

Rape Myth Acceptance and the News Media

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Abstract

Ample research has been conducted on rape as a crime. In the past few decades, researchers have also begun to look at rape myths, which 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 1992, 134). These myths allow perpetrators to be absolved from responsibility while victims of rape are held blameworthy for their own attacks. This study will seek to expand on previous research to discover if rape myths are widely used by the online news media in high-profile cases. Using the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, media coverage of high profile cases are assessed to determine what types of rape myths (if any) are present and if any counterarguments are presented to rebut these stereotypes.

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Introduction

Rape is not a topic that has been neglected within the academic community. Brownmiller (1975), Katz (2006), and Stewart (2002) have all examined how rape is either encouraged or condoned by our society through a variety of means. Some of these methods include blaming the victim, excusing the perpetrator's behavior, or otherwise "explaining away" the incident as a trivial occurrence rather than a serious violation of a woman's bodily integrity (Burt 1980). In American society, there is a common image of what a "real rape" is. According to Masser, Lee, and McKimmie (2010), true victims of rape are those women who have not engaged in behavior that would increase the likelihood of their victimization; they are "chaste and respectable", resist the attack wholeheartedly (and have the injuries to prove it), report the attack immediately, and are emotionally traumatized by the incident. When an incident of sexual assault does not fit this cookie-cutter definition, there is a strong tendency to doubt the victim's account of the attack (Peterson and Muelenhard 2004).

In other ways, society implicitly justifies or minimizes the prevalence of rape and serious effects rape has on the victim. For example, music, television shows, and movies may all subtly encourage rape by proliferating violent attitudes towards women, attitudes that not only encourage sexual and other forms of assault but also lead men to believe that these acts are not only socially acceptable, but will enhance their masculinity by their demonstration of strength and dominance over women(Katz 2006). One of the most detrimental effects of these widely-held beliefs regarding sexual violence is the proliferation of rape myths within our culture. According to Martha Burt, rape myths are

“prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (1980, 217). Burt was one of the pioneers in the study of rape myths. In her study, Burt established the foundations that would be further researched by other scholars. In creating this framework for study, Burt (1980) found that sex role stereotyping as well as restrictive definitions of rape were correlated with higher rape myth acceptance. Lonsway and Fitzgerald expanded on this discussion in 1992, redefining rape myths as “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” (134). Additionally, these beliefs “tend to be universally and persistently held, and ... serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” while being “universally applied, as echoed in jury verdicts, public policy decisions, and personal reactions to survivors of sexual violence” (1992, 135).

What is critical about the topic of rape myths is that these myths are not viewed as critically as other stereotypes. For example, one stereotype prevalent in society is that women with blonde hair are less intelligent. Though many people may make jokes about this idea, it would be difficult to find evidence to support this idea. However, those who accept rape myths could point to the number of false accusations made against men publicized by the media to support these faulty beliefs. Rape myths have severe, lasting effects and are not dismissed as easily as more trivial stereotypes. As indicated by Lonsway and Fitzgerald’s definition, rape myths are widespread and nearly immutable to efforts to dispel these falsehoods (1992). Because these beliefs are based on stereotypes and are generally false, they prevent victims of rape from being taken seriously. The

reluctance to negate rape myths is detrimental to women in several ways. To begin with, the knowledge that these myths exist may cause a woman to fail to report her attack for fear that her story will be doubted. Additionally, those individuals who accept rape myths are not limited to laypersons only; the police, investigators, prosecutors, and the media are only a few among a wide range of people and groups who accept these myths at face value (Stewart 2002). Furthermore, the proliferation of these myths may also mitigate the punishment a convicted rapist will receive; Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1992) note that many rape cases are dropped by prosecutors due to a lack of sufficient evidence. In other words, the more an incident strays from what we consider to be “real rape”, the more likely that either the victim or the criminal justice system will drop the charges against the accused, and justice will not be achieved.

What is important to understand about rape myths is that they can exist and influence a person without that person’s knowledge. Though this knowledge of rape myths may go unnoticed, rape myths affect a number of people involved in a rape case, including everyone from the perpetrator, the victim, the victim’s family, the criminal justice system, and juries. However, whether we are aware of it or not, rape myths can be present in daily interactions. We may hear (or believe) in stereotypical views of women and men that provide the foundations for rape myths or even hear myths used on television or in things we read. These stereotypical ideas present women with a contradictory view of their appropriate roles, a view that tells women that they are supposed to use sex as a way to validate their worth yet be virginal at the same time (Katz 2006). One way people are exposed to rape myths is through the media. Though many of

these myths are presented in dramatic television shows or movies, the news media are also guilty of proliferating rape myths and stereotypes. Kaeppler and Potter (2005) argue that the mass media are “the primary and most consistent sources of information on crime, criminals, crime control policies, and the criminal justice system “ in the United States (47). Because rape is one of these crimes, we can apply Kaeppler and Potter’s (2005) statement to our discussion and know that like other crimes, information about rape is found primarily in the media. As such, the media have an enormous influence. Thus, there is a tremendous importance for the news media to convey all information accurately and without bias towards either the defendant or victim.

Research has shown that the news media are guilty of proliferating rape myths as well. Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephess, and Vandello (2008) conducted a study on the prevalence of rape myths in print news media surrounding the Kobe Bryant rape scandal and found that 65.4 percent of 156 stories analyzed contained at least one rape myth that either blamed the victim for her attack or absolved the perpetrator from guilt. In another study, Franiuk, Seefeldt, and Vandello (2008) found that almost 10 percent of headlines surrounding the case contained rape myths as well; though this number is not quite as high as the previous study, we must consider that headlines are much briefer than the articles themselves; as such, it is more difficult to incorporate a rape myth into a headline. The treatment of sexual assault and rape by the media is particularly detrimental because the inclusion of stereotyped ideas “serves not only to prime and reinforce rape myths in those who already hold them but also may construct these thoughts for those who do not already have them” (Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephess, and Vandello 2008, 291). In both of these

studies, the authors found that those subjects who were exposed to rape myths in news stories were more likely to believe in Bryant's innocence. As such, researchers already have some idea of how much of an impact press coverage can have on perceptions of a sexual assault. However, while the Kobe Bryant case was most certainly notorious, little research has focused on the prevalence of rape myths in the news media in other cases.

