns with victim credibility and precipitation overshadowed concerns with suspect culpability and dangerousness. Rape myths also overshadowed concern with the racial stereotypes associated with offending. Such rare references to racial modifiers are inconsistent with research showing that race influences the likelihood of arrest (Lapsey et a., 2021; O'Neal et al., 2019; Shaw & Lee, 2019; Skolnick, 2011; Stacey et al., 2017; Venema et al., 2021; Wentz, 2020; Ylang & Holtfreter, 2020). However, this finding makes sense: like suspect concerns generally, racial stereotypes

associated with criminality may be less salient in sex crimes, where rape myths shift attention to the victim's behavior, particularly their precipitation and motives to lie.

The Role of Rape Myths in Detectives' Decisions

Although comments referenced rape myths more frequently than any other focal concern, the findings suggest that most detectives were not influenced by individual-level RMA. Instead of influencing detectives' decisions via detectives' RMA, rape myths seem to influence decisions indirectly, via other focal concerns. This conclusion is consistent with evidence that rape-myth-related factors like risky behavior and victim credibility issues influence case processing decisions (Morabito et al., 2019; O'Neal, 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2014) even though overall RMA among police officers is low (Franklin et al., 2020; Page, 2008).

This dynamic was revealed in a number of ways. First, comments overtly blaming victims were rare. Comments more frequently described victims sympathetically, even when they referenced rape myth factors; some even suggested that detectives were aware of "rape myths" conceptually and were critical of rape myths' influence on case processing decisions. Furthermore, comments associated with victim credibility were more prevalent than comments about victim precipitation, which suggests that few detectives perceived victims as precipitating sexual assault. Rather, to the extent that detectives perceive themselves as truth-seekers and fact finders, being suspicious of victims' stories may be built into the policing role. This suspicion becomes problematic in sex crimes because it does not seem to extend to suspects' accounts.

Second, the indirect effect of rape myths on decisions was evident in the overlap

between references to rape myths and focal concerns. Detectives' comments frequently

juxtaposed discussions of "he said-she said" cases to "real rape" cases involving

strangers, force, or injury when describing evidence and the likelihood of charges or

conviction, which suggests that "real rape" characteristics were intimately tied to

detectives' assessments of case viability. Even when comments revealed detectives'

understanding that rape myths were, indeed, *myths*, comments emphasized a need for

evidence of force or resistance to "take it to a different level." Comments also revealed

that detectives understood how rape myth factors would influence prosecutors' and

juries' decisions. They described "real rape" factors as necessary to overcome credibility

concerns associated with cases involving a prior relationship. Other scholars have

similarly argued that police view "real rape" factors as aggravating elements that can

mitigate credibility issues (Morabito et al., 2019). At least some detectives, therefore,

understood that rape myths were embedded within legal statutes, evidentiary standards,

and definitions of offense seriousness in ways that prioritized "real rapes" and discredited

"he said-she said" cases. I interpreted these results to mean that most detectives in the

sample did not believe in rape myths. Rather, they were influenced by rape myths *even

though* they "saw through" them.

Third, while rape myths may not influence attrition via individual-level attitudes,

their cultural function of minimizing the perceived harm and prevalence of rape may be

endemic to the department. Detectives' comments tied a lack of resources, training, and

qualified sex crimes detectives to the low status of sex crimes within the department as a

whole. They noted that few officers sought out sex crimes assignments, sex crimes units

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had fewer detectives, and sex crimes detectives had fewer resources than those working homicide or auto-theft. The problem of sexual assault case attrition, therefore, may be structural (Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987). If police departments do not prioritize sex crimes investigations, particularly investigations of "he said-she said" cases, then detectives may be forced, whether through policies or lack of resources, to focus attention on the most viable "real rape" cases (Spohn & St. George, 2020).

Altogether, these findings support the argument that rape myths are "incorporated into the definition of the crime and the rules of proof" that guide police responses to sexual assaults (Estrich, 1987, p. 29). Sexual assault case attrition does not seem to result primarily from officers' RMA. Rather, rape myths structure detectives' perceptions of suspect culpability and dangerousness, evidence, and chargeability, because they are incorporated into case processing guidelines and legal statutes in ways that prioritize "real rape" cases. On the one hand, rape myths influence the arrest decision via a downstream orientation to chargeability. Concern with chargeability combined with an understanding that rape myth-related factors affect prosecutors' decisions, results in detectives basing the arrest decision on more stringent criteria than legally required. On the other hand, deprioritization of sex crimes within the department limits the availability of resources needed to effectively and thoroughly investigate cases. A lack of training and oversight results in ineffective investigative practices and incorrect usage of myth-related factors—such as motives to lie and lack of physical evidence—to unfound cases. Attrition then seems to be a two-part problem, one that results from department policies and practices and one that reflects a downstream orientation to prosecutors and juries.

These implications indicate a need for a top-down approach to reform. Below I recommend reforms that respond to these problems.

Implications and Recommendations for Police Departments

First, the findings suggested that sex crimes and sex crimes detectives were stigmatized, and this affected the distribution of resources to sex crimes, including the quality of detectives working them. To address this problem, departments need to redefine their cultural orientation to sex crimes by implementing practices (e.g., advertising, memos, information sessions for new recruits) that highlight the seriousness of sex crimes, the importance of sex crimes investigations, and the value of sex crimes detectives. Rather than being stigmatized, sex crimes assignments should be incentivized as prestigious positions reserved for the best detectives. As part of this cultural reorientation, departments should review policies guiding the distribution of resources across investigative units. Sex crimes should be sufficiently staffed with experienced and trained detectives, and detectives should have the necessary basic equipment to conduct investigations. Departments should provide at least as many resources for staffing, investigations, and evidence processing in sex crimes units as units responding to other violent crimes. Departments should also review policies regarding evidence processing to ensure that evidence from sex crimes is prioritized over evidence from non-violent crimes. Policies prioritizing the processing of evidence in stranger cases over acquaintance or intimate partner cases should be removed.

Second, departments should ensure the quality of detectives working sex crimes by implementing rigorous application, screening, and training processes. Departments

should assess applicants on investigative skills, experience, and compatibility (e.g., empathy for victims, demeanor), as well as RMA. Applicants who overtly endorse rape myths, or who have a history of problematic interactions with victims (e.g., multiple citizen complaints), should be screened out. Accepted applicants should undergo a probationary period in which they work closely with veteran detectives to learn the specific tactics, challenges, and procedures involved in sex crimes investigations and case processing. After the probationary period, detectives' work quality and attitudes should be reevaluated, including reassessing RMA and reviewing citizen complaints. Those not meeting quality and attitudinal standards should be removed from the unit.

