Social Media's Influences on Perceptions of Rape Victims and Perpetrators

Thesis

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to determine how social media would influence people's perceptions of rape victims and rape perpetrators. The Rape Myth Acceptance scale and Belief in a Just World scale were completed by 191 participants during the pretest. Mock news stories that varied in whether were supportive of the victim or the perpetrator, and comments that were either supportive of the victim or the perpetrator, were shown to 106 participants during the posttest. After reading the stories and comments, the participants completed the Rape Myth Acceptance scale, Belief in a Just World scale, Identification scale, Judgment Questionnaire, and questions over the message and comments. After viewing the stories, participants tended to adhere to rape myth acceptance less than prior to the stories. Men were more likely to endorse rape myth acceptance, then women were. The effect of the story on rape myth acceptance was not mediated by identification with the victim. There were no significant effects for rape myth acceptance and belief in a just world in terms of the story being framed positively for the perpetrator or framed positively for the victim. The victim framed story lead to greater judgments of attribution of guilt for the perpetrator. Overall, these finding suggest that just viewing one perpetrator or victim story and one set of comments will not change peoples' rape myth acceptance beliefs as these beliefs are ingrained in people and will take time and exposure to change.

Dedication

This document is dedicated to my family for being with me every step of this journey.

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INTRODUCTION

Every 2 minutes, someone 12 years or older is a victim of a rape or sexual assault in the U.S. There are approximately 207,754 victims each year of rape or sexual assault (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). The U.S. Department of Justice's definition of rape: "the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (2012). Recent rape and sexual assault cases have been featured prominently in the news, from the Steubenville rape case and trial (CNN), the sexual assault of Audrie Pott (ABC News), to teens posting the video of them raping a girl on Facebook (Chicago Tribune).

There have been recent sexual assault cases that have attracted a lot of media attention. In the Steubenville rape case, a young girl was going to some end of the summer parties with friends in 2012, when two high school football players she knew raped her. Audrie Pott was a 15-year-old girl from California who took her own life after she had been the victim of a sexual assault by three of her friends. Pott found pictures online that showed her sexual assault. In Chicago, three teenage boys were charged with raping a 12-year-old girl at gunpoint. The boys posted the video of them raping the young girl to Facebook.

All of these cases have created a dialogue that looks at how people see the victims or the perpetrators of sexual assault. Some people see that the victims were to blame in some capacity, while others feel that the perpetrators were to blame. Recently, Serena Williams, a prominent women's tennis player, came under fire for comments that she made about the Steubenville rape victim. She was giving an interview to *Rolling Stone* magazine and said, "I'm not blaming the girl, but if you're a 16 year old and you're drunk like that, your parents should teach you: Don't take drinks from other people. She's 16, why was she that drunk where she doesn't remember?" (Rodrick, 2013). Serena's comments are just one of the many examples of these kinds of comments being made to the media by someone who is observing the events of the rape scenario. Not only are comments like these being made to the media, they are also being made on social media.

One factor that plays into people's views about who is to blame for rape/sexual assault cases is how media cover the case. For example, CNN had a segment that talked about how the two convicted boys' lives were ruined in the Steubenville rape case (2013). CNN also played segments that showed one of the convicted boys' crying and asking for forgiveness after his sentence. Fox News (2013) had an article on their website that dealt with how the victim and her family were coping with what happened to her. The lawyer for the family said that the young woman was dealing with her rape due in large part to her family and the outpouring of support she was receiving from people. Public comments on many media sites showed a diversity of opinions as well.

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There were several blog sites, like Clutch Magazine and Jezebel, that were defending the victims from negative comments in the media and from the general public. In addition, the blog sites were also trying to bring attention to the fact that rape not only affects the victim and offender. They did this by letting people know that rape is an issue that needs to be discussed not only with girls/women but also with boys/men. The present research examines the effects social media and the comments on the social media have on our perceptions of rape victims and perpetrators. This paper looks to achieve those goals through various communication methods such as mass media, rape myth acceptance, and belief in a just world.

Rape Myths

Burt (1980) originally defined rape myths as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (p. 217). Even though this was the foundational definition that was used, there was an issue about what makes up a myth. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) say that a myth has three features: "they are false or apocryphal beliefs that are widely held, they explain some important cultural phenomenon, and they serve to justify existing cultural arrangements" (p. 134). Taking these characteristics into consideration, they created a new definition for rape myths. 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" (p. 134). With this new definition, there is now a more concrete, theoretically sound definition of rape myths that can be used.

Burt's (1980) paper was considered ground breaking at the time because it put a name to the stereotypes that women who reported rape were facing. Rape myths allow people to deny or minimize injury to the victim or blame the victim for what happened to them. Some of the rape myths that Burt listed are that "only bad girls get raped", "women ask for it", "women 'cry rape' only when they've been jilted or have something to cover up", and "rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both" (p. 217). Operating within

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rape myths are six different conditions: men's sexual frustration, impulsiveness of rape, women's preference to sexual violence, women's desire to be raped, victim's responsibility, and invention of rape cases (Ohbuchi et al., 1985).

Burt proposed that there were four variables that when taken into account lead to rape myth acceptance. The four variables that she proposed were background, personality, attitude, and experience (Burt, 1980), from which Burt developed the Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) scale. The scale consisted of 19 questions that were asked on a 7-point Likert scale. The RMA scale was the starting point for future rape myth scales that were to be created later on. Burt tested the RMA along with other scales and found that many people do believe in rape myths, their rape attitudes are tied to other attitudes, such as sex role stereotyping. She also found that acceptance of interpersonal violence was the major predictor of rape myth acceptance.

Further work (Burt & Albin, 1981), investigated the role of rape myths and rape definitions in decisions to convict alleged rapists and whether the woman did something to cause the rape. This study examined how rape is defined from several perspectives and where those perspectives fall on the rape spectrum. Radical feminists fall on one end of the spectrum in defining rape in that they view all coerced sex as rape. On the other end of the spectrum are people that believe that there is "no such thing as rape" (p. 213). In most cases people fall in the middle of the spectrum when it comes to defining their rape definitions, by allowing some acts to be classified as rape while excluding others.

One finding from this study is how people perceive stories of coercive sex. A story was not classified as rape if the participant thought that the woman did something to warrant the rape and if the participant scored higher on the RMA scale. The study showed that a lack of choice and the thought that the victim was forced into the assault increased the chances of the study story being called a rape. They also found that the perpetrator's intent to rape and the thought of force being used resulted in the participant's inclination to convict. They found that several things affected the participant's proclivity to convict the perpetrator. They were acceptance of interpersonal violence, belief that the victim brought the attack on herself, and wanting to know more about the situation and the perpetrator's character.

Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) looked at how women's definitions of sex and their view of rape myth acceptance influenced how the women labeled their own experiences. The researchers were very much interested in how unacknowledged rape victims classified their own experience. An unacknowledged rape is when a woman has been raped, but does not think of herself as a rape victim (Koss, 1985, p. 195). Their study consisted of 86 undergrad women who had been raped (they had suffered vaginal penetration either while intoxicated or because the other person used force). They found that when women accepted the rape myths of sexually teasing someone and not physically fighting back were less likely to acknowledge their experience as rape. They also found that women were less likely to label their experience as rape if they did not

view the rape as sex because there was no penile penetration (Peterson &

Muehlenhard, 2004).

The studies of rape myth acceptance have proven to offer some valuable insight

into why people blame rape victims for being raped and why some of the convictions for

rape cases are so low. Rape myth acceptance is the belief that there are stereotypes and

false beliefs about rape victims and rapists. The various studies done on rape myth

acceptance have shown that people who show a higher proclivity for rape myth

acceptance will tend to think that women who were raped deserved it, men who rape

are not responsible for their actions because women wanted to have sex, and give out

shorter sentences for rape cases.

All of these studies lead to three hypotheses and a sub hypothesis:

H1: Women will show less adherence to rape myth acceptance than men.

H1a: The sex effect in H1 will be due to greater identification with the victim in

the story for female readers than male readers.

H2: If the rape story is framed consistently with rape myth ideology (i.e., the

victim is blamed and perpetrators are viewed in a positive light), then the participants

will have a greater affinity to engage in rape myth acceptance and have a strong belief

in a just world.

H3: If the rape story is framed opposite to the rape myth ideology (i.e., the story

is critical of the perpetrator and portrays the victim in a positive light), then the

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participants will engage less in rape myth acceptance and have a weak belief in a just world.

Belief in a Just World

Belief in a just world is the belief that people have control over what happens to them, and that they get what they deserve (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). For example, if you are a bad person and something bad happens to you, then you deserve it because you are a bad person. This belief is held not just for the person, but also for other people. When people engage in the belief in a just world, it helps them to feel less vulnerable about negative events that are taking place around them. If innocent people who have something bad done to them, then people's ideas of deservingness are disrupted. When this happens, people need to restore their belief that good things happen to good people, while bad things happen to bad people. As a result, people will blame the victim for what happened to them. This blaming of the victim will lead people to once again believe that the world is a just place. People can have a strong belief in a just world or a weak belief in a just world. People with a strong belief in a just world tend to have little empathy for rape victims (Murray et al., 2005; Correia et al., 2007). When it comes to blaming rape victims, strong believers in a just world need to believe that the victim did something to warrant the rape so that they can confirm their belief that the world is a just place.

Several studies have been conducted that look at how people react when they are confronted with a rape scenario to see how the respondents belief in a just world

will affect their perception(s) of the rape victim. Murray, Spadafore, and McIntosh (2005) ran a study on undergraduate women, which examined whether beliefs in a just world are automatically activated and used in social perception. They found that the women who held a strong belief in a just world perceived the woman in the date rape scenario in a more negative light. The researchers state that by blaming the victim for being raped, people are engaging in a self-protective idea that they have control over negative situations and can avoid them.

There have also been studies that looked at how attribution effects a person's belief in a just world. Attribution theory deals with the how people assign responsibility to individuals within a scenario. Attributions have been shown to be able to be molded and influenced by cognitive and motivational prejudices (Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Kelley, 1967). Heider (1958) has identified two forms of attribution: internal attribution and external attribution. Internal attribution deals with the way a person behaves in a certain way because of something about themselves, whereas external attribution deals with a person behaving in a certain way because of the situation. In terms of blaming the victim in a rape case, if people are using the internal attribution than they will blame the victim for what happened to her/him, but if people are engaging in external attribution, than the victim will less likely be blamed for what happened because there is more emphasis put on the situation (Rotter, 1996).

The defensive attribution hypothesis has also been used to explain why people engage in victim blaming. The defensive attribution hypothesis explains why people

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either increase blame or reduce blame to a victim depending on the person's similarity to the victim and the likelihood of them becoming victims of the same situation (Grubb & Turner, 2012). This attribution allows people to protect themselves from being blamed if they find themselves in the same situation as the victim.

Aguiar, Vala, Correia, and Pereira (2008) looked at the effects of belief in a just world on how people viewed victims from either an ingroup or an outgroup through two studies. In the first study the researchers showed the participants a video of a child who was the victim of an accident. The child was presented as either a member of the participants' ingroup (Portuguese) or a member of their outgroup (Gypsy). The results from this first study found that the participants' belief in a just world was threatened more when the story depicted an ingroup member, whereas the outgroup story did not have an influence on the participants' belief in a just world. This study also found that the participants were less likely to assign blame to the victim because he was a child.

The second study wanted to eliminate the effects of social norms when it comes to blaming children that was encountered in the first study, and to comprehend people's reactions to victims from ingroups and outgroups. In this study, the victim was once again portrayed as a Portuguese person (ingroup) or a Gypsy (outgroup). There was also a non-victim story shown to the participants. This study resulted in the same results about the participants' belief in a just world when it comes to the ingroup and outgroup members as the first study. The second study also found that the non-victim ingroup member was not as threatening as the victimized ingroup member. Because sex

is being looked at during this study, ingroup/outgroup membership is important

because maybe men will empathize with the male rape perpetrator, and women will

empathize with the female rape victim.

Grubb and Turner (2012) examined key factors that influence people's attitudes

towards rape victims. They looked at the effect of rape myths, gender roles, and

substance use on attributions of blame in a rape. While reviewing the literature they

found several findings. They found that men display higher rape myth acceptance than

women. Men attribute more blame to victims than women do. Women who do not

follow traditional gender roles are assigned more blame compared to women who

follow traditional gender roles. And lastly, women who drink alcohol before their rape

are attributed more blame compared to women who did not drink.

Jones and Aronson (1973) examined attribution of fault to a rape victim in terms

of the victim's respectability. They wanted to know if a socially respectable person

(married woman versus a virgin versus a divorcee) was more likely to be seen as being

at fault for what happened to them. Jones and Aronson based their study on the

assumptions of a belief in a just world, and that the more respectable the victim is

perceived to be, the greater the need to attribute fault to their actions than it is to

attribute fault to their character. They also looked at how people handed out conviction

rates to a defendant who injured a socially respectable person. What they found was

that if a woman was married or a virgin when she was raped, she was attributed more

blame for what happened to her compared to a divorcee. This finding supports the

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belief in a just world, because the respondents were viewing the woman (married or a virgin) as having done something to cause their rape, because they did not deserve the rape based on their character. They also found that people sentenced the defendant to a longer jail time for the rape of a married woman than the rape of a divorcee.

All of these studies go to show that people engage in victim blaming by assigning some or all of the blame to rape victims for what happened to them. It seems that no matter what the woman was doing, how she acted, or what her social standing in society is, there is no safe haven from being a victim of receiving some blame for their rape. Belief in a just world and attribution effects go hand in hand when activating reasons why people blame the victim of a rape.

This leads to the next hypothesis and sub hypotheses:

H4: People who engage in belief in a just world will feel that the victim deserved what happened to them.