In this study, I will be analyzing the online news media in five prevalent rape/sexual assault cases. These cases include the allegations made against Dominique Strauss Kahn in 2011, the allegations against Ben Roethlisberger of the Pittsburgh Steelers in 2009 and 2010, accusations made against the Duke University Lacrosse team in 2006, accusations made against two U.S. Soldiers in South Korea in 2011, and the accusations made against Kobe Bryant in 2003-2004. Four articles from national news sources like *The New York Times* will be used from each case. Though it would be ideal to use articles that were written within a certain time frame after each incident (such as two days after the allegations came to light), articles that came from the exact same sources, or articles that were uniform in some other way, it is difficult to do so because of discrepancies in reporting. For example, some news sites do not allow access to stories after a certain period of time; others may replace outdated stories with more current stories or may only provide a few sentences to update a previous article. Due to these shortcomings, articles were chosen based on several criteria. First, articles needed to be long enough to at least provide an overview of the case rather than just a short update. Second, articles were chosen that had neutral headlines (one in which a rape myth was not directly implied). In this analysis, I am not concerned with the guilt or innocence of the alleged perpetrators or

the outcome of the case; I will merely be analyzing the relevant articles to see if A) the articles contain rape myths; B) how many rape myths the articles contain; and C) if there is any counterargument made to negate the rape myths. Using the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald 1999) as a standard of what constitutes a rape myth, I will document which myths (if any) are present in each news story. I will then summarize the data to try and discern any patterns apparent; for example, whether one stereotype more common than another or if the social status of the accused leads different myths to be presented. I anticipate that rape myths will be present in the majority of the articles, especially those myths in which the accused rapist is a public figure (such as a professional athlete or the head of an international organization). Rape myths will be more common in articles that are published later on in the course of the scandal, as more information about the victim becomes available to the media.

Literature Review

Rape and the Social Context

The social underpinnings that exacerbate the effects of rape have been noted by scholars for decades. In her work *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller outlines the evolution of rape. Using a thorough historical analysis of how rape was handled legally and socially, Brownmiller supports her main thesis that rape “is nothing more or less than the conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (1975, 15). Years before humans were even able to keep a written record of events, women were reliant on men to protect them from other men as well as to help them survive the brutality of nature; men were needed to hunt for food and

provide for a woman while she was caring for young children (Brownmiller 1975). Over time, the natural protection males were able to provide to women because of men's physical dominance was transformed into male dominance and control in every realm of women's lives. Though women have made leaps and bounds in achieving parity with men in legal status, occupation, and education, women are still not afforded equal protection from violations of their right to control their bodies and what is done to them (Brownmiller, 1975). Brownmiller is not alone in asserting that rape is more than a violent crime, however. Stewart (2002) also argues that rape cannot be defined as a meaningless act of violence. It has often been employed as a punishment for a woman who is "too dominant, too masculine, too independent, or too self sufficient" (Stewart 2002, 65). The physical attack the man perpetrates may be a way of showing the woman that she has overstepped her feminine boundaries and impinged upon the realm of the world in which men dominate (Stewart 2002). Even if a man rapes a woman without the intention of teaching her a lesson, his behavior is still shaped by societal forces. Men who rape should not be seen as rare monsters lurking in our society; rather, they are "the products of a culture that glorifies and sexualizes male power and dominance, and at the same time glorifies and sexualizes female subservience and submission. Rape must be understood not as an aberration in such a cultural environment but as simply the extreme end on a continuum of behaviors" (Katz 2006, 149). To be masculine in American culture, men must be powerful and exercise a sense of entitlement, "including power over women and entitlement to their bodies" (Katz 2006, 153). Thus, men are expected to exert their physical dominance over a woman in a sexual situation in order to express their masculinity. What these scholars are trying to demonstrate is that rape is not a

deviant event, but rather is the product of a society that treats rape as a trivial or natural event in many cases (Katz 2006, Stewart 2002, Brownmiller 1975).

Historically, the criminal justice system and other formal responses have treated rape victims with some level of doubt or suspicious, or treated the women's victimization as insignificant, particularly if the victim wasn't a "Mary Poppins" whose rape was not complicated by any extra-legal factors. Prior to the thirteenth century, rape was considered a property offense rather than an offense against the state or a person. During these times, women were treated as property; raping a woman before she became married essentially decreased her value by taking her virginity, so the harm was thought to fall upon the family, who was forced to incur the financial burden. For many years rapists were even allowed to avoid punishment by marrying their victims, thus ameliorating the financial damage (Stewart 2002). It was not until Edward I enacted the Statutes of Westminster that the status of rape changed from a property crime to a crime against the state. By the 1800s, the crime of rape was serious enough to warrant a life sentence or the imposition of the death penalty. Though the penalties were increased, they were also matched with a strict requirement of corroborating or supporting evidence. In order to prove a rape had taken place, evidence had to be brought forth that demonstrated that the woman had resisted the attack that took place; this could take the form of ripped clothing, visible injuries to the woman, etc. (Stewart 2002). These requirements unfairly burdened the victims of rape by forcing them to prove their own victimization rather than requiring the perpetrator to demonstrate his innocence in the face of accusation. This history of bias is significant in the present discussion because it demonstrates the historical hardships

women have had to endure in order to receive justice for their attacks. Though many evidentiary rules have changed and procedures have been enacted to protect victims from bias in court proceedings (such as rape shield laws that forbid a victim's sexual history from being used as evidence), victims of rape still face enormous obstacles in receiving justice for their attacks.

One of the problems that remain in regards to rape is the lack of reporting of incidents of rape to the police. Though these women have suffered attack, many women either wait to report a rape to the police or fail to report the crime entirely (Peterson and Muelenhard 2004). This failure to report can occur for various reasons. Some women are afraid of retaliation from the perpetrator, while others may know their attacker personally and not want to get him (who may be a friend or relative) into trouble (Stewart 2002). Other victims do not want to endure what is known as Secondary Victimization; this refers to the process in which a woman is forced to relive her attack in detail to the police, as well as to the negative and degrading treatment she may receive while doing so. A number of factors come into play when a woman reports a rape, and there are many things she may have done prior to, during, and after the rape that may lead the police to doubt the victim. This causes women to feel doubly victimized, as they were not only attacked but are also being criticized by the criminal justice system that is meant to protect them (Stahl, Eek and Kazemi 2010). All of these factors, including self-blame, fear of retaliation, and fear of secondary victimization may prevent a woman from going to the police and reporting that she was raped.

One of the reasons most often cited by rape victims explaining why they do not report an attack is self-blame. Before the police analyze the events leading up to a rape, a woman is likely to blame herself; she may think the attack was her own fault because she was drinking, dressed provocatively, or engaged in other “risky” behaviors. These thoughts are also reflected by prosecutors and police, who may fail to thoroughly investigate and prosecute offenders because their victims engaged in risky behaviors. While this may not reflect the personal preferences of actors in the criminal justice system, they may make these decisions knowing that when a victim engages in risky behaviors there will be a much lower chance of a conviction (Stewart 2002, Weiss 2009).

These perceptions of risky behavior do not exist within a void, however; they are the result of cultural creations of what is considered appropriate feminine behavior. Through socialization, both men and women are taught to fulfill “appropriate” roles; these roles define what is considered to be acceptable behavior. Often times for women, these roles are contradictory; for example, a woman is supposed to be chaste, yet open for sexual activity at any time given the right circumstances (Stewart 2002). This allows each expectation to be conformed to varying situations in order to serve the needs of the person interpreting the situation.

These stereotypical sexual roles define the behaviors that are considered appropriate for woman and which behaviors they should avoid; at the same time, they define how others should respond to women’s actions. Women are thought to be sexual teases that will lead a man on and then try to deny him any action. However, there are some people who believe that women also offer “token resistance” to sex. By this, it is

assumed that women will only say no to sex because they believe that the social expectations call for them to do so even though they are not planning on abstaining (Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh, 1988). With all of the conflicting ideas on how women should behave in sexual situations, it is clear why there is such a great disparity in opinions in regards to rape myths.