Finally, the findings suggested that some detectives lacked the legal, procedural, and investigative knowledge to make appropriate and effective decisions, which contributed to case attrition. I also found that a downward orientation to the decisions of prosecutors resulted in a more stringent standard for arrest than probable cause. Detectives working sex crimes, and first responders generally, need more training on the definition of different sex offenses, what types of evidence or statements provide sufficient probable cause to arrest, and unfounding criteria. Training should orient detectives to a probable cause standard when making arrest decisions, and departments should require detectives to make arrests in sex offense cases if they have probable cause to do so. Although increasing arrests overall risks overloading the criminal legal system, if departments prioritize sex crimes investigations and arrests over enforcement activities targeting non-violent crime (e.g., arrests for low-level drug offenses), then the balance could be maintained. Furthermore, detectives' knowledge and decisions should be

assessed regularly to ensure correct application of laws and guidelines. Detectives found to be applying laws or guidelines incorrectly should be required to repeat training. If divergence from laws and guidelines persist, they should be disciplined or removed from sex crimes units.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusions

The data used for this study came from interviews with detectives working in one jurisdiction and were collected over 10 years ago. Researchers should continue to assess how legal, extralegal, and practical concerns influence detectives' responses to sexual assault across departments and over time. Additionally, because I did not examine complete interviews—I received detectives' responses organized by question and theme—some of the context surrounding detectives' comments may have been lost. I also was unable to link specific comments to specific detectives interviewed, so I cannot say to what extent the results reflect the concerns of the majority of detectives in the sample, or only a few. Relatedly, as detectives' RMA was not assessed in the original investigation, if detectives endorsed rape myths, the strength of these attitudes, and how they influenced responses to interview questions remains unclear. So, while I interpreted the dearth of overt victim-blaming statements to mean that detectives did not explicitly endorse rape myths, future researchers should control for officers' underlying RMA when assessing the role of rape myths in their decision-making.

My goal was to examine the overlap between rape myths and focal concerns, so assessing how victim precipitation or "real rape" factors overlapped with victim credibility was outside the scope of the current investigation. Nevertheless, researchers

have found that RMA is associated with police officers' misperceptions of victims' responses to trauma (Franklin et al., 2020), and that police associate "real rape" characteristics and risky behavior with victim credibility (O'Neal, 2019; O'Neal & Hayes, 2020a). As victim credibility is integral to sexual assault cases, and assessments of credibility may precede official case processing decisions, future research should continue to examine how rape myths influence credibility assessments.

Furthermore, as Spohn and Tellis (2014) revealed in their report, sex crimes detectives in Los Angeles collaborated closely with DAs. Detectives commonly sought a prearrest charge evaluation with the ADA in "he said-she said" cases and cases involving uncooperative victims. The use of this screening process in LA was unique to cases involving sexual assault. That this practice was so common it was essentially policy supports my assertion that the influence of rape myths on attrition is structural. However, the overlap between the arrest, prearrest charge evaluation, and charging decisions may have inflated the salience of prosecutors' decisions in the content analysis. While the prearrest charge evaluation or a similar screening process is not unique to Los Angeles (Gershowitz, 2019), researchers should examine the role of downstream decisions in jurisdictions that have a more linear case processing pipeline. Researchers could compare the salience of downstream decisions across departments that vary in procedures, as well as how a prearrest charge evaluation and other case processing procedures amplify or mitigate the influence of rape myths on police and prosecutors' decisions.

Overall, this study has contributed to our understanding of how rape myths influence police responses to sexual assault allegations. Using qualitative analyses of

police interviews, I triangulated the findings of many quantitative studies that linked rape myths to sexual assault case outcomes, and I have begun to untangle rape myths from the legal and practical concerns that influence police decision-making. Results show that rape myths contribute to sexual assault case attrition in complex ways: 1) the stigmatization of sex crimes at the department level limits resources available for sex crime investigations; 2) and a downstream orientation to prosecutors' charging decision results in associating "real rape" factors with evidence and case viability and a more stringent standard for arrest. Both processes will require changing the way that sex crimes are perceived and processed at the department level.

CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION

"The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance
strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination
of people of color."
                                        —Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1990, p. 1241

In 1971, Susan Griffin argued that "the fact that rape is against the law should not

be considered proof that rape is not in fact encouraged as part of our culture" (p. 27). Half

a century later, rape culture persists. Despite important social movements and reforms

highlighting the prevalence of sexual violence, critiquing criminal justice responses, and

implementing rape law reform (Spohn & Horney, 1992), sexual violence victimization

remains common. In the United States alone, one in five women and one in thirty-three

men are victims of a completed or attempted rape at some time in their lives (Rape Abuse

and Incest National Network, 2020). At the same time, in 2020, only 23% of sexual

assaults were reported to the police, less than any other violent crime (Morgan &

Truman, 2021), and victims note fear of being blamed or not believed as reasons for not

reporting (Cohn et al., 2013; Wolitzky-Taylor, 2011b).

Further, the criminal legal system continues to treat sex crimes differently from

other crime types. Police are reluctant to arrest "innocent" suspects in rape cases,

overestimating the frequency of false reports (Ask, 2010; Kelly, 2010; McMillan, 2018;

Spohn et al. 2014). Prosecutors are reluctant to file charges in rape cases, fearing biased

jurors will find defendants' not guilty in acquaintance rape cases, where trial verdicts

frequently hinge on the victim's credibility (Frohmann, 1991; Spohn et al., 2001). Even

laws prohibiting rape demand more stringent evidence of non-consent than required in

other consent-based crimes (Little, 2005; Malm, 1996; Remick, 1992), indicating that "the distrust of women victims [is] actually incorporated into the definition of the crime and the rules of proof" that guide criminal justice responses to sexual assault and rape (Estrich, 1987; p. 29). Cassia Spohn's (2020) assessment of the rape reform movement is fitting: "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (p. 90).