H4a: People who believe in a just world will prefer the story and comments that are critical of the victim to the story and comments that are critical of the perpetrators.

Because belief in a just world is a defense that helps people feel less vulnerable to harm, it should be stronger in people who are more vulnerable to sexual assault. Thus,

H4b: Because women are more likely to be victimized by rape than men, women should show greater belief in a just world in judging the victim of rape portrayed in the story.

Identification

Identification is the process of being able to take the place of a character in a narrative. Identification is the process of how people can become engrossed with a character and can seem to feel the same emotions that the character is experiencing. When a person has identified with a character in the narrative, their mental resources are focused on the narrative and the situation that the character is facing more so than a person who has not identified with a character (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). Identification usually takes place with one character that the reader finds to be the protagonist of the narrative (Maccoby & Wilson, 1957). Even though majority of people only identify with the main protagonist, some people can identify with multiple characters in the narrative.

When people are able to identify with a character they are able to see themselves as acting just like the character. By identifying, the reader(s) are able to empathize with the character. By being able to empathize with the character, the reader is able to take on the same emotion(s) as the character and essentially become the character (Oately, 1999). If the character is experiencing positive feelings like happiness, then the readers should also feel happiness. By being able to feel the same emotions as the character that is being identified with, the reader is able to experience the character's emotions when his/her plans go as planned or when they go awry (Oatley, 1999). When a reader is able to identify with a character she/he is able to attune to the same cues as the character in the narrative (Maccoby & Wilson, 1957). This attuning to

the same cues as the character allows the reader to feel that they are actually a part of the narrative in the "body" of the character. The attuning to the same cues also helps to facilitate transportation into the narrative by helping the readers get lost into the narrative (Cohen, 2001).

Chory-Assad and Cicchirillo (2005) looked at the effect of people's empathy and affective orientation on their identification with their favorite television character. From their study they found that most viewers identified with someone of the same sex as them. They also found that empathy and affective orientation (actively being able to consider and use one's emotions to direct communication) had a greater effect when it came to predicting if the participants were engaging in cognitive-emotional identity (pathway through which people are able to experience the events in the text as if it were happening to them and share the character's emotions). The results suggest that it is easier for people to spread cognitive interpersonal tendencies to characters on television compared to spreading affective cognitive tendencies.

Maccoby and Wilson (1957) conducted two studies that looked at how people identified and learned from movies. In particular importance to this present paper is study two where the researchers looked how sex influenced identification. The researchers showed a movie with both a male and female as the main characters to a group of 7th graders. The study showed that the boys remembered more of the material that just focused on the male character, while the girls remembered more of the material that dealt with just the female character. The results show that when

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identification and relevance are acting together, there will be a greater difference

between boys' and girls' identification; and when identification and relevance are acting

against each other, there will be no significant difference between boys' and girls'

identification.

Media Effects

The media have been shown to have an effect on people's rape myth

acceptance. The earliest known studies that looked at media effects on rape myth

acceptance were done using pornography (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993; Russell,

1998; Zillman and Bryant, 1982; Ohbuchi, Ikeda, & Takeuchi 1994).

Helen Benedict (1992) looked at how rape myths and acceptance of those myths

were framed in media coverage of four rape cases. In her book, she looked at a case of a

wife who was raped by her husband, a woman who was gang raped by several men in a

bar, a woman who was raped and murdered by an acquaintance, and a woman who was

raped in the park while she was jogging.

In these stories, Benedict looked at whether the media portrayed the women as

either a virgin or a vamp. A virgin is a woman who is depicted as "either pure or

innocent, a true victim of attacked by monsters" and a vamp is described as "a wanton

female who provoked the assailant with her sexuality" (p. 18). These labels are based on

rape myths that are found throughout the media coverage of rape cases. In her analysis

of the media coverage of these rape stories, Benedict found that in three of the four

cases (the rape by the husband, the gang rape, and the rape and murder) the woman

was depicted as a vamp.

It was only in the case of the woman who was raped while she was jogging that

she was seen as the virgin. The media did not dig into her past sexual experiences, use

her name, criticize her morals, or blame her for being in a park after dark by herself. The

victim had several rape myths that were working in her favor that lead to the virgin

label: she did not know her rapists, weapons were used, she was of a different class and

race than her rapists, she was in the higher standing class, and majority of the people

covering the case were of the same class and race as the victim.

Social Media and Commentary

Social media is a new field that has arisen out the mass media field. With the

breadth and depth of the Internet, and it being integrated into people's everyday life, it

has become a new way of influencing people and changing how people receive their

information. Social media is changing the way people seek out information about a

variety of subjects, from which professors to take classes from, what person(s) to order

from on eBay, and where we get our news. Using social media places people in contact

with multiple sources of influence (Walther et al., 2010).

There have been a few studies that look at how online comments affect people's

perceptions of what they are reading. One of those studies was conducted by Walther,

DeAndrea, Kim, and Anthony (2010). They were examining the effects of online

comments on people's perceptions of antimarijuana public service announcements

(PSAs) that are posted on YouTube. The researchers showed the participants one of four

PSAs that were uploaded to YouTube and the comments that were over the PSAs. The

comments were taken from actual antimarijuana PSAs. What the researchers found

from their study was that if the comments where for the PSAs or against the PSAs

effected the participants' perceptions of the PSAs but not their marijuana attitudes. The

results also showed that when the combination of the participants identifying with the

comments and if the comments where for the PSAs or against them affected both the

PSAs and people's marijuana attitude. If the participants identified with the commenters

and the comments where positive about the PSAs, while extoling the harmful effects of

marijuana, then the PSAs were given a better evaluation and the participants' views of

the harmful effects of marijuana were increased. However if the participants identified

with the commenters and the comments about the PSAs were negative, while praising

marijuana use, then the PSAs were given a poor evaluation, and the participants viewed

marijuana use as acceptable.

Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, and Shulman (2009) examined how people

made judgments of other people's Facebook page from self-generated comments

compared to other-generated comments. The study was done in two experiments: the

first experiment looked at opinions of extraversion, while the second experiment looked

at opinions of physical attraction. Both experiments used fake profiles to show the self-

generated and other-generated comments.

In experiment one, extroversion was defined as "an individual's outgoingness and eagerness to interact with other people" (p.235). There were 115 undergraduates that participated. All of the participants had their own Facebook page. There was a fake profile page created that had a profile picture of either a male or female, number of friends, and a name (all of this information was consist on all versions of the fake Facebook pages). Self-generated information was given in the about me section, interests, activities, and other components that someone wants to display (this information was different for each version of the fake Facebook pages). Other-generated information was displayed as comments posted on the wall by friends. What the researchers found was that other-generated information had an effect on the participants' personality impressions. For example if a self-generated comment spoke to how the profile user was shy, while the other-generated comments spoke to how they were not shy, then the profile users' perceived extraversion was increased

Experiment two had 125 undergraduate participants complete the experiment. The Facebook page showed the same name, picture, and number of friends as the page used in experiment one. The self- and other-generated comments in this experiment focused on the profile owners' physical attractiveness. There was a manipulation check done to make sure that the self- and other-generated comments were inciting the intended physical attractiveness perceptions. The manipulation check ruled out any interaction effects of subject sex and profile owner sex, or any interaction effects between the message conditions and the terms for attractiveness and honesty ratings.