Rape Myths

Rape myths became a topic of discussion as early as the 1970s. According to Brownmiller, rape myths “deliberately obscure the true nature of rape” by perpetuating false ideas about both the victims and perpetrators (1975, 312). The study of rape myths was originally pioneered by Martha Burt in 1980. In her widely-known work, she defines rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” that serve to “[create] a climate hostile to rape victims” (Burt 1980, 217). Burt notes in this early work that some rape myths include the idea that women “cry rape”, that rapists are mentally unstable, and that only certain types of (bad) women are likely to be raped. In analyzing what causes a person to buy into rape myths, Burt found that the most prevalent indicators of rape myth acceptance were stereotypical ideas about sex roles, adversarial sexual beliefs (which she explains to be “distrust of the opposite sex”), and a greater acceptance of violence within relationships (229). What is important about this research is not only that Burt’s research began to establish a framework for what constitutes a rape myth, but that there were also no conclusive findings for particular demographic groups; that is to say, no particular ethnic, religious, or other group had a higher level of myth acceptance. Burt (1980) was one of the first to show that rape myths

are accepted and employed by all types of people. Though subsequent studies found that men are more accepting of rape myths than women (Stahl, Eek and Kazemi 2010), the fact remains that everyone from relatives of the victim to prosecutors and police can buy into these falsities.

The most common theme within rape myths involves blaming the victim for her behavior prior to the attack. According to Masser, Lee, and McKimmie (2010), there is a widely held image of what a “genuine” victim of rape looks like. This true victim (according to the stereotype) has done nothing that would bring on an assault, is “chaste and respectable” (496), fully resists the attack, reports the rape immediately, and is emotionally traumatized by the experience. Peterson and Muelenhard (2004) also note that everyone also has a “rape script” in his or her mind; this is defined as “an individual’s impression of what typically happens during a rape” (130). While these scripts may vary slightly from person to person, they generally tend to match up with what Masser, Lee, and McKimmie define as a “genuine” rape (2010). When victims begin to deviate from these characteristics, their story begins to be called into question. Examples of behavior that have been used to explain why a woman was raped include drinking, dressing provocatively, hitchhiking, flirting with the perpetrator (or engaging in any intimate behavior with him), or being sexually promiscuous (Masser, Lee, and McKimmie 2010). Other authors have argued that only “bad” women are raped (Stewart 2002, Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). These women are often economically disadvantaged, are members of minority or marginalized groups, are young, and may have been abused previously (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994).

Another common theme present in many rape myths accuses the victim of fabricating the story or misrepresenting the circumstances of the incident. Many authors note the prevalence of the idea that women “cry rape” (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994, Stewart 2002, Burt 1980). In this sense, a woman is not actually raped, but may only claim to have been a victim for some other purpose. She may have actually consented to intercourse with the accused individual, but later decided she had made a mistake by doing so and is only saying she was raped to protect her reputation. On the other hand, an attack may have not even taken place, but a woman may accuse a man of rape to get back at him for whatever reason or may do so to gain something from her “victimization” (such as money or sympathy). However, while this stereotype may arguably be the most common, it is highly unfounded. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) note that there are very few rapes reported annually that are later declared unfounded; in the majority of these cases, this declaration was only made because there was not enough evidence (or police did not investigate fully enough) to prove what actually happened.

Other rape myths contain themes that give insight into the way society views men. There is a widely held belief that once a man becomes aroused, he must relieve his frustration; there is no way for him to channel his sexual energy other than through sexual activity. Thus, a woman who leads a man on should expect to have sexual intercourse (Franiuk, Seefelt, Cephress, and Vandello 2008). Similarly, some people also believe that some level of force within intimate relationships is natural and even pleasurable for both parties (Weiss 2009). As previously mentioned, the idea that only abnormal or deviant men are capable of rape is also widely held (Burt 1980). While these

myths may not seem like they involve a woman directly, their implications excuse the behavior of their attackers. In this way, nearly all rape myths "...serve to indirectly perpetuate sexual violence through creating beliefs and attitudes about sexual assault that distort the definition of sexual assault and shift the blame to the victim" (Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cepress, and Vandello 2008, 290).

Adding Structure to the Discussion

Early discussions on rape myths generally did not differentiate between different forms and functions of rape myths; rather, they were all clustered together into one undefined category (see for example Burt, 1980). As more literature and research were conducted on rape myths, scholars such as Scully and Marolla (1984) and Weiss (2009) noted patterns that began to emerge. Several authors found that rape myths frequently employed could be categorized as excuses or justifications (Scully and Marolla 1984, Weiss 2009). According to Scully and Marolla (1984), excuses "admit the act was bad or inappropriate but deny full responsibility [of the offender], often through appeals to accident, or biological drive, or through scapegoating" (530). On the other hand, justifications "accept responsibility for the act but deny that it was wrong" (530). In other words, while the justifications and excuses admit rape occurred, these justifications and excuses deny that the act was inappropriate in that circumstance. In a similar vein, Weiss (2009) also divides rape myths into excuses and justifications. However, her categories are a bit more specific; she sees rape myths as belonging to three particular groups. The first, excuses, serve to deny the responsibility of the offender. This category include

myths such as those that lead us to believe that male sexual aggression is normal or those that excuse the offender's behavior due to his use of drugs or alcohol. (Here it is interesting to note that while alcohol may lead a perpetrator to be held less blameworthy, it may lead a victim to be held more blameworthy.) The next two categories are labeled justifications, but Weiss divides these into two subcategories: those that deny injury and those that deny the victim. In the first of these two situations, the rape myth may acknowledge that intercourse took place, but will allege that no "real crime" occurred; it is often thought that a rape without serious injuries does not qualify as a "real" rape. In the last category of myths, those that deny the victim, stereotypical beliefs about appropriate roles for women come into play. These myths hold the victim partially responsible for her victimization either by engaging in risky behaviors or by failing to resist the attack effectively (Weiss 2009).

One of the most monumental studies undertaken on rape myths that blame the victim while absolving the perpetrator of guilt was conducted by Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999). In their review of existing literature, these authors found something lacking; they believe that the lack of structure was a serious shortcoming preventing researchers from fully understanding the causes and uses of rape myths. Structure, meaning a logical breakdown of rape myths according to their uses, is important in examining rape myths for several reasons. First, logical structure allows us to look at how different individuals employ rape myths; for example, men may utilize rape myths to absolve a perpetrator of responsibility while women may use them to deny their own likelihood of being a victim (because they do not engage in "bad" behaviors).

Furthermore, well-structured rape myths also provide clarity. Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999) found that many studies of rape myths either relied on colloquial language (such as “hooking up”) or included rape myth situations that were not likely to occur frequently. The authors felt that a new scale needed to be established that could be used to draw more generalizable conclusions.