Rape myths are the attitudinal component of this cultural phenomenon, and unsurprisingly, they have received a lot of empirical attention. Importantly, scholars have demonstrated that rape myths are discursively linked to traditional gender role norms and values: they justify men's sexual aggression, describing it as normal and natural; they suggest women purposefully or negligently provoke men's sexual interest, enjoy forced sex, and lie about being raped; and they define rape narrowly as the rare and violent actions of sexual deviants, which excludes rapes involving acquaintances and intimate partners, rapes lacking force or resistance, and rapes involving intoxication (Burt, 1980; Edwards et al., 2011; Lonsway & Fitzgerald; 1999). Scholars also have documented the enduring impacts of rape myths on men's rape proclivity (Bohner et al., 2006; Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; O'Connor, 2021), victim's rape acknowledgement and decision to report (Heath et al., 2013; LeMaire et al. 2016; Reed et al. 2020), and criminal justice responses, including arrest, charging, and conviction (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Dinos et al., 2015; Hine & Murphy, 2019; St. George & Spohn, 2018; Venema, 2019). Cumulatively, this evidence demonstrates that rape myths maintain patriarchal power arrangements by "restrict[ing] women's sense of agency, autonomy, and freedom" (Barn & Powers, 2021, p. 3529). Rape myths, therefore, are structurally embedded in, and help

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maintain, women' subordination (Armstrong et al. 2018; Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; Estrich, 1987; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; White, 1995).

But women's subordination intertwines with other forms of oppression, like racism. Intersectionality scholars have documented the ways that Black and White women, for example, experience gender subordination differently (Crenshaw, 1990; Collins, 2000, 2019). Furthermore, historically, the rape of Black women has been denied, dismissed, and discredited even more than the rape of White women (Cochran et al., 2019; Hamid, 2020; Pokorak, 2006; Williams et al., 2007). At the same time, the rape of White women by Black men was used to justify the torture and murder of Black men (Davis, 1983; Hamid, 2020; Pokorak, 2006; Wallace-Sanders, 2002). Even today, the most severe criminal sanctions are reserved for Black men who rape White women, while the rapes of Black women continue to be regarded as less traumatic, less serious, and less deserving of punishment (Cochran et al., 2019; LaFree, 1980a; Williams et al., 2007; Wolfgang & Riedel, 1975).

Despite these trends, rape myth scholars have largely ignored how rape myths—and by extension, rape culture—maintain white supremacy, focusing instead on how they maintain patriarchal power arrangements. Specifically, the literature exploring the impacts of rape myths on perceptions of victims and their reports largely ignores race. While the rape perception myth is full of studies assessing the effects of victim gender, victim-perpetrator relationship, force and resistance, and intoxication—among other rape myth factors—few rape myth studies assess the effects of victim or perpetrator race on rape perceptions. Furthermore, the most used RMA scales describe victims and offenders

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in race-neutral ways, and they fail to include race-specific rape myths, like the myth of the Black male rapist, or the promiscuous (Black female) Jezebel. The rape myth literature, therefore, has done what much feminist scholarship has done: embarked on a colorblind campaign meant to battle women's oppression while pushing race to the margins. The goal of this dissertation was to bring race back to the center.

I used an intersectional framework to conceptualize how rape myths may contribute to gender oppression and racial oppression. Specifically, I argued that if rape myths come from gender stereotypes, which intersectionality scholars emphasize are race-specific, then rape myths also must be race-specific. Rape myths, therefore, may have race-specific effects on victim blaming and rape-minimizing attitudes. Further, I argued that if rape myths disadvantage victims of sexual violence, because they are incorporated into the laws, policies and procedures that guide criminal justice decision-making, then they especially will disadvantage victims of color. Rape myths, therefore, may contribute to racial disparities in criminal justice responses to sexual assault reports. More broadly, I argued that rape myths come from, and help reinforce, both sexist and racist social structures, and by ignoring the racialized origins of rape myths and their race-specific effects, rape myth research has contributed to the marginalization of black and brown victims. Overall, evidence from the three studies described above support these assertions.

Primary Findings

First, I found that rape myths have race-specific effects on perceptions of rape victims and perpetrators. Specifically, in Chapter 2, I assessed how victim and perpetrator

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race moderated the relationship between the "victim precipitation" myth, the "accidental rape" myth, the "victims lie" myth, and the "real rape" myth on victim and perpetrator blame. Findings revealed that the effects of rape myths varied by victim and perpetrator race. Specifically, the effects of the "precipitation" and "victims lie" myths were amplified when the victims and perpetrators were Black and Latinx, resulting in more perceived victim blame and less perceived perpetrator blame. By contrast, the accidental rape myth only influenced perceptions of victim blame when the victims were White, and the real rape myth only influenced perceptions of perpetrator blame when the victims and perpetrators were Black. In other words, by assessing the *race-specific* effects of rape myths on rape perceptions, I showed that some rape myths only apply to certain victims, depending on their race. Collectively, these findings suggest that rape myths harm some victims more than others—Black and Latinx victims were harmed more than White victims—and, more specifically, some rape myths only harm certain victims.

Second, I found that rape myths also have race-specific effects on criminal justice responses to sexual assault reports. Given evidence that rape myths influence victims' decisions to report (Heath et al., 2013), police and prosecutors' case processing decisions (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Hine & Murphy, 2019; St. George & Spohn, 2018; Venema, 2019), and jury verdicts (Dinos et al., 2015), the race-specific effects of rape myths on rape perceptions suggests that rape myths may also have rape-specific effects on sexual assault case outcomes. Building on findings in Chapter 2, I explored this possibility in Chapter 3. Specifically, I assessed if victim race moderated the relationship between precipitation, credibility issues (victims lie), and real rape consistency on the decisions to

unfound reports and arrest suspects. Similar to Chapter 2, I found that rape myths had

race-specific effects on case processing decisions. Furthermore, the race-specific effects

on case outcomes were consistent with the effects on rape perceptions, at least when the

victim was Black. Specifically, the effects of precipitation on the unfounding and arrest

decisions were amplified when the victim was Black, compared to White. Additionally,

the effects of credibility issues and real rape consistency on unfounding (but not arrest)

were amplified when the victim was Black, compared to White. Although the rape myth

factors assessed in Chapter 3 were not amplified in cases involving Latina victims, as the

findings in Chapter 2 suggested they would be,[43] overall, Chapter 3 confirms that rape

myths are not race-neutral. Rather, the race-specific effects of rape myths on rape

perceptions translates into race-specific effects on criminal justice decisions-making and

does so in predictable ways.

Third, rape myths influence case processing outcomes, even though police do not

endorse them overtly. In Chapter 4, I examined detectives' descriptions of their responses

to sexual assault reports, attending to the factors that they said influenced their decisions.