The researchers found that other-generated comments outweighed self-generated comments.

Edwards, Edwards, Qing, and Wahl (2007) examined how online word of mouth comments influences peoples' perceptions of a professor and their attitudes towards learning course content. The researchers used undergraduates as their sample population. The results from the study was that the undergrads who received positive online word of mouth comments about a professor found the professor more credible and attractive compared to undergrads who received negative word of mouth comments. This result shows the impact that word of mouth comments on the Internet can have on people's expectations and can influence their choices.

This leads to a research question that this study will aim to address:

RQ: Will social commentary that contradicts the story negate the effects of the story on rape myth acceptance?

Social Proof

Social proof is how we determine what is the correct way to behave based off of what other people think is the correct way to behave. Even though people are observing other people to see how they show behave, those same people are also observing others to see how they should behave. The cycle can lead to pluralistic ignorance because everyone is looking at everyone else for how they should react in a situation, especially if the situation is unclear (Cialdini, 2001). Cialdini (2001) details social proof in his book in the context of copycat suicides, and a doomsday cult in Chicago.

When stories of suicides are prominently covered in news stories, the rate of car and plane crashes went up (Phillips, 1979). Phillips (1979) found that when news stories focused solely on singular suicides, there were more wrecks where just one person died; when the news stories focused on suicide-murder, there were more wrecks that involved multiple deaths. Phillips also found that if the news stories focused on young people committing suicides, then the people in the wrecks were young as well; and if the news stories focused on older adults committing suicides, then the people in the wrecks were older adults. Phillips attributed this finding to what he called the "Werther effect". The "Werther effect" is where people mimic someone who has committed suicide. The people who commit suicide after reading these news articles about suicide are displaying social proof by looking to the people who have committed suicide as behaving in manner that is acceptable.

In Chicago, there was a doomsday cult that believed the world was going to be destroyed by a flood, but the members of the cult were going to be saved from the flood by spiritual beings called the Guardians (Festinger, Riecken, & Schacther, 1964). Before the flood was supposed to happen, the cult did not talk to reporters about their group or the flood, and neither did they want to bring attention to themselves. On the day that the flood was supposed to take place and the Guardians were to rescue them, the members were all waiting together in silence. After the time of the flood and rescue had come and gone, one of the leaders of the group decided that she must call the newspaper and explain why the flood was not happening and to try and recruit new

members. Once the other members saw their leader publicly talking about the cult, they started calling newspapers and television stations themselves. This turn of events show that an important principle of social proof was at work: the more people who find an idea correct, the more a person will subscribe to that idea because it's correct (Cialdini, 2001).

There have also been studies conducted that look at social influence online among different people. One of these studies was conducted by David, Cappella, and Fishbein (2006). They wanted to see how online chatting would impact adolescents' thoughts about antimarijuana advertisements. They have 535 seventh and twelfth grade students participate in their study. The participants were placed into one of four conditions: chat with strong argument ads, chat with weak argument ads, no chat with strong argument ads, and no chat with weak arguments ads. The results of the study were that no matter the argument strength of the antimarijuana ads, as long as there was a chat component, the participants had more promarijuana beliefs compared to those who didn't have a chat component. The participants who had a chat component also showed more subjective normative beliefs compared to those participants without a chat component. A reason for the participants exhibiting a greater subjective normative belief is because they felt more pressure from the group chat to have promarijuana beliefs.

Another study looking at the effects of social influence online was done by Huffaker (2010). This study wanted to see how the communication behaviors of online

leaders. Online leaders are defined as "those who have the ability to trigger feedback, spark conversations within the community, or even shape the ways that other members of a group "talk" about a topic" (p. 594). The sample for this study was 33,540 users who added 632,622 messages to 16 different discussion groups in Google Group over a 2 year period. There were four main topic areas that made up the 16 discussion groups: politics, health and support, recreation and hobby, and science and technology. From these four topics, the 16 discussion groups were created. Some examples of the discussion groups are breast cancer, blues music, chemistry, and gun rights. The results of this study found that online leaders had the ability to influence others by the number of posts and replies their comments have generated, their credibility, and the number of links to other comments from other people.

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

Thanks to social media, rape cases are able to be posted to the internet where anyone can comment about the case; and how the media covers and frames the rape cases effects how people's rape myths are formed. Blaming the victim and internal attributions made of rape victims help people feel less vulnerable. Taken all of this together, the aims of this study are to examine how framing of news reports and the posted commentary effect judgments of the crime, the victim, and the perpetrator.

METHOD

The Sample

One hundred and ninety-one undergrads participated in the pretest portion of the study. Out of those 191 participants, 108 participants completed the posttest portion of the study. Two participants were dropped because their pre and posttest were not able to be linked, otherwise all remaining data was usable. Majority of the participants were female (84% female, 16% male). The average age was 20.26. Majority of the participants were sophomores (40%). Majority of participants self-identified as Caucasian (81%). Asians comprised 9% of the sample, African Americans comprised 3% of the sample, and participants who self-identified as more than one race comprised 6% of the sample.

Experimental Design

The study was a 2 (sex of participant) X 2 (framing: victim-focused vs. perpetrator-focused) X 3 (comments: pro-victim vs. pro-perpetrator vs. no comments) between-subjects study. The independent variables of this study were media framing and comment valence. These variables were important because we wanted to determine if how the media frames a rape story will have an effect on people's perception of who is to blame, the victim or the perpetrator. The dependent variables of

this study were judgments of the victim and the perpetrator, evaluations of the messages, evaluations of the comments, rape myth acceptance, and beliefs in a just world.

Survey Instruments

All of the participants were given the same surveys. There was a pretest and a posttest. The pretest was used to access the participants' pre-existing rape myth acceptance level and their belief in a just world. The posttest was used to access their rape myth acceptance levels, belief in a just world, and their perceptions of the victim/perpetrator, the media stories, the comments on the media stories, identification, and guilt. The survey also included demographic information (age, sex, and year in school). These demographic questions were important so that we could see if sex is a moderating factor in the analysis. We also wanted to make sure that we could generalize our findings to the general population from our survey pool.

Pretest Measures

Rape Myth Acceptance

To gauge the participants' rape myth acceptance, we will be using the Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) scale (Burt, 1980) (See Appendix A). This is a scale that has been used several times in rape myth studies (Krahe, 1988; Margolin, Miller, & Moran, 1989; Carmody & Washington, 2001). The scale was modified to reflect the language and times that we live in now. According to Burt (1980), the Rape Myth Acceptance

Scale has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of .88. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .84.