As a result of the lack of structure from previous studies (i.e. Burt, Lonsway & Fitzgerald 1994), Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999) developed the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. In order to develop this scale, the authors conducted a series of six studies in order to test the validity and reliability of the measures they used. Beginning with 120 items, the researchers eliminated rape myths that were not generalizable or were otherwise not suitable for study, eventually ending up with 40 items that fell into seven categories of rape myths. The final set of categories is as follows: 1) “She asked for it” 2) “It wasn’t really rape” 3) “He didn’t mean to” 4) “She wanted it” 5) “She lied” 6) “Rape is a trivial event” 7) “Rape is a deviant event” (1999, 49-50). In addition, the scholars also included a category of filler questions to reduce the likelihood of answers being generated on social desirability alone. The items included in the IRMA Scale were verified for construct validity and reflect the findings of previous studies, such as those conducted by Burt (1980) and Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994). This scale presented in this study has replaced Burt’s scale and has been used in a number of subsequent studies (Peterson and Muelenhard 2004).

The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

1. She asked for it

- a. If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.
- b. When women go around wearing low-cut tops or short skirts, they're just asking for trouble.
- c. If a woman goes home with a man she doesn't know, it is her own fault if she is raped.
- d. When a woman is a sexual tease, eventually she is going to get into trouble.
- e. A woman who "teases" men deserves anything that might happen.
- f. When women are raped, it is often because the way they say "no" was ambiguous.
- g. A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex.
- h. A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on the first date is implying that she wants to have sex.

2. It wasn't really rape

- a. If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say that it was rape.
- b. A rape probably didn't happen if the woman has no bruises or marks.

- c. If the rapist doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it rape.
- d. If a woman doesn't physically resist sex – even when protesting verbally – it really can't be considered rape.
- e. If a woman claims to have been raped but has no bruises or scrapes, she probably shouldn't be taken too seriously.

3. He didn't mean to

- a. When men rape, it is because of their strong desire for sex.
- b. Rapists are usually sexually frustrated individuals.
- c. When a man is very sexually aroused, he may not even realize a woman is resisting.
- d. Men don't usually intend to force sex on a woman, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
- e. Rape happens when a man's sex drive gets out of control.

4. She wanted it

- a. Although most women wouldn't admit it, they generally find being physically forced into sex a real "turn on."
- b. Many women secretly desire to be raped.
- c. Many women find being forced to have sex very arousing.

- d. Some women prefer to have sex forced on them so they don't feel guilty about it.
- e. Many women actually enjoy sex after the guy uses a little force.

5. She lied

- a. Women who are caught having an illicit affair sometimes claim that it was rape.
- b. Many so-called rape victims are actually women who had sex and "changed their minds" afterwards.
- c. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.
- d. A lot of women lead a man on and then cry rape.
- e. A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.

6. Rape is a trivial event

- a. If a woman is willing to "make out" with a guy, then it is no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex.
- b. Rape isn't as big of a problem as some feminists would like people to think.
- c. Being raped isn't as bad as being mugged and beaten.

- d. Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them.
- e. If a woman isn't a virgin, then it shouldn't be a big deal if her date forces her to have sex.

7. Rape is a deviant event

- a. Rape mainly occurs on the "bad" side of town.
- b. Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped.
- c. Men from nice middle-class homes almost never rape.
- d. It is usually only women who dress suggestively that are raped.
- e. Rape is unlikely to happen in the woman's own familiar neighborhood.
- f. In reality, women are almost never raped by their boyfriends.
- g. Rape almost never happens in the woman's own home.

8. Filler questions

- a. Newspapers should not release the name of any rape victim to the public.
- b. Most rapists are not caught by the police.
- c. All women should have access to self-defense classes.
- d. It is preferable that a female police officer conduct the questioning when a woman reports a rape.

- e. This society should devote more effort to preventing rape.

Functions of Rape Myths

Scholars have noted many reasons why rape myths have become so widespread in our culture (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi 2010; Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephress, & Vandello 2008; Lonsway & Fitzgerald 1994). Though some respondents who accepted these ideas were found to do so because they possess a “general hostility towards women,” others respondents may only have accepted these ideas because it allows them to have peace of mind (Stahl, Eek, and Kazemi 2010, 240). One function of rape myths is to allow us to believe that the world is a just place; if, as the saying goes, “bad things only happen to bad people,” then we do not have to put as much effort into preventing crimes that happen to people who violate social norms (Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephress, and Vandello 2008, Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). Similarly, rape myths provide system justification; they serve to “... justify and rationalize the way things are, so that the existing social, economic, and political arrangements tend to be perceived as fair and legitimate” (Jost and Hunyady 2005). Additionally, rape myths serve to “[maintain] cognitive economy by simplifying incoming information” (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1999, 30). When people are able to pull from cultural scripts that claim that only certain women who misbehave are raped, they do not have to think as much about why the rape occurred; thus rape myths allow us to save energy that would otherwise be put into thought if we were to individually scrutinize each case within the larger issue (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1999). By blaming the victims of rape rather than the perpetrators, we can fool

ourselves into believing that the United States treats men and women with complete parity (Stahl, Eek and Kazemi 2010).

Another function of rape myths is the trivialization of a massive problem. Millions of women are raped annually, yet not all victims are treated equally. Rape myths are a large factor in this disparity; by brushing off all attacks that do not fit the stereotype of the “genuine” rape, we ignore a large percentage of rape victims. Thus, only a small percentage of rapes are considered to be “real” (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). As such, rape myths limit the amount of information we receive regarding rape; they teach us to be critical of all victims and hold them accountable for their own victimization. According to Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cepress and Vandello (2008), rape myths “serve to not only perpetuate misinformation about sexual assault but also prevent communication of accurate information about sexual assault” by leading us to believe that only a small fraction of those women who have been attacked are actual victims (301).

Rape myths also function to help non-victims make sense of the crime. As mentioned, rape myths allow people to see the world they live in as “just” by perpetuating the idea that only “bad” people are victimized. Some authors also argue that they allow women to rationalize that they will not become victims; they allow women to “[protect their] self-esteem with downward comparison and the derogation of others” (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1999, 30). By perpetuating the idea that only other “bad” women are raped, “good” women can feel at ease.

Yet another function of rape myths is to maintain the oppression and social control of women within our society. Masser, Lee, and McKimmie (2010) describe the

phenomenon they label “benevolent sexism,” which refers to “a set of beliefs about women (and their relationship to men) that are subjectively positive in feeling tone, but that are stereotypical in viewing women in restrictive roles” (494). Thus, ideas that women should be pure, moral, and chaste may on the surface seem like beneficial traits, but in reality they only serve to limit the activities women can participate in that are socially accepted. The risky behaviors engaged in by “bad” women who are raped are congruent to those behaviors considered unfeminine in our culture. Women who do not fit the stereotypical model of a true woman are those who are blamed for their own victimization. For example, a woman who is seen as sexually loose violates the expectation that she be chaste; if a woman like this is raped, her promiscuity is used as a justification for her attack. As such, these myths indirectly serve to tell other women that those behaviors are prohibited by our culture and will likely lead to something bad happening to them should they choose to act in an unfeminine way (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994).