Importantly, few detectives overtly blamed victims for precipitating assaults or indicated

exaggerated skepticism in their reports. Nevertheless, their comments revealed concern

with how rape myth factors, like a prompt report or victim intoxication, influence the

availability and probative value of evidence, prosecutors' decisions to file charges, and

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[43] What I think is going on is that the racist history of the criminal legal system in the United States
compounds the outcomes for Black people more than Latinx people, who have been linked to criminal
stereotypes more recently. In other words, the effects of myths on perceptions are mitigated by a shorter
history of general Latinx discrimination in the criminal legal system, while the amplified effects for Black
people are even more exaggerated by a system that has historically, and for much longer, discriminated
against them compared to Whites.

the likelihood of conviction. Furthermore, detectives' comments revealed that organizational factors associated with stigmatization of sex crimes cases and investigations, inequitable distribution of resources, inconsistent understanding or application of legal rules and procedures, and a downstream orientation to the decisions of prosecutors and jurors, contributed to attrition. Specifically, these organizational factors resulted in detectives using the unfounding designation inappropriately, using a more stringent standard of proof than legally required to make an arrest, and using rape myth schemas to determine case viability. Importantly, although detectives rarely mentioned victim or perpetrator race in descriptions of cases or decisions, their systemic reliance on rape myths to guide decision-making suggests that the race-specific effects of rape myths on case outcomes will also be systemic. In other words, policies and practices exacerbate the effects of rape myths on rape victims and sexual assault case attrition, and these effects will be felt most by Black and Latinx victims.

Implications

Taken together, findings from all three studies indicate that rape myths contribute to racial oppression. Ample research demonstrates that rape myths contribute to sexual assault case attrition at multiple stages of the case processing pipeline (Acquaviva et al., 2022; Dinos et al., 2015; Hine & Murphy, 2019; St. George & Spohn, 2018; Venema, 2019). Rape myths, therefore, pose problems for all victims of sexual violence. Findings from Chapters 2 and 3, however, reveal that these problems are amplified for Black victims, and possibly Latinx victims. Except for the "accidental rape" myth, rape myths contributed to more blame for Black and Latinx victims than for White victims.

Furthermore, the presence of rape myth factors in reported sexual assault cases increased the likelihood of unfounding more for Black victims than for White victims. Extrapolating these findings to sexual assault case processing more broadly, rape myths may contribute to disproportionate attrition of sexual assault cases involving Black and Latinx victims. Furthermore, findings from Chapter 4 indicate that rape myths' effects are not the result of individual biases; they are institutionalized and systemic. Importantly, victim race did not influence rape perceptions or police decisions directly, and detectives rarely mentioned race in their descriptions of victims, cases, or decisions. Rather, race amplified the effects of rape myths on perceptions and decisions, and this influence seems to result from the institutionalization of rape myths in criminal justice responses to sexual violence. Collectively, these findings support my assertion that the race-specific effects of rape myths—including the racial disparities they cause—are structural and systemic: rape myths influence the distribution of justice in ways that align with racist social hierarchies.

These findings have important implications for practitioners and researchers. For practitioners, like police and prosecutors, it is clear that rape myths influence case processing decisions, and that they contribute to more negative outcomes for Black victims than for White victims. Further, it seems that the effects of rape myths result more from organizational constraints than individual-level biases. Reducing or removing the effects of rape myths on case outcomes, therefore, will require changing the practices and procedures that guide criminal justice decision-making. For police, this may mean destigmatizing sex crimes and sex crimes detectives, prioritizing sex crimes

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investigations and increasing investigatory resources, and increasing oversight of unfounding and arrest decisions. More broadly, reducing the impact of rape myths on criminal justice responses to sex crimes will require more systemic changes, including limiting police and prosecutors' focus on downstream decisions and reforming sex offense statutes that require more stringent evidence of non-consent than in other crimes. Organizational and systemic changes that decrease the influence of rape myths on criminal justice decision-making should also decrease some of the racial disparities in outcomes that rape myths cause.

Reducing concern with downstream decisions, particularly the decisions of jurors, may also require addressing the race-specific myths that potential jurors hold. Rape prevention programs and bystander intervention trainings on college campuses, for example, often include curriculum that discusses and debunks rape myths (Amar et al. 2012; Mujal et al., 2021). Such training, if widespread, could reduce general RMA among prospective jurors over time. Such programs should ensure that race-specific rape myths are addressed, otherwise they may only improve perceptions of, or responses to, some victims. Likewise, to the extent that jury selection procedures involve removing jurors with high RMA—which I believe they should—prosecutors should be careful to assess the acceptance of race-specific rape myths, or tailor their questioning to assess the myths most likely to influence jurors' perceptions of victims and defendants. Additionally, jurors could be instructed on the dynamics of sexual assault in ways that debunk rape myths; they should also be instructed that considering rape myth factors in their deliberations has the potential to introduce unnecessary *racial* biases in decisions

and should therefore be avoided.

I believe the most important contributions of this dissertation are for rape myth researchers. Evidence-based sexual violence prevention programs and criminal justice reforms require research that properly identifies the mechanisms through which rape myths influence perceptions, decisions, and outcomes. I have shown that race is an important piece of this puzzle. Unfortunately, the rape myth literature to date has mostly ignored race, focusing instead on the relationship between rape myths and gender stereotypes or gender oppression. Few published studies assess the relationship between victim and perpetrator race and rape perceptions (Gravelin et al., 2019; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Even fewer assess the effects of race-specific rape myths on rape perceptions or criminal justice outcomes (Donovan, 2007; Miller, 2019), and I know of no study to date that assesses how race moderates the relationship between rape myths and perceptions of rape victims and perpetrators or criminal justice decision-making. Additionally, studies identifying, codifying, and measuring specific rape myths have ignored race altogether. More importantly, prior rape myth literature failed to conceptualize rape myths intersectionally or theorize how rape myths may contribute to racist power arrangements.

This dissertation highlights the flaws of such colorblind feminist scholarship. Findings indicate that ignoring race has resulted in the misidentification of rape myths as race-neutral. Furthermore, the presumption of race-neutrality has resulted in the misspecifications of rape myths' effects on rape perceptions and case processing outcomes. By centering race, by conceptualizing rape myths and their effects

intersectionally, I demonstrated that the effects of rape myths vary depending on victims'
(and perpetrators') race, and that some rape myths only affect certain victims. In other
words, the way victims experience gender oppression varies by race (Crenshaw, 1990).
Furthermore, I showed that rape myths have more damaging effects in cases involving
Black women than White women. So, structurally, rape myths, seem to regulate the
sexuality and gender expression of Black women more than White women.