Belief in a Just World

The scale to gauge the participants' belief in a just world, was the Belief in a Just World (BJW) scale (Rubin & Peplau, 1975); we also added some questions that deal with rape that were not on the original scale (See Appendix B). The BJW is a 20 item scale that was constructed in 1975 to see how people view the world as a just place. The scale was a 6-point Likert scale. The scale was comprised of 11 questions that pertain to the world being a just place, and nine of the questions that focused on how the world is an unjust place. When interpreting the participants' results on the BLW scale, we needed to reverse-code the nine unjust world questions, so that we could sum the total of those questions and then added them to the 11 just world questions to get a total number for people's belief in a just world. The questions that were added to the scale about rape addressed people's feelings about women being raped and about the perpetrators. Examples of these types of questions were "do you think that women who are drinking deserve what happens to them if they are raped", and "women who wear too tight or too short clothes, they deserve what happens to them if they are raped". According to Rubin and Peplau (1973), the Belief in a Just World Scale has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of .79. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .54.

Posttest Measures

Judgment Questionnaire

To test the participants' judgments of attributions of responsibility, a modified version of the Judgment Questionnaire (Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011) was used (See Appendix E). The Judgment Questionnaire contained 12 items that either showed whether the participants were assigning blame to the accused or to the accuser. The first two questions used a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from not at all responsible to completely responsible. The remaining 10 questions used a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from not at all to completely. Some examples of the questions that the Judgment Questionnaire ask were "Please indicate how confident you are that the boy is innocent" and "Please indicate how confident you are that the girl contributed to what happened that night". According to Hammond, Berry, and Rodriguez (2011), the original Judgment Questionnaire has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of .88. In the current study, we separated the questions into either guilt for the boy or guilt for the girl. The Cronbach's alpha for the boy's guilt was .53 for six items, and the Cronbach's alpha for the girl's guilt was .90 for six items.

Identification

Identification was measured by a modified version of the Identification Scale that Tal-Or and Cohen (2010) used in their study (See Appendix C). The scale consisted of five questions from the original scale that used a 7-point Likert scale. This scale was administered after the participants viewed the story and the comments. The questions

on the scale were the same for the victim and the perpetrator, with the only difference being the insertion of the word "source" in the questions. The word "source" was a place holder for either the victim or the perpetrator depending on which story the participants had read. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .86.

Manipulation Checks

The questions that dealt with the story and the comments measured the perceived bias, persuasiveness of the story, and to make sure that the participants were paying attention to the story and comments (See Appendix D). These questions used a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree. Some of the questions that were asked were "the message presented in the story was clear", "the story was about an important topic", "the story was compelling story", "the comments reflected my opinion of the story", and "I was more in agreement with the comments that showed support for the victim/perpetrator".

The rating of the stories and the comments used a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 being not at all and 7 being completely, that was placed at the end of the questionnaire (See Appendix D). Since the participants were lead to believe that they were evaluating the story on the content and delivery, we used this scale to access that. The participants were lead to believe that they were evaluating the comments to see if the comments went along with the story, so asking them to evaluate the comments was necessary. By having the participants evaluate the stories and comments, we could see how the participants viewed the material in terms of their belief in a just world. There were also

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questions that saw how favorable the story and the comments were to the victim and the perpetrator. This let us see if the participants were paying attention to the story and comments.

Story Creation

There were two different rape stories for this study (See Appendices F-K). There was a story supporting the victim and one supporting the perpetrator. The stories were modified from media outlets that covered recent rape cases. The stories focused on the sexual assault of a 17 year old girl.

The web articles were made into PDFs that were uploaded into the survey. The web articles gave a lot of identifying information about the victim and the perpetrator; those details were scrubbed from the final articles that were used in the survey. The names of the victim and perpetrator, the city that they are from, and their pictures were all removed. Removing the names of the victim and perpetrators was done because all the involved parties were under the age of 18. Even though we removed all of the identifying information from these two web articles, the style and the overall original message was left intact.

Concerning the comments that are on both the story about the victim and the perpetrator, they were actual comments from the same media outlets that were used to create the stories: they were modified for the purpose of this study, along with some comments that were created. The rationale behind creating comments is that there were no comments that were in favor of the perpetrators (all of the original comments

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focused on supporting the victim or supporting her being in trouble for breaking a law).

There were 10 comments chosen to be part of the study. The comments were

presented with fictional user names that were sex and race neutral. The commenters'

names were created and then pretested to see which names were ambiguous for sex

and race. The names that were the most ambiguous were used for this study. The

comments were broken up into five categories: for the victim, against the victim, for the

perpetrator, against the perpetrator, and no comments. The comments mirrored each

other in terms of length, grammar, and number of comments; they only differed in their

support for the victim or the perpetrator.

Even though there were only two stories used in this study, the stories had three

versions of comments. There were four conditions for this study: two with a

perpetrator-blaming frame and two with a victim-blaming frame. These were crossed

with manipulations of the valence of comments (pro victim, pro perpetrator, or no

comments). The length of the story and the length of the comments were as close in

length as possible so that there was a balance between the materials that were being

read.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from C-REP during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Once participants signed up for the study they were granted access to take the pretest.

Either the Sunday or Monday before the participants were to complete the posttest,

they received a follow-up email to remind them to sign up for the second half of the

survey. The participants were allowed to complete the pretest online through Qualtrics, and completed the second part of the study in a computer lab. Qualtrics was set up so that it gave the participants different response ID codes for the pretest and the posttest so that both parts of their survey were able to be linked together. Before beginning the study, participants were shown a consent screen.

If the participants chose to begin the study, they were given the pretest questions that pertained to rape myth acceptance and belief in a just world. This part of the study took no more than 10 minutes to complete. Upon completion, the participants were emailed a link for the second part of the survey seven to ten days later to finish the rest of the study.

When the participants came back to finish up the study they were given one of the rape stories with the comments at random. Qualtrics was set up to randomize the stories and the corresponding comments, so that each participant was given a different story and comments. It took the participants less than 10 minutes to read the story and the comments.

After finishing up the readings, the participants were asked questions about rape myth acceptance, belief in a just world, questions about the story and comments, the personal attribute inventory, identification, and judgment. It took the participants approximately 25 minutes to complete this portion of the study. Once the participants finished answering these questions, they were asked demographic questions. At the end

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of the demographics questions, participants were shown the screen that debriefs them

over the real reason for the survey, and thanked them for their time and attention.

RESULTS

The pretest data were examined to ensure that pretest participants were responding accurately. Data were examined to make that all participants had reasonable variability in responses across questions. Pretest and posttest records were combined using the participant-generated code. Two records were unable to be matched. The data for those participants were deleted.