A more sinister function of rape myths is the of these myths by rapists. According to Scully and Marolla (1984), the justification of rape by attackers is a learned response based on the “acquisition of culturally derived vocabularies of motive, which can be used to diminish responsibility and negotiate a non-deviant identity” (530). In their study, Scully and Marolla interviewed convicted rapists that were incarcerated at the time. What is interesting and perhaps a bit scary about this study is that an astounding 83 percent of the convicted rapists they interviewed did not view themselves as rapists. In justifying or excusing their behavior, these men pulled readily from existing rape myths. Five

justifications were frequently invoked in this study. The justification argued that women are seductresses who are supposed to play hard to get, so the victims protestations were all part of the game women play. Other justifications included the idea that the woman said “no” but meant “yes,” the idea that “nice” girls don’t get raped, that most women eventually gave in and enjoyed it, or that the crime was only a minor wrongdoing. Other convicts excused their behavior, blaming it on alcohol or drugs or on emotional problems beyond their control. Of the few that did admit their behavior, some still felt as though they were still a “nice guy” who had just made a mistake (Scully and Marolla, 1984). The fact that convicted rapists were so apt to utilize rape myths in a real situation demonstrates that they are not harmless fallacies that appear only on paper, but are harmful rationalizations used in the real world.

Effects of Rape Myths

One of the most harmful ramifications of rape myths is the effect they have on victim reporting. Weiss (2009) conducted a study that analyzed rape victim reporting using the National Crime Victimization Survey, which is a self-report survey conducted twice yearly by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. What is unique about this survey is that the participants are interviewed through their household rather than through reporting rates given to the FBI; as such, it is thought to more accurately reflect crime levels in the United States by including those victims who did not report the crime. Weiss analyzed the statements given by 944 victims of sexual assault and found that 20 percent of women who reported sexual victimization to the National Crime Victimization Survey, a self-report survey conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, used rape myths to excuse or

justify the situation. These women “[drew] on social vocabularies that suggest male sexual aggression is natural, normal within dating relationships, or the victim’s fault” (811). Only 19 percent of the 944 women who reported being sexually assaulted reported their victimization to the police; furthermore, only four women out of the 20 percent who used a rape myth to justify their assault reported to the police. Weiss believes that these statistics demonstrate the fact that “...many victims interpret their own experiences of unwanted sexual contact and coercion through a cultural prism infused by gendered vocabularies” (827).

Weiss is not the only scholar to note the effect rape myths have on victims of rape, however. Peterson and Muelenhard (2004) also discovered similar effects; they found that many women who had been the victim of a sexual assault “defined by state laws or researchers’ operational definitions do not label their experience as ‘rape’” (129). These “unacknowledged rape victims” have legally been raped, but do not think of themselves as rape victims for one reason or another; some women may inadvertently use rape myths to excuse what happened to them as something less than rape (130). More often than not, these women’s attacks do not match the stereotypical image of what a “real” rape looks like; the victim and her attacker may be acquainted, no weapon or extreme force may be used, and the victim may not have the physical evidence to prove she was attacked. Thus, many of the behaviors that may lead a woman to not see herself as a rape victim are the risky behaviors defined by rape myths. In their study, Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) recruited participants who had had a sexual experience that met the legal definition of rape. These women were then surveyed on this experience; the

researchers found that those women who had a high level of rape myth acceptance were less likely to label their own experience as rape when the attack corresponded with rape myths (Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004). Peterson and Muehlenhard's (2004) study is significant because it provides some insight into how rape myths may actually reduce reporting rates by causing victims to feel as though their attack was not "real" enough to involve the police.

Another harmful effect of rape myths is that men that buy into these myths may be more likely to be sexually aggressive towards women (Franiuk, Seefeldt, and Vandello 2008; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). In one study, men were given a vignette in which they were told to imagine they went on a date with a woman who both dressed and acted conservatively throughout the course of the evening. They were then told to imagine that their date had refused sexual advances made by the reader three times. When these men were surveyed after reading this script, about half of the men still assumed that she wanted sexual relations; they assumed that her responses were "token resistance," or resistance provided for the sake of satisfying social cues (Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh, 1988).

While the authors in the preceding paragraph may only be speculating, the aforementioned study conducted by Scully and Marolla (1984) demonstrates that rapists have a high level of rape myth acceptance. The men these two scholars interviewed use rape myths to justify and excuse their behavior; though all were convicted rapists, only a few of them actually saw themselves as such. The rest either believed that the victim had precipitated the crime or that they (as perpetrators) were somehow not responsible

whatsoever or less blameworthy for some reason. This study is critical in demonstrating how devastating these myths can be (Scully and Marolla 1984).

Finally, rape myths may also have detrimental effects in the criminal justice system. It has been noted that rape myths may cause prejudice against a victim during trial, but these same myths can also serve to bias a trial in favor of the defendant. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) note that preceding studies have demonstrated that a high level of rape myth acceptance among jurors in mock trials leads to a lesser likelihood of a perpetrator being convicted. Similarly, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) also argue that rape myth acceptance also leads to shorter, more lenient sentences for those rapists that are convicted. Franiuk, Seefelt, Cephess, and Vandello (2008) affirmed this assertion, arguing that “real” rapes are punished severely while those cases in which a rape myth can be applied are treated more leniently; the presence of a rape myth situation may be seen as a mitigating factor for the defendant, leading him to be punished less harshly than a perpetrator who commits a “real” rape.

Rape Myths in the Media

One of the primary methods of transmission for rape myths is through the media. Television shows, music videos, and movies are all guilty of perpetuating these myths; it is not uncommon to see a rape victim on a television show being doubted because she knew her attacker, nor is it uncommon to hear popular artists singing about giving a girl a few drinks to loosen her up. For example, in her song “London Bridge,” the artist Fergie includes a lyric that states “The Grey Goose got your girl feelin’ loose.” Though it could be argued that the presence of rape myths in the entertainment media is trivial because,

by definition, it is only meant for entertainment, we cannot say the same thing about the news media. The news media are responsible for providing most of the information we receive about crime and criminals; the average person does not spend a great deal of time researching the criminal justice system in depth. As such, what they see on the news or read in newspapers shapes the way most people think about crime in our country (Kaeppeler and Potter 2005). Because the media have such a prominent role in creating and reinforcing ideas about such important issues, we would expect that they would attempt to present fair, and unbiased (myth-free) reports; however, this is generally not the case.

More often than not, rape is used in the news media for its shock value. According to Los and Chamard (1997), “sexual violence can be endlessly exploited for its titillating value, its crypto-pornographic quality and its sexist slant” (294). In other words, the audacious nature of rape in combination with its sexual nature makes stories on rape great for entertainment value. Because the news media are highly competitive, news stations must do whatever possible to try and entice viewers in watching their programs; this is often achieved by presenting the most violent, gory, or sensational material possible (Kaeppeler and Potter 2005; Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephress and Vandello 2008). As such, the news media primarily focus on stranger rape scenarios rather than acquaintance rape. Additionally, the news media focus heavily on cases in which false allegations are found, perpetuating the idea that many women lie about rape (Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephress and Vandello 2008).

Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephress and Vandello (2008) firmly assert that the media are responsible for perpetuating rape myths, claiming that "...the media's treatment of sexual assault not only serves to prime and reinforce rape myths in those who already hold them but also may construct these thoughts for those who do not already have them" (291). Additionally, these authors note that the "fragmented nature" of news reporting makes it difficult for a viewer to know the full context of the crime. In their study, these scholars analyzed 156 articles reporting on the Kobe Bryant rape scandal that took place in 2003. They found that over 65 percent of the articles they analyzed contained some type of rape myth, with "She's lying" being the most popular, followed by "She wanted it" or "He's not the type". Only thirteen of the 156 articles presented any type of counterargument to rape myths (Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephress and Vandello 2008). Similarly, another study conducted by Franiuk, Seefeldt, and Vandello (2008) found that 9.6 percent of 555 articles relating to the same case contained a rape myth in the headline alone. Given the limited word count of headlines, including a myth is not an easy task. These headlines were frequently misleading. For example, one headline read "Kobe's Accuser Admits Lies", leading the reader to believe she lied about the entire incident; however, the article goes on to state that the victim only lied about why she was late to work the following day. Such headlines are used to entice readers, yet doing so can unfairly prejudice these individuals. Pasternak (1987) found that people who read a defamatory headline were likely to still have prejudicial attitudes even after reading the entire article; however, we must also take into consideration the fact that many people only skim headlines and do not even read the article, further exacerbating the problem.

It has been difficult for activists to overcome these issues. Los and Chamard (1997) conducted a study in Canada in which they examined news articles about rape both before and after a new, stricter rape law was passed. Though they did find an increase on reporting on acquaintance rape after the law was passed, this additionally commentary was matched with a harsh critique of those fighting for rape victims. In these articles, the “women’s movement was [portrayed as] a marginal but noisy bunch of activists, who were narrow-minded, antagonistic, territorial, and intolerant of competition” (301). In other words, the individuals who were working towards a justice system that treated women equally were portrayed as radical individuals squabbling over nothing. In this way, “press reports on sexual assault appear to be inherently lacking as they legally disqualify women’s presence and voice” (Los and Chamard 1997, 310).

Though there is evidence of rape myths in the news media regarding certain cases, more information is needed on how prevalent these myths are when the perpetrators are not famous athletes. As such, this study will examine the prevalence of rape myths in a variety of high-profile cases in order to discern if they are used more frequently when celebrities are involved or are used in all high-profile cases, regardless of who is involved.

Methods

This study will seek to establish whether rape myths are frequently present in online news articles in a variety of cases. In doing so, this study will examine five incidents of rape and sexual assault. These cases were chosen for several reasons. The first three cases (Bryant, Roethlisberger, and Duke Lacrosse) were chosen because they

were seen as arguably some of the most prominent rape cases brought against athletes in the past decade. For comparative purposes, the Strauss-Kahn case and the case involving a U.S. soldier were included in order to see if there were any differences in the number of myths included when the accused was not an athlete or was not well-known. The cases included in this study are as follows:

- Kobe Bryant rape allegations made in 2003
 - In this case, what has been agreed upon by both the accuser and the defense is that the woman went up to Bryant's room after giving him a tour of the resort where she worked. Both admit that they began to kiss, but then the two sides of the story diverge; the woman alleges that Bryant became aggressive and began groping her ("Kobe Records Released"). While Bryant claims that the intercourse was consensual, the woman alleges that Bryant prevented her from leaving the room, placed his hands around her neck, and raped her ("Case Will Not be Retried, but Civil Trial Pending").

- Allegations made against the Duke University Lacrosse team in 2006
 - In the Duke case, the accuser was an exotic dancer who was invited to perform at a party at the home of several of the lacrosse players. She claims that she and another woman were first verbally assaulted due to their race; she alleges that she was then dragged to a bathroom, raped, sodomized, and choked. The players denied that any sexual activity

occurred. (“Duke Lacrosse Players’ Attorneys Step Up Defense”). It was later determined that the woman was lying and that no rape occurred.

- Ben Roethlisberger rape allegations made in 2008
 - The allegations made against Ben Roethlisberger came from an incident that occurred in a Lake Tahoe hotel casino. The victim alleges that Roethlisberger called her up to his room to have her fix his television. The woman had been told by her employer that it was important to please celebrity guests, so she handled the situation herself (Bellisle). When she arrived in his room, the woman alleges that Roethlisberger began kissing and fondling her before raping her (“Steelers QB Accused of Rape at Casino”). Roethlisberger argued that the sex was consensual, and pointed to the fact that the woman did not press criminal charges, but only was suing him in civil court as evidence of this (“Steelers QB Wants Written Apology”).

- Allegations made against U.S. soldiers in South Korea in 2011
 - In this incident, two U.S. soldiers were accused of raping two young South Korean women. One man, Pfc. Kevin Flippin, was found guilty of breaking into a woman’s apartment, stealing roughly 5,000 won (\$4.50), and raping the woman repeatedly. He was sentenced to ten years in prison (Sang-Hun).

- Sexual assault allegations made against Dominique Strauss-Kahn in 2011

- Dominique Strauss-Kahn is the former head of the International Monetary Fund. In the Strauss-Kahn case, the accuser, a hotel maid, alleges that she entered Strauss-Kahn's room in order to clean it. As she entered, she alleges that a naked man rushed from the bathroom; he then locked the door and forced her to perform oral sex. Strauss-Kahn argued that the incident never occurred (Secret). It was later determined that the woman had lied about the encounter.

The present study will look at four articles from each case, all taken from widely-known national online news sources such as *The New York Times* or *CBS News*. The articles that were chosen for examination were those with the most neutral headlines available; in other words, articles that seemed inherently prejudicial were not included to prevent bias in the sample. Thus, articles with headlines such as “Kobe Accuser Admits Lies” were excluded. Articles were found primarily by using the search engine Google. Terms such as “Kobe Bryant rape case” were used to find articles; in some cases, similar terms were input directly into the search bars within the online news sources themselves. Sometimes links from one article to another were used to find articles that were more appropriate for this study.

Articles were not chosen based on random selection, but rather were included based on several criteria. First, articles needed to be long enough to contain enough substance for analysis. Many articles that were found were much too short (only a few short sentences) to examine. Articles ranged in length from half of one page to nine pages when printed on standard size printer paper.

The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale was used to determine which rape myths, if any, were present. This scale was used because it is one of the most up-to-date and structurally sound scales that have been developed (Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald 1999). The IRMA Scale contains 45 items sorted into seven categories of rape myths, with an additional category made up of “filler” questions (See page 15). Each article will be read through to determine if any of the 45 myths are present; myths contained within articles will not have to be a verbatim match to those in the IRMA scale, but rather express the same idea to a point. For example, an article that mentions that an accuser has had a history of mental or emotional issues prior to the rape would be found to contain rape myth “e” in category 5, which states that “A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.” A total number of myths, not categories, (out of 45) will be kept for each article. If the same myth was repeated more than once in the same article, it was counted for each time; however, the myths had to occur separately. In other words, if myth X occurred and then another topic was brought up before myth X occurred again, myth X was present twice. However, if the same myth was discussed at length, it was only counted once.