This dissertation, therefore, reveals some important flaws in the rape myth
literature, particularly its failure to consider the racist origins of rape myths and the role
they play in maintaining racial inequalities. Moving forward, rape myth researchers
should consider how intersecting identities influence the formation and effects of rape
myths. I describe some suggestions for future research below along with some limitations
of the current study.

Limitations and Future Research

First, researchers should continue to assess the ways that race moderates the
effects of rape myths on rape perceptions and criminal justice responses. This dissertation
assessed the race-specific effects of rape myths on attributions of victim and perpetrator
blame. Rape myths may likewise influence other perceptions of hypothetical scenarios in
race-specific ways, including assessments of consent, severity of incidents, guilty
verdicts, and sentencing decisions. Researchers should continue to explore these
relationships in laboratory studies. Furthermore, this dissertation assessed the race-
specified effects of rape myths on two case processing decisions: to unfound a report and
to arrest a suspect. Rape myths may have race-specific effects on other decision points

that contribute to attrition, including victims' rape acknowledgement and the decision to report, police investigative decisions (e.g., to submit a rape kit for DNA testing or interview witnesses and suspects), prosecutors' charging and plea-bargaining decisions, attorneys' trial strategies, juries' verdicts, and judges' sentencing decisions. Identifying the racially disparate impacts of rape myths, as well as the *cumulative* effects of race and rape myths on sexual assault case attrition, will require exploring all these decision points individually and together. In addition to laboratory studies and studies assessing outcomes in real cases, researchers should interview victims and practitioners to identify how race-related rape myths and gender stereotypes influence their decisions. Collectively, research that replicates, triangulates, and extends the findings in this dissertation will further highlight a need to reimagine rape myths intersectionally.

Second, researchers should identify, codify, and measure race-specific rape myths. While I described some race-specific rape myths, like the "Jezebel" and the "Black male rapist" myths, I did not examine these directly. Instead, I assessed the race-specific effects of rape myths, which provides some evidence that the myths themselves are race-specific. A fuller test of these assertions will require researchers to *rearticulate* rape myths. That is, using both senses of "articulation" proposed by Stuart Hall (2017),[44] scholars need to dismantle and reassemble rape myths in new formations that account for their racist origins. Specifically, scholars should examine discourses that link stereotypes

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[44] Stuart Hall (2017) proposed a double meaning of articulation that Patricia Hill Collins (2019) noted is particularly useful for thinking about intersectionality and relationality. In the first meaning, "articulation" refers to a "joint or juncture" between parts that can be disassembled and reassembled differently across contexts. The second meaning refers to how "language 'articulates' or brings new ideas by combining existing ideas into new patterns, by attaching new connotations to them, or both" (Collins, 2019, p. 233).

of gender, sexuality, *and race* to concepts of desire, consent, sexual aggression, victim credibility and responsibility, and "real rape." For example, scholars could follow in the footsteps of Susan Estrich (1987) and assess how judicial decisions in rape cases use *racialized* gender and sexuality stereotypes to justify distrust of *Black* women's allegations. Qualitative explorations of medical and media discourses could also shed light on race-specific gender and sexuality stereotypes and their relationship to sexual violence. Furthermore, scholars could conduct interviews with victims, perpetrators, and community members to identify how race-specific gender and sexuality stereotypes influence conceptions of sexual violence, sexual assault experiences, and perceptions of victims and perpetrators.

Once race-specific rape myths have been articulated, researchers should develop tools that measure race-specific RMA. Creating more inclusive assessment tools is not new. Scholars have responded to critiques that the rape myths centers female victims, heterosexual formations, and binary genders by developing gender-inclusive RMA scales (Urban & Porras Pyland, 2021), as well as scales that assess myths specifically about male victims (Melanson, 1998; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992) and LGBTQ+ victims (Schulze et al., 2019). Rape myth scholars should extend this work by developing and validating RMA scales that measure acceptance of race-specific rape myths and using more inclusive RMA scales in future rape perception studies.

Finally, researchers should examine the relationships between rape myths and other marginalized identities. This dissertation centered race, focusing on the race-specific effects of rape myths among three racial groups: White, Black, and Latinx.

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Scholars should examine rape myths and effects unique to other racial identities, including Indigenous, Asian, and mixed-race identities. Furthermore, there may be specific rape myths associated with other sources of inequality that deserve attention, including sexual orientation, class, age, nationality, and disability. Researchers should explore these relationships and the intersections of these relationships. By rearticulating rape myths intersectionally and by centering marginalized identities, rape myth scholars can generate a body of research that more inclusively, comprehensively, and correctly specifies rape myths and their consequences. More importantly, a more robust and inclusive body of research can contribute to more effective and equitable solutions to the problems of sexual violence and sexual assault case attrition.

Conclusions

For 40 years, scholars have studied rape myths, demonstrating their pervasive and persistent effects. From increasing rape proclivity to hindering successful prosecution, rape myths continue to perpetuate sexual violence while simultaneously diminishing the criminal legal system's ability to apprehend and sanction perpetrators. Scholars agree that rape myths and their effects indicate a culture that normalizes and minimizes sexual violence. The rape myth literature, however, has largely overlooked the relationship between rape culture and other oppressive structures, particularly race. Responding to this oversight, this dissertation brought race from the margins to the center. I drew on intersectionality theory to conceptualize how intersecting race and gender stereotypes would result in race-specific rape myths and race-specific effects of rape myths. I demonstrated that rape myths affect rape perceptions and criminal justice responses to

sexual violence in race-specific ways that disadvantage Black and Latinx victims. The primary findings of this dissertation, therefore, demonstrate that rape myths are a vehicle through which racism persists in criminal justice practices. More broadly, they demonstrate that rape culture is not just about maintaining women's oppression or justifying male sexual aggression; rape culture is also about maintaining racial hierarchies that privilege the sexual freedom and autonomy of White men—as well as the sexual purity and autonomy of White women *relative to* Black and Latinx women. Combatting rape culture without attending to the racist effects of rape myths, therefore, will require attending to the race-specific ways that rape myths influence rape perceptions and case outcomes. More importantly, it will require identifying, codifying, and measuring race-specific rape myths. I hope these findings usher in a new era of rape myth research, one that conceptualizes and articulates rape myths intersectionally and pays particular attention to markers of oppression that are seemingly disparate from, but nevertheless entangled with, gender and sexuality.