Descriptive analyses

Correlations, means, and standard deviations among key outcome variables are presented in Table 1. There were nine males in the perpetrator story condition, and eight men in the victim story condition. There were 47 females in the perpetrator story condition, and 42 in the victim story condition. Identification was heavily correlated with transportation, which is to be expected since these measures are conceptually related (Cohen, 2001). You have to be transported into a story to be able to identify with a character. Rape myth acceptance before reading the stories and also after reading the stories, had a direct effect on the attributions of guilt to the perpetrator and the victim. This shows that rape myth acceptance are inherent beliefs of the participants. The story condition had a direct effect on transportation, identification, and the attribution of guilt to the perpetrator. This is to be expected because what story the participants read affected how much they were transported in the story, which in turns affects how much

they were able to identify with the victim or the perpetrator. This correlation also shows

that when the participants read the stories, they attributed more guilt to the

perpetrator.

Table 1 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Key Outcome Variables

Outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Belief in a Just World Pretest	1	.679**	.049	.028	-.133	-.147	-.043	.031	-.104
2. Belief in a Just World Posttest	.679**	1	.057	.153	-.116	-.079	-.035	.159	-.094
3. Rape Myth acceptance pretest	.049	.057	1	.790**	-.152	-.101	-.275**	.529**	.056
4. Rape Myth Acceptance Posttest	.028	.153	.790**	1	-.202*	-.126	-.319**	.663**	.036
5. Transportation	-.133	-.116	-.152	-.202*	1	.951**	.166	-.376**	.275**
6. Identification	-.147	-.079	-.101	-.126	.951**	1	.149	-.277**	.299**
7.	-.043	-.035	-.275**	-.319**	.166	.149	1	-.380**	.271**

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Continued

Table 1: Continued

Attribution of Guilt to the Perpetrator									
8. Attribution of Guilt to the Victim	.031	.159	.529**	.663**	-.3.	-.277**	-.380**	1	.015
9. Story Condition	-.104	-.094	.056	.036	.275**	.299**	.271**	.015	1
M	4.18	4.25	2.14	2.05	4.43	4.50	5.15	3.18	.47
SD	.50	.54	.59	.57	1.20	1.28	.93	1.41	.51

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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Hypotheses Tests

Sex effects: H1 and H1a

A repeated measures analysis of variance was run to determine the effect of sex on rape myth acceptance. The design of this analysis was 2(rape myth before story exposure) X 2 (sex) X 2 (story condition). The rape myth factor was within subjects, and the others were between subjects. We examined Levene's test of equality of variance and there was no significant effect for rape myth acceptance in the pretest, F(3,102) = 1.82, *p* = .148, or for rape myth acceptance after the story, F(3,102) = .57, *p* = .64. There were no outliers in the data. On average, there was a significant effect of time such that after viewing the stories (M = 2.17), participants tended to adhere to rape myth less than prior to the stories (M = 2.92), F (1,102) = 6.35, *p* = .013, η =.059. There was a significant effect of sex, F(1,102) = 7.53, p = .007, η .069, indicating that across the two time measures, men were more likely to endorse rape myth (M= 2.42) then women (M = 2.03). No other effects in this analysis were significant. There was no overall effect of the story on rape myth acceptance, F(1,102) = .04, *p* =.84, η = .000. Nor did the story and sex interact, F(1,102) = .07, *p*= .79, η = .001. Thus, H1 is supported.

H1a said that the sex effect would be due to women's greater identification with the victim. An independent t-test was run comparing men and women on identification and there was no main effect, *t*(104) = .062, *p*= .95. Because there were so few men in the sample, we examined women's identification with the victim for the perpetrator framed story (M= 4.14, SD = 1.44) compared to the victim framed story (M = 4.89, SD=

1.08), $t(87) = 2.74$, $p = .007$. This indicates women identified more with the victim in the victim framed story. We conducted a mediation analysis using the process procedure (Hayes, 2013) on the female sample, and found that the effect of the story on posttest rape myth acceptance was not mediated by the identification with the victim. Thus, H1a is not supported.

Rape Myth Acceptance and Belief in a Just World: H2, H3, and RQ

A regression was run to evaluate H2 and H3 to evaluate belief in a just world with a regression in which just world belief posttest were predicted by story condition, pro perpetrator comments, pro victim comments, sex of participants, and pretest just world beliefs. No significant effects were found. Another regression was run to evaluate the rape myth acceptance in H2 and H3. Rape myth acceptance posttest was predicted by story condition, pro perpetrator comments, pro victim comments, sex of participants, and pretest rape myth acceptance. The only significant predictor of posttest rape myth acceptance was rape myth acceptance pretest, $\beta = .78$, $t = 12.49$, $p = .000$. Thus, neither H2 nor H3 were supported. It was determined that there was not an interaction between the story and comments from the aforementioned repeated-measures ANOVA that was conducted on rape myth acceptance. This research question was not supported by the data.

Belief in a Just World: H4, H4a, and H4b

A multiple regression was run predicating attributions on the perpetrator. Predictors were story condition, sex, comments that were pro perpetrator and pro

victim, and pretest just world beliefs. Just world beliefs were not associated with guilt for the perpetrator, β = -.029, p = .76. The only significant predictor in this model was story condition, indicating that the victim framed story lead to greater judgments of guilt for the perpetrator, β =.29, t = 2.99, p =.004. The comparable analysis predicating judgment of guilt for the victim revealed only an effect of sex, β = -.24, t = -2.46, p = .016, indicating that males were more likely to attribute blame to the girl.

We analyzed our variable of message evaluation as predicted by just world beliefs and moderated by story condition, and there were no significant effects. Thus, H4a was not supported. We evaluated H4b using a process model in which story condition and sex were entered as moderators of the effect of just world beliefs on attributions of guilt for the victim. No significant effects were obtained. Thus, H4b was not supported.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to examine how social media influence's people's perceptions of rape victims and perpetrators. We experimentally predicted exposure to rape and perpetrator stories and comments, rape myth acceptance, and judgments of guilt for the victim and the perpetrator, and belief in a just world. We also examined the effect of sex on rape myth acceptance, and whether sex effects will lead to greater identification with the victim. Victim and perpetrator stories along with victim comments, perpetrator comments, or no comments were used as the stimuli before completing the measurement instrument.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, results of the repeated measures analysis of variance showed that women did adhere less to rape myth attitudes compared to men. This finding is consistent with previous research done on rape myth acceptance, which has shown that women hold less rape myth attitudes compared to men (Burt, 1980; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). Hypothesis 1a showed that men and women did not differ in terms of identifying with the victim. This finding is not consistent with previous research that people would identify with a source that is like them (i.e. men will identify with men, and women will identify with women) (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010; Maccoby & Wilson, 1957; Oately, 1999; Cohen, 2001). This finding could be because men did not want to see themselves in the role of a perpetrator and women did not want to see

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themselves as victims of a sexual assault. The participants could have put up a

psychological wall between themselves and the perpetrator and the victim. This

psychological wall could have allowed them to see the perpetrator or victim as someone

they would never be because they would never put themselves in the kind of situation

the perpetrator and victim were in.