The articles will then be ranked based on the level of rape myths they contain using the following procedure. If an article contains one or more items in a particular category (e.g. “Many so-called rape victims are actually women who had sex and “changed their minds” afterwards.” in the category “She lied), that category will be marked as present. Each article can thus be ranked from zero to seven, where zero represents the absence of any category of the IRMA scale while seven represents the presence of all seven

categories of the IRMA scale, which again are: She asked for it, It wasn't really rape, He didn't mean to, She wanted it, She lied, Rape is a trivial event, and Rape is a deviant event. The articles will be ranked according to this scale:

- 0 Categories present: No mention
- 1-2 Categories present: Low presence of rape myths
- 3-4 Categories present: Moderate presence of rape myths
- 5-6 Categories present: High presence of rape myths
- 7 Categories present: Extreme presence of rape myths

These scores will then be averaged (both for each individual case and in totality) to determine the average number of rape myths present in the online news articles that were analyzed. Furthermore, it will be noted which myths (both in terms of individual items and categories) were most frequently used.

Results

The results of this analysis demonstrated that rape myths were present more frequently in those cases that involved athletes. Interestingly, these cases constituted two out of the three cases that were not shown to be unfounded at a later point in time. Rape myths were most frequently employed in the Kobe Bryant case, followed by the Duke Lacrosse case, the Ben Roethlisberger case, the Dominique Strauss-Kahn case, and lastly the case involving US soldiers in South Korea. Very few myths were found in the Strauss-Kahn case, while none were found in any articles pertaining to the soldiers in

South Korea. In totality, Kobe cases averaged 3.75 myths per article; Roethlisberger cases averaged 2.5 myths per article; Duke cases averaged 3.5 myths per article; Strauss-Kahn cases average .25 cases per article, and the soldier cases averaged 0 myths per article. In sum, there were 1.4 rape myths per article when all cases are averaged together. Results from each article are shown below.

Kobe Bryant Articles

Article 1: Liptak, Adam. (2004, August 4). Papers Reveal New Details in Kobe Bryant Rape Case. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/04/us/papers-reveal-new-details-in-kobe-bryant-rape-case.html>>.

- Myth B, category 7: Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped.
 - In paragraph 3: “The only witness to testify at the hearing, a defense expert, said that DNA evidence strongly suggested that Mr. Bryant’s accuser had sex with a second man not long after her encounter with Mr. Bryant.”
- Myth G, category 1: A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex.
 - In paragraph 14: “The second man’s DNA was present, she said, in and on the woman, on what prosecutors called ‘the purple G-string’ she wore when she met Mr. Bryant...”

Article 2: No author listed. (2009, May 7). Kobe Records Released. *CBS News*.

Retrieved from < http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-201_162-636205.html>.

- Myth A, category 6: If a woman is willing to “make out” with a guy, then it is no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex.
 - In paragraph 3: “The then-19-year-old woman said she and Bryant kissed for several minutes in his room before he became aggressive and began groping her.”
- Myth D, category 5: A lot of women lead men on and then cry rape.
 - In paragraph 9: “The woman also said she believed she led Bryant to believe she wanted him to hug or kiss her – she said she thought he was ‘going to try and make a move on me’ – but she did not intend to have sex with him.”
- Myth B, category 5: Many so-called rape victims are actually women who had sex and “changed their minds” afterwards.
 - In paragraph 10: “During his interview with detectives, Bryant said the woman told him she had hoped he would have sex with her, according to the transcript released Friday. He said the woman never cried and he repeatedly told detectives the sex was consensual. He also said she gave him a kiss goodbye before she left his room.”

- Myth C, category 5: Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.
 - In paragraph 11: “Several times during the questioning, Bryant asked detectives whether the woman wanted money from him.”
- Myth B, category 2: A rape probably didn’t happen if the woman has no bruises or marks.
 - In paragraph 17: “Trina McKay, the resort’s night auditor, said she saw the woman as she was leaving to go home, and ‘she did not look or sound as if there had been any problem’.”
- Myth D, category 5: A lot of women lead men on and then cry rape.
 - In paragraph 32: “Later, Bryant said, ‘We were still only this close, and she gets up and she gives me a kiss, so I kiss her back, and then, you know, I started caressing her or whatever, and then she puts her hand on my, you know, my thing or whatever, and it kinda goes from there’.”
- Myth E, category 1: A woman who “teases” men deserves anything that might happen.
 - In paragraph 34: “Bryant said the woman offered to show him a tattoo of musical instruments and notes on her back, and she lowered a strap on her dress so he could see it. After that, he said, she kissed him and he kissed back. They caressed each other and she performed oral sex.”

- Myth B, category 4: Many women secretly desire to be raped.
 - In paragraph 39: “‘She said she wanted to, you know, she hoped that I would (edited) her,’ Bryant said.”

Article 3: Sarche, Jon. (2004, July 23). Judge to Allow Accuser’s Sex Life as Evidence in Bryant Case. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/basketball/nba/2004-07-23-bryant-case_x.htm#>.

- Myth B, category 7: Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped.
 - In paragraph 8: “The defense has suggested the woman had multiple sexual partners in the days surrounding her June 2003 encounter with Bryant, including sex with someone after the alleged attack and before she contacted the authorities.”

Article 4: No author listed. (2004, September 1). Case Will Not Be Retried, but Civil Trial Pending. *ESPN News*. Retrieved from <<http://sports.espn.go.com/nba/news/story?id=1872740>>.

- Myth F, category 1: When women are raped, it is often because the way they say “no” was ambiguous.
 - In paragraph 5: “‘Although I truly believe this encounter between us was consensual, I recognize now that she did not and does not view this

incident the same way I did,' said Bryant, a married father of one who still faces a civil lawsuit filed by the woman that seeks unspecified damages.”

- Myth B, category 7: Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped.
 - In paragraph 8: “Yet the case would have ultimately rested on the testimony of a young woman the defense suggested was a promiscuous, attention-seeking liar.”
- Myth B, category 7: Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped.
 - In paragraph 13: “This was expected to bolster the defense contention that she slept with someone after leaving Bryant and before she went to a hospital exam – a potentially key blow to her credibility.”
- Myth A, category 6: If a woman is willing to “make out” with a guy, then it is no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex.
 - In paragraph 18: “Her attorneys accuse Bryant of flirting with the woman, a front desk employee, during a tour of the resort. After the two ended up in his room, they began to kiss.”

Ben Roethlisberger articles

Article 1: Sonner, Scott. (2009, July 23). Ben Roethlisberger Rape Allegations: Officials Not Planning to Investigate. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/22/ben-roethlisberger-rape-a_n_242955.html>.