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APPENDIX A

CONTROL VARIABLES NOT DISPLAYED IN TABLE 2.6

Variable	Step 3		Step 4		Step 5		Step 6		Step 7	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Participant characteristics										
RMA	.150***	.02	.150***	.02	.148***	.02	.149***	.02	.152***	.02
Age	.004***	.00	.004***	.00	.004***	.00	.004***	.00	.004***	.00
Male	.000	.02	.000	.02	.000	.02	.000	.02	-.002	.02
Other gender	-.007	.06	-.004	.06	-.007	.06	-.006	.06	-.011	.06
Heterosexual	.008	.02	.008	.02	.006	.02	.008	.02	.005	.02
Black	.016	.04	.033	.04	.018	.04	.017	.04	.029	.04
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific										
Islander	-.018	.04	-.014	.04	-.018	.04	-.018	.04	-.011	.04
Other/Mixed race	.008	.04	.010	.04	.007	.04	.007	.04	.017	.04
Latinx/Hispanic	.092*	.04	.092*	.04	.090*	.04	.091*	.04	.089*	.04
Never Victimized	-.003	.02	-.001	.02	-.004	.02	-.002	.02	-.005	.02
Maybe Victimized	-.023	.06	-.021	.06	-.019	.06	-.022	.06	-.020	.06
Never Perpetrated	-.083**	.03	-.072*	.03	-.085**	.03	-.083**	.03	-.071*	.03
Maybe Perpetrated	.036	.08	.046	.08	.033	.08	.035	.08	.049	.08
Mturk worker	.032	.03	.032	.03	.030	.03	.032	.03	.031	.03
Vignette characteristics										
Precipitation elements	-.013	.03	-.011	.03	-.015	.03	-.013	.03	-.012	.03
Accident elements	.014	.03	.013	.03	.012	.03	.014	.03	.008	.03
Victims lie elements	.059*	.03	.060*	.03	.058*	.03	.060*	.03	.057*	.03
All myths elements	-.014	.03	-.013	.03	-.016	.03	-.014	.03	-.016	.03
Specified Victim/Perpetrator Race										
Black	.029	0.03	0.002	0.03	0.027	0.03	0.028	0.03	-0.001	0.03
Latinx	.000	0.03	-0.018	0.03	0.001	0.03	-0.001	0.03	-0.022	0.03
Victim gender/sexual orientation										
Cis female, gay victim	.038	.03	.038	.03	.039	.03	.038	.03	.039	.03
Trans female, hetero victim	-.003	.03	-.005	.03	-.004	.03	-.003	.03	-.005	.03

Cis male, heterosexual victim	.124***	.03	.122***	.03	.125***	.03	.124***	.03	.117***	.03
Cis male, gay victim	.022	.03	.019	.03	.024	.03	.022	.03	.018	.03
Real rape question type	-.351***	.02	-.356***	.02	-.350***	.02	-.352***	.02	-.355***	.02

Notes. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

APPENDIX B

CONTROL VARIABLES NOT DISPLAYED IN TABLE 2.7

Variable	Step 3		Step 4		Step 5		Step 6		Step 7	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Participant characteristics										
RMA	-.022	.04	-.019	.04	-.021	.04	-.022	.04	-.019	.04
Age	.001	.00	.001	.00	.001	.00	.001	.00	.001	.00
Male	-.033	.03	-.033	.03	-.032	.03	-.031	.03	-.033	.03
Other gender	-.151	.11	-.152	.11	-.148	.11	-.151	.11	-.150	.11
Heterosexual	-.039	.03	-.040	.03	-.038	.03	-.044	.03	-.039	.03
Black	.070	.05	.062	.05	.068	.05	.069	.05	.061	.05
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.028	.06	.027	.06	.024	.06	.025	.06	.025	.06
Other/Mixed race	-.138†	.07	-.129†	.07	-.136†	.07	-.139†	.07	-.141†	.07
Latinx/Hispanic	.021	.05	.023	.05	.022	.05	.016	.05	.017	.05
Never Victimized	-.063†	.03	-.066†	.03	-.062†	.03	-.063†	.03	-.062†	.03
Maybe Victimized	.200*	.09	.202*	.09	.204	.09	.213*	.09	.202*	.09
Never Perpetrated	-.030	.05	-.033	.05	-.034	.05	-.034	.05	-.031	.05
Maybe Perpetrated	-.073	.09	-.075	.09	-.076	.09	-.081	.09	-.078	.09
Mturk worker	-.110*	.05	-.110*	.05	-.113*	.05	-.113*	.05	-.114*	.05
Vignette characteristics										
Precipitation elements	-.137**	.04	-.138***	.04	-.139***	.04	-.142***	.04	-.139***	.04
Accident elements	-.051	.04	-.054	.04	-.052	.04	-.054	.04	-.049	.04
Victims lie elements	.015	.04	.014	.04	.014	.04	.013	.04	.014	.04
All myths elements	-.100*	.04	-.103*	.04	-.103*	.04	-.103*	.04	-.099*	.04
Specified Victim/Perpetrator Race										
Black	-.015	.05	-.009	.05	-.014	.04	-.018	.04	-.005	.05
Latinx	.002	.05	.005	.05	.005	.04	.007	.04	.012	.05
Victim gender/sexual orientation										
Cis female, gay victim	-.099*	.04	-.099*	.04	-.101*	.04	-.098*	.04	-.097*	.04
Trans female, hetero victim	-.039	.04	-.039	.04	-.041	.04	-.039	.04	-.038	.04

Cis male, heterosexual victim	-.077†	.04	-.078†	.04	-.076†	.04	-.075†	.04	-.071†	.04
Cis male, gay victim	-.109**	.04	-.110**	.04	-.112**	.04	-.107*	.04	-.105*	.04
Real rape question type	.477***	.03	.480***	.03	.477***	.03	.479***	.03	.480***	.03