Hypothesis 2 showed that there were no significant effects for belief in a just

world when the story was framed positively for the perpetrator and negatively for the

victim. Hypothesis 3 showed that there were also no significant effects for belief in a

just world when they story was framed positively for the victim and negatively for the

perpetrator. These findings are not consistent with previous research that shows that

people who strongly believe in belief in a just world will see the victim as the one to

blame, while people who do not believe in a just world would see the perpetrator as the

one to blame (Murray et al., 2005; Correia et al., 2007; Grubb & Turner, 2012). A

potential reason for these findings are that belief in just world was something that the

participants did not feel one way or another about. The participants could have been

more on the moderate side instead of being on one end of the extremes. This

moderation could have led to the participants clicking random answers and not really

processing what the questions were asking them. Another potential reason why belief in

a just world did not work is that the scale is from the 1970s. The scale could have asked

some questions that the participants did not relate to. Since the participants may not

have been able to relate to some of the questions, this scale did not produce the effects that were expected.

Hypothesis 2 showed that there were no significant effects for rape myth acceptance when the story was framed positively for the perpetrator and negatively for the victim. Hypothesis 3 showed that there were also no significant effects for rape myth acceptance when they story was framed positively for the victim and negatively for the perpetrator. These findings are not consistent with the previous research that shows that if a story is framed positively for the victim that people would not engage in rape myth acceptance, and that if the story was framed positively for the perpetrator then people would engage in rape myth acceptance (Benedict, 1992). A reason for this finding is that rape myth acceptance is an attitude that is taught over time and will need more than one exposure to a news article to counteract the existing rape myth acceptance. Rape myth acceptance is something that people may not even know they are engaging in, because it's more of a subconscious way of thinking. This acceptance is so prevalent that people may not even want to change their way of thinking because it goes against the grain. Most people, women and men, exhibit rape myth acceptance, and to go against what is the social norm of our time may cause one to have anxiety or feel like they no longer belong to the majority.

The research question did not show an interaction between the story and comments. This could be because the comments were not extreme enough to elicit a response from the participants. The comments were not like what you would normally

see online. The comments in this study were more moderate in the language used, than

one would normally find online. The comments were also reflective of each other (i.e.

the comments for the victim mirrored the comments for the perpetrator). This would

not normally happen in an actual online setting.

LIMITATIONS/FUTURE DIRECTIONS

One limitation of the current study was the number of males that participated in the study. There were only 17 males that participated in the study. Future research is needed to replicate the finding of men attributing more guilt to the perpetrator than women, with more men participating in the study. It is possible that this low number of males were impacted by the pro victim comments, more than normal.

Another limitation was the stories. The fact that there was no identifying information (i.e. names and locations) available in the stories possibly made the participants feel less empathy towards the victim. If the victim was named then maybe the participants would have identified more with the victim. Further research is needed to replicate the study but have the stories name the victim.

The comments that accompanied the story were not extreme enough to elicit the response we were looking for. The comments in this study were created to be in the middle of a spectrum so as not to create interference with the stories. Normally when you see comments accompanying an article on the Internet, they range the spectrum from being right-wing to liberal. The comments also had no identifying information about the commenters. The commenters' names were all sex neutral and did not give any information about their hobbies, interests, or themselves. This is a problem because most of the commenters' names always gives a clue about them as a person. The lack of

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identifying information in the commenters' names could have led to a lack of

identification with the comments. This could be because the participants did not see

themselves in the commenters. Future research needs to have comments that are on

the far end of the spectrum, and also commenters' names need to have some

identifying information about them so that researchers can see if people identify with

the comments.

Another limitation to this study was that identification was not parsed out more

in the questionnaire. The reason for this was that the identification measure used in this

study was taken from another study that looked at how people identified with

characters in a book. The identification measures also did not explicitly state whether

they were dealing with the victim or the perpetrator. The measures just used the word

"source" as a stand in when talking about the victim or the perpetrator. This was done

so that all the identification measures could be shown to all the participants. In

hindsight, this was a terrible decision. In the future, research needs to use a better

identification measures to assess how participants identify with the victim or the

perpetrator.

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Appendix A: **Rape Myth Acceptance Scale**

1. A woman who goes to the apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

2. One reason that women falsely report a rape is that they frequently have a need to call attention to themselves.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

3. Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

4. When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops, they are just asking for trouble.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

5. In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

6. If a girl engages in kissing and touching, and lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

7. Women who get raped while out by themselves get what they deserve.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

8. A woman who thinks she is too good to talk to guys deserves to be taught a lesson.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

9. Many women have an unconscious wish to be raped and may set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

10. If a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with a man there, she should be considered "fair game" to other men who want to have sex with her.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

11. What percentage of women who report a rape would you say are lying because they are angry and want to get back at the man they accuse?

Almost All   About 3/4   About Half   About 1/4   Almost none

12. What percentage of reported rapes would you guess were merely invented by women who discovered they were pregnant and wanted to protect their own reputation?

Almost All   About 3/4   About Half   About 1/4   Almost none

13. A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were:

your best friend?

Always   Frequently   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

an Indian woman?
Always   Frequently   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

a neighborhood woman?
Always   Frequently   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

a young boy?
Always   Frequently   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

a Black woman?
Always   Frequently   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

a White woman?
Always   Frequently   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

Appendix B: Belief in a Just World

1. Basically, the world is a just place.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly					Strongly
Disagree					Agree

2. The political candidate who sticks up for his principles rarely gets elected.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly					Strongly
Disagree					Agree

3. I've found that a person rarely deserves the reputation he or she has.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly					Strongly
Disagree					Agree

4. People who find money in the street have often done a good deed earlier that day.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly					Strongly
Disagree					Agree

5. It is a common occurrence for a guilty person to get off free in American courts.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly					Strongly
Disagree					Agree

6. Movies in which good triumphs over evil are unrealistic.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly					Strongly
Disagree					Agree

7. Students almost always deserve the grades they receive in school.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly					Strongly
Disagree					Agree

8. Crime doesn't pay.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

9. When parents punish their children, it is almost always for good reason.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

10. Although there may be some exceptions, good people often lead lives of suffering.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

11. It is often impossible for a person to receive a fair trial in the USA.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

12. In almost any business or profession, people who do their job well rise to the top.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

13. Although evil men may hold political power for a while, in the general course of history good wins out.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

14. By and large, people deserve what they get.

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

15. American parents tend to overlook the things most to be admired in their children.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree

16. It is rare for an innocent man to be wrongly sent to jail.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree

Appendix C: **Identification Scale**

1. I think I understood the source well

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

2. I understood the events in the message the way the source understood them

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

3. While reading, I felt like the source felt

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

4. While reading, I could really "get inside" the source's head

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

5. I tend to understand why the source did what he/she did

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

6. I could image myself in the situation I was reading

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

7. I would like to know more about what happened to the source

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

Appendix D: **Message Evaluation**

For each of the following questions, please think about the ***news article and comments you just read***. Please **circle** the **NUMBER** that best corresponds with your opinion about the news article and comments.