Notes. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

APPENDIX C

CONTROL VARIABLES NOT DISPLAYED IN TABLE 2.8

Variable	Step 3		Step 4		Step 5		Step 6		Step 7	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Participant characteristics										
RMA	.150***	.02	.149***	.02	.149***	.02	.149***	.02	.150***	.02
Age	.004***	.00	.004***	.00	.004***	.00	.004***	.00	.004***	.00
Male	.000	.02	.000	.02	-.001	.02	.000	.02	-.001	.02
Other gender	-.009	.06	-.003	.06	-.010	.06	-.007	.06	-.013	.06
Heterosexual	.008	.02	.005	.02	.006	.02	.008	.02	.001	.02
Black	.013	.04	.029	.04	.017	.03	.015	.03	.026	.04
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-.019	.04	-.018	.04	-.018	.04	-.018	.04	-.016	.04
Other/Mixed race	.009	.04	.011	.04	.007	.04	.009	.04	.020	.04
Latinx/Hispanic	.092*	.04	.091*	.04	.090*	.04	.092*	.04	.088*	.04
Never Victimized	-.003	.02	-.002	.02	-.005	.02	-.003	.02	-.005	.02
Maybe Victimized	-.021	.06	-.021	.06	-.017	.06	-.022	.06	-.019	.06
Never Perpetrated	-.086**	.03	-.078**	.03	-.087**	.03	-.085**	.03	-.077**	.03
Maybe Perpetrated	.033	.08	.041	.08	.028	.08	.034	.08	.043	.08
Mturk worker	.031	.03	.031	.03	.028	.03	.032	.03	.026	.03
Vignette characteristics										
Precipitation elements	-.013	.03	-.014	.03	-.014	.03	-.013	.03	-.015	.03
Accident elements	.014	.03	.012	.03	.013	.03	.014	.03	.008	.03
Victims lie elements	.059*	.03	.058*	.03	.059*	.03	.059*	.03	.057*	.03
All myths elements	-.015	.03	-.015	.03	-.016	.03	-.015	.03	-.019	.03
Specified Victim/Perpetrator Race										
Black	.036	.03	.006	.03	.033	.03	.032	.03	.004	.03
Latinx	.005	.03	-.013	.03	.007	.03	.002	.03	-.014	.03
Victim gender/sexual orientation										
Cis female, gay victim	.038	.03	.037	.03	.039	.03	.038	.03	.035	.03
Trans female, hetero victim	-.003	.03	-.004	.03	-.004	.03	-.003	.03	-.004	.03

Cis male, heterosexual victim	.124***	.03	.124***	.03	.125***	.03	.124***	.03	.120***	.03
Cis male, gay victim	.023	.03	.021	.03	.025	.03	.023	.03	.018	.03
Real rape question type	-.350***	.02	-.354***	.02	-.349***	.02	-.350***	.02	-.352***	.02

Notes. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01   259

APPENDIX D

CONTROL VARIABLES NOT DISPLAYED IN TABLE 2.9

Variable	Step 3		Step 4		Step 5		Step 6		Step 7	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Participant characteristics										
RMA	-.022	.04	-.020	.04	-.022	.04	-.022	.04	-.020	.03
Age	.001	.00	.001	.00	.001	.00	.001	.00	.001	.00
Male	-.032	.03	-.032	.03	-.031	.03	-.030	.03	-.033	.03
Other gender	-.142	.11	-.150	.11	-.142	.11	-.145	.11	-.142	.11
Heterosexual	-.041	.03	-.042	.03	-.042	.03	-.048	.03	-.041	.03
Black	.071	.05	.061	.05	.063	.05	.066	.05	.061	.05
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.024	.06	.025	.06	.023	.06	.024	.06	.022	.06
Other/Mixed race	-.135†	.07	-.128†	.07	-.131†	.07	-.135†	.07	-.141†	.07
Latinx/Hispanic	.017	.05	.022	.05	.020	.05	.014	.05	.013	.05
Never Victimized	-.063†	.03	-.066†	.03	-.063†	.03	-.063†	.03	-.062†	.03
Maybe Victimized	.201*	.09	.202*	.09	.201*	.09	.213*	.09	.205*	.09
Never Perpetrated	-.032	.05	-.035	.05	-.034	.05	-.033	.05	-.034	.05
Maybe Perpetrated	-.074	.09	-.075	.09	-.073	.10	-.082	.09	-.084	.10
Mturk worker	-.107*	.05	-.109*	.05	-.109*	.05	-.112*	.05	-.107*	.05
Vignette characteristics										
Precipitation elements	-.139***	.04	-.140***	.04	-.143***	.04	-.143***	.04	-.141***	.04
Accident elements	-.053	.04	-.055	.04	-.055	.04	-.054	.04	-.051	.04
Victims lie elements	.012	.04	.012	.04	.011	.04	.011	.04	.012	.04
All myths elements	-.102*	.04	-.105*	.04	-.105*	.04	-.104*	.04	-.101*	.04
Specified Victim/Perpetrator Race										
Black	-.024	.04	-.012	.05	-.020	.04	-.022	.04	-.011	.05
Latinx	-.003	.05	.004	.05	-.001	.05	.005	.05	.008	.05
Victim gender/sexual orientation										
Cis female, gay victim	-.099*	.04	-.100*	.04	-.099*	.04	-.096*	.04	-.093*	.04
Trans female, hetero victim	-.038	.04	-.037	.04	-.039	.04	-.038	.04	-.037	.04

Cis male, heterosexual victim	-.075†	.04	-.077†	.04	-.077†	.04	-.075	.04	-.072†	.04
Cis male, gay victim	-.108**	.04	-.109*	.04	-.110**	.04	-.107*	.04	-.103*	.04
Real rape question type	.476***	.03	.480***	.03	.477***	.03	.479***	.03	.479***	.03

Notes. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

APPENDIX E

SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSES FROM CHAPTER 2: MEAN RESPONSES TO

ACCIDENT ITMES AND ONE-WAY TESTS FOR MEAN DIFFERENCES ACROSS

VICTIM RACE

	Victim Race				
	Total	White (N = 1247)	Black (N = 757)	Latinx (N = 585)		
Accident Scale Items	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F	p
Didn't mean to rape	2.49 (1.30)	2.81 (1.33)	2.32 (1.25)	2.03 (1.09)	88.00	<.001
Sex drive out of control	2.77 (1.37)	3.05 (1.35)	2.63 (1.36)	2.35 (1.27)	60.93	<.001
Too drunk to notice resistance	2.69 (1.31)	2.98 (1.29)	2.58 (1.32)	2.23 (1.21)	71.45	<.001
Victim and perpetrator both drunk	2.60 (1.41)	2.93 (1.43)	2.47 (1.38)	1.04 (1.19)	89.62	<.001
	Perpetrator Race				
	Total	White (N = 1296)	Black (N = 744)	Latinx (N = 549)		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F	P
Didn't mean to rape	2.49 (1.30)	2.77 (1.33)	2.33 (1.25)	2.06 (1.12)	68.58	<.001
Sex drive out of control	2.77 (1.37)	3.00 (1.35)	2.66 (1.37)	2.38 (1.30)	44.76	<.001
Too drunk to notice resistance	2.69 (1.31)	2.93 (1.29)	2.58 (1.32)	2.28 (1.23)	53.16	<.001
Victim and perpetrator both drunk	2.60 (1.41)	2.88 (1.42)	2.47 (1.38)	2.09 (1.24)	6.70	<.001

Note. All pairwise comparisons revealed statistically significant differences between group means.

APPENDIX F

SELECTION MODEL NOT DISPLAYED IN TABLE 3.5

Variable	B	SE
Precipitation	-.188**	.09
Precipitation^2	.071*	.04
Credibility issues	-.287**	.12
Credibility issues^2	.049	.04
Real rape consistency	-.154***	.06
Black Victim	.116	.24
Latina Victim	.103	.19
Victim age	-.002	.01
Black suspect	.052	.26
Latino suspect	.006	.22
Suspect age	-.002	.00
Evidence strength	.205***	.04
Penetration occurred	-.446**	.20
Penetration unknown	-1.311***	.36
Suspect identified	1.434***	.22
Victim cooperated	-.418***	.16
Agency	-.954***	.16
Victim made pretext call	.388	.37
Victim was hospitalized	-.656**	.27
Victim requested female officer	-.302	.34
Multiple perpetrators	-.178	.20
Victim recanted	-1.457***	.17
Constant	.441	.34

Notes. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

APPENDIX G

CONTROL VARIABLES NOT DISPLAYED IN TABLE 3.6

Variable	Precipitation interactions		Credibility issues interactions		Real rape consistency interactions		All interactions	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Victim age	-.004	.01	-.002	.01	.000	.01	-.006	.01
Black suspect	.201	.46	.120	.46	.169	.46	.232	.48
Latino suspect	.196	.39	.209	.40	.224	.40	.286	.40
Suspect age	-.020	.01	-.020	.01	-.018	.01	-.017	.01
Suspect age2	.001**	.00	.001**	.00	.001**	.00	.001**	.00
Evidence strength	-.303***	.06	-.291***	.06	-.296***	.06	-.297***	.07
Penetration occurred	.966***	.35	.957***	.35	.872***	.35	.963***	.36
Penetration unknown	1.952***	.63	1.979***	.62	1.861***	.62	2.129***	.65
Suspect identified	-1.901***	.39	-1.974***	.39	-1.911***	.39	-1.979***	.41
Victim cooperated	.296	.26	.271	.26	.275	.26	.274**	.27
Agency	2.303***	.31	2.267***	.30	2.274***	.30	2.281***	.31

Notes. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

APPENDIX H

CONTROL VARIABLES AND SELECTION MODEL NOT DISPLAYED IN TABLE

3.7

Variable	Precipitation interactions		Credibility issues interactions		Real rape consistency interactions		All interactions	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
	Control variables							
Victim age	-.008	.01	-.007	.01	-.007	.01	-.008	.01
Black suspect	-.444**	.22	-.461**	.22	-.458**	.22	-.405*	.23
Latino suspect	-.397**	.18	-.379**	.18	-.391**	.18	-.365**	.18
Suspect age	-.001	.00	-.001	.00	.000	.01	-.001	.01
Evidence strength	.140***	.03	.142***	.03	.144***	.03	.142***	.03
Penetration occurred	-.356**	.15	-.364**	.15	-.337**	.15	-.309**	.15
Penetration unknown	-.316	.33	-.356	.32	-.332	.33	-.308	.34
Victim cooperated	1.196***	.13	1.168***	.13	1.168***	.13	1.200***	.14
LAPD	.521***	.12	.517***	.12	.521***	.13	1.524***	.13
	Selection model							
Interactions								
Black-Precipitation	-.207	.14					-.342**	.17
Latina- Precipitation	-.096	.13					-.168	.14
Black-Credibility			-.110	.17			-.196	.19
Latina- Credibility			.232	.16			.169	.17
Black-Real rape					-.116	.12	-.313**	.16
Latina-Real rape					-.088	.10	-.132	.12
Main effects								
Precipitation	-.100	.12	-.185**	.08	-.178**	.09	-.034	.13
Precipitation^2	.074*	.04	.079*	.04	.065*	.04	.080*	.04
Credibility issues	-.295**	.12	-.397**	.17	-.286**	.12	-.349**	.17
Credibility issues^2	.050	.05	.071	.05	.046	.05	.070	.05

Real rape consistency	-.159***	.06	-.151***	.06	-.085	.09	-.033	.10
Black Victim	.171	.24	.143	.25	.118	.24	.274	.27
Latina Victim	.135	.19	.084	.19	.097	.20	.105	.20
Controls								
Victim age	.000	.01	-.001	.01	-.001	.01	-.001	.01
Black suspect	.008	.26	.053	.26	.000	.26	-.031	.27
Latino suspect	-.006	.22	-.006	.23	-.026	.23	-.042	.23
Suspect age	-.003	.00	-.003	.00	-.003	.00	-.004	.00
Evidence strength	.200***	.04	.201***	.04	.205***	.04	.197***	.04
Penetration occurred	-.442**	.21	-.439**	.21	-.434**	.21	-.422**	.22
Penetration unknown	-1.344***	.37	-1.324***	.36	-1.324***	.38	-1.424***	.39
Suspect identified	1.392***	.18	1.463***	.19	1.430***	.20	1.432***	.21
Victim cooperated	-.407***	.16	-.390***	.16	-.411***	.16	-.363**	.17
Agency	-.951***	.17	-.941**	.17	-.946***	.17	-.927***	.17
Victim made pretext call	.342	.37	.338	.37	.413	.37	.304	.37
Victim was hospitalized	-.641**	.27	-.633**	.26	-.619**	.26	-.528*	.28
Victim requested female officer	-.299	.23	-.371	.34	-.279	.34	-.411	.35
Multiple perpetrators	-.189	.20	-.170	.17	-.213	.21	-.175	.20
Victim recanted	-1.435***	.20	-1.491***	.19	-1.447***	.20	-1.478***	.20
Constant	.464	.34	.384	.35	.485	.35	.404	.36

Notes. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01.