1. The message presented in the script was clear.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

2. The message was about an important topic.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

3. The message is intended for college-aged people.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

4. The message is intended for people like me.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

5. The message told a compelling story.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

6. The message contained a lot of important information.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

7. The comments reflected my opinion of the story.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Strongly
   Disagree

Strongly
   Agree

8. I was more in agreement with the comments that showed support for the victim.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Strongly
   Disagree

Strongly
   Agree

9. I was more in agreement with the comments that showed support for the perpetrator.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Strongly
   Disagree

Strongly
   Agree

10. How favorable was the story to the victim?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Not At All

Completely

11. How favorable was the story to the perpetrator?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Not At All

Completely

12. How favorable were the comments to the victim?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Not At All

Completely

13. How favorable were the comments to the perpetrator?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Not At All

Completely

14. The news article I read was about
The Victim   The Perpetrator

15. The comments I read were about the

Victim   Perpetrator   No Comments

Appendix E: **Judgment Questionnaire**

1. Please indicate the boy's overall guilt/responsibility for the events in question.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All						Completely
Responsible						Responsible

2. Please indicate the girl's overall guilt/responsibility for the events in question.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All						Completely
Responsible						Responsible

3. Please indicate how confident you are that the boy is innocent.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not At All | | | | | | Completely |

4. Please indicate how confident you are that the boy is not guilty of rape/sexual assault because he only did what the girl wanted.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not At All | | | | | | Completely |

5. Please indicate how confident you are that the boy is guilty.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not At All | | | | | | Completely |

6. Please indicate how confident you are that the girl contributed to what happened that night.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not At All | | | | | | Completely |

7. To what extent were the boy's actions too forceful?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not At All | | | | | | Completely |

8. To what extent did the girl act carelessly or lead the boy on?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Not At All   Completely

9. To what extent could the girl have foreseen the events of that night?
                1   2   3   4   5   6   7
                Not At All   Completely

10. To what extent is the girl responsible for the sexual encounter?
                1   2   3   4   5   6   7
                Not At All   Completely

11. To what extent is the boy responsible for the sexual encounter?
                1   2   3   4   5   6   7
                Not At All   Completely

12. To what extent was the sexual encounter mutually agreed upon and consented to?
                1   2   3   4   5   6   7
                Not At All   Completely

Appendix F: Rape Perpetrator Story with No Comments

17-Year-Old Sexual Assault Victim, Ruined Attacker's Life, Lawyer Says

A teenager, who was sexually assaulted and then threatened with jail for naming her attackers, has reportedly destroyed the life of at least one of the perpetrators. The teen girl violated a court order by tweeting the names of the boys who assaulted her.

"He's had to move," the attorney for one of the attackers, said. "He has lost all the potential that was there. He was attending high school and was kicked out. He was on course to a scholarship to an Ivy League school to play sports and that may be jeopardized. He's in therapy. He's just overwhelmed and devastated by what started from the conduct of this young girl saying false things as she did."

The victim told the paper she was assaulted in August 2011 by two boys she knew when she passed out after drinking at a gathering. She learned months later that pictures of the assault were taken and shared with others.

The boys pleaded guilty to first-degree sexual abuse and misdemeanor voyeurism. The victim says she was unaware of a plea agreement until just before it was announced in court.

The attorney filed a contempt motion against the victim in July. She had tweeted the names of two teenage boys who assaulted her back in August 2011.

After naming the boys, the victim, then 16, tweeted, "I'm not protecting anyone that made my life a living Hell. Protecting rapist is more important than getting justice for the victim. This is no justice for victims at all."

"The victim, in a fit of anger, tweets my clients name, calls him a rapist -- something he was never accused of -- and said the court system was corrupt and he got away with what he did," the attorney said. "She also said he videotaped her and put it on Internet. There never was a rape, there was no video and there was nothing on the Internet."

"When we filed the motion, we wanted our client's name off the Internet and wanted her to know that what she was doing was wrong," he said. "[She should] acknowledge what she's done, remove the name and promise not to do it again.

Appendix G: Rape Perpetrator Story with Pro Perpetrator Comments

17-Year-Old Sexual Assault Victim, Ruined Attacker's Life, Lawyer Says

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"When we filed the motion, we wanted our client's name off the Internet and wanted her to know that what she was doing was wrong," he said. "[She should] acknowledge what she's done, remove the name and promise not to do it again.

Comments

JLS1950
What a bitch!!! She should never have named them. She was so wrong.

xtch3
These boys should not let themselves be victims. Great job for standing up for themselves.

bg1435
I'm so proud of these boys. That's how you stand up to nasty girls like this.

First Last
I'm glad they are fighting back. They are role models against girls who lie.

G2MNR
Way to go guys!!! Good for you!!!

GMORN
Way to get back at that girl so other guys can stay away from her.

PRAVEL
This guy is my hero. If I had a son I would want him to stand up for himself like this boy.

NL1599
This boy just made me smile. Wish more boys would do this. Totally agree with what he did.

zipzap21
This boy is awesome. Hopefully, more boys will be like him.

nimbex12456
This boy is badass for what he did!! Wish more guys would get back at girls for lying.

Appendix H: Rape Perpetrator Story with Pro Victim Comments

17-Year-Old Sexual Assault Victim, Ruined Attacker's Life, Lawyer Says

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Appendix I: Rape Victim Story with No Comments

17-Year-Old Sexual Assault Victim, Faces Charge For Naming Attackers

A teenager, who was sexually assaulted and then threatened with jail for naming her attackers, has reportedly destroyed the life of at least one of the perpetrators. The teen girl violated a court order by tweeting the names of the boys who assaulted her.

"For months, I cried myself to sleep. I couldn't go out in public places," she told the newspaper, as her father and attorneys sat nearby. "You just sit there and wonder, who saw (the pictures), who knows? The boys have ruined my life. They took something away from me that I can't get back. Just because I had too much to drink does not give them the right to do what they did to me. They need to be punished for what they did to me."

The victim told the paper she was assaulted in August 2011 by two boys she knew when she passed out after drinking at a gathering. She learned months later that pictures of the assault were taken and shared with others.

The boys pleaded guilty to first-degree sexual abuse and misdemeanor voyeurism. The victim says she was unaware of a plea agreement until just before it was announced in court.

The victim's attorneys want her contempt hearing open to the media, arguing she has a First Amendment right to speak about her case and to a public hearing.

The boys' attorneys, however, have asked to keep the hearing closed.

The victim tweeted, "They said I can't talk about it or I'll be locked up. Protecting rapist is more important than getting justice for the victim. This is no justice for victims at all. If no one will stand up for me, I'll stand up for myself then. This is craziness. Can't believe this is happening."

Gregg Leslie, interim executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, said the victim should "not be legally barred from talking about what happened to her. That's a wide-ranging restraint on speech. In the past, people would complain to anyone who would listen, but they didn't have a way to publish their comments where there would be a permanent record, like on Facebook and Twitter, for people to see worldwide."

Appendix J: Rape Victim Story with Pro Perpetrator Comments

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Appendix K: Rape Victim Story with Pro Victim Comments

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