- Myth E, category 4: Many women actually enjoy sex after the guy uses a little force.
 - In paragraph 8: “She said the security chief, Guy Hyder, told her she was ‘over reacting,’ that ‘most girls would feel lucky to get to have sex with someone like Ben Roethlisberger’...”

Article 2: No author listed. (2011, January 31). Steelers QB Accused of Rape at Casino. *CBS News*. Retrieved from < http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500290_162-5176788.html>.

- Myth D, category 6: Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them.
 - In paragraph 22: “The lawsuit claims that when the woman first reported the attack to Hyder he dismissed her distress and crying and said she was ‘overreacting’.”
- Myth E, category 4: Many women actually enjoy sex after the guy uses a little force.
 - In paragraph 23: “The woman said Hyder told her that ‘most girls would feel lucky to get to have sex with someone like Ben Roethlisberger’...”

Article 3: Bellisle, Martha. (2012, January 20). Ben Roethlisberger Settles Lawsuit Alleging 2008 Rape. *USA Today*. Retrieved from

<<http://www.usatoday.com/sports/football/nfl/steelers/story/2012-01-20/ben-roethlisberger-settles-lawsuit/52702798/1>>.

- Myth E, category 4: Many women actually enjoy sex after the guy uses a little force.
 - In paragraph 11: “McNulty said she later reported the alleged attack to a Harrah’s security chief, but was told that Harrah’s President John Koster was friends with Roethlisberger and said most girls would feel lucky to have sex with someone like Roethlisberger, according to the suit.”
- Myth E, category 4: Many women actually enjoy sex after the guy uses a little force.
 - In paragraph 12: “In the months that followed, Cornwell presented e-mails and witness statements that painted McNulty as an emotionally unstable woman who later bragged about the alleged sexual encounter.”
- Myth E, category 5: A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems; Myth C, category 5: Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.
 - In paragraph 13: “Cornwell claimed that McNulty has a history of using sex and lies to get what she wanted and said she was using the suit to extort money from a sports star.”
- Myth D, category 6: Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them.

- In paragraph 14: “The suit sought general and punitive damages, as well as \$380,000 to cover medical expenses for care McNulty claimed she needed to deal with the emotional distress she suffered from the alleged rape.”

Article 4: No author listed. (2009, August 21). Steelers QB Wants Written Apology.

ESPN News. Retrieved from <

<http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=4414936>>.

- Myth E, category 5: A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems; Myth C, category 5: Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.
 - In paragraph 1: “Ben Roethlisberger’s lawyers say the woman accusing him of raping her at Lake Tahoe last summer is ‘disturbed and calculating’ and fabricated the assault to extort a big payoff from the Steelers quarterback.”
- Myth C, category 5: Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.
 - In paragraph 14: “She is a ‘disturbed and calculating woman who, together with counsel, fabricated a claim of sexual assault... to save her job and extort a large monetary payoff,’ the quarterback’s lawyers said.”
- Myth B, category 5: Many so-called rape victims are actually women who had sex and “changed their minds” afterwards.

- In paragraph 17: “In one written less than 24 hours after the alleged rape, the woman writes about how much she has enjoyed entertaining the celebrities and VIPs.”
- Myth E, category 4: Many women actually enjoy sex after the guy uses a little force.
 - In paragraph 19: “Antonetti said the woman who made the rape claim ‘did not appear to be upset, stressed-out or nervous’ about her time with Roethlisberger rather she ‘appeared happy and boastful’ and later said she thought she might be pregnant from the encounter.”

Duke University Lacrosse Articles

Article 1: Wilson, Duff and Glater, Jonathan. (2006, August 25). Files from Duke Rape Case Give Details but No Answers. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/25/us/25duke.html?pagewanted=all>>.

- Myth E, category 5: A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.
 - In paragraph 4: “Defense lawyers, amplified by Duke alumni and a group of bloggers who have closely followed the case, have portrayed it as a national scandal – that there is only the flimsiest physical evidence of rape, that the accuser is an unstable fabricator...”

- In paragraph 19: “Finally, no one, not even the second dancer at the party, has corroborated the rape charge made by the woman, whose troubled personal history is sure to be an issue at trial.”
- In paragraph 91: “Defense lawyers have also attacked the woman’s credibility. In one court filing, Mr. Selifmann’s lawyer, Mr. Osborn, said evidence of her “mental and emotional problems” would be used to impeach her testimony. Medical records in police files show that doctors had previously diagnosed depression and bipolar disorder.”
- Myth G, category 1: A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex; myth D, category 7: It is usually only women who dress suggestively that are raped.
 - In paragraph 28: “The women, wearing see-through outfits, started dancing about midnight.”
- Myth B, category 2: A rape probably didn’t happen in the woman has no bruises or marks; myth E, category 2: If a woman claims to have been raped but has no bruises or scrapes, she probably shouldn’t be taken too seriously.
 - In paragraph 46: “She was next examined by sexual-assault specialists, Dr. Julie Manly and Ms. Levicy, who confirmed ‘tenderness’ in the vagina and the rectum. The nurse reported finding ‘diffuse edema’ or swelling ‘of the vaginal walls,’ but no abrasions, tearing, or bleeding.”

- Myth B, category 7: Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped.
 - In paragraph 49: "... defense lawyers had argued publicly that the woman's swelling and tenderness could have been caused by consensual sexual activity in the days before the Monday-night party."
- Myth A, category 1: If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.
 - In paragraph 57: "She has given slightly differing accounts of how much she drank that evening. She told police that she had one or two large-size beers before the party and had taken Flexeril, a muscle relaxant."

Article 2: No author listed. (2009, February 11). Rape Allegations Cloud Duke Lacrosse. *CBS News*. Retrieved from < http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500290_162-1449886.html>.

- No myths present.

Article 3: Price, S.L. and Evans, Farrell. (2006, June 22). The Damage Done. *Sports Illustrated*. Retrieved from <<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1104409/index.htm>>.

- Myth E, category 5: A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.

- In paragraph 26: “The woman is her youngest child and the one who has the most problems, including a run-in with the law. She also made a previous claim of gang rape, in 1994.”
- Myth A, category 1: If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.
 - In paragraph 44: “SI has confirmed through defense motions and lawyers who have studied the files that they contain no evidence that a forensic toxicology test was performed on the accuser, though she appeared impaired to witnesses...”
- Myth B, category 7: Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped.
 - In paragraph 44: “The documents also show that the accuser recanted her charge of rape to a police officer that evening; that in the 48 hours before the party she had, by her account, been on at least four one-on-one dates as an escort...”

Article 4: No author listed. (2006, April 7). Duke Lacrosse Players’ Attorneys to Step Up Defense. *ESPN News*. Retrieved from <<http://sports.espn.go.com/ncaa/news/story?id=2401203>>.

- Myth B, category 5: May so-called rape victims are actually women who had sex and “changed their minds” afterwards.

- In paragraph 3: “Sutton, who represents team co-captain Matt Zash, said she thought the woman fabricated her story and ‘quickly got in over her head with the story she’s telling’.”
- Myth E, category 5: A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.
 - In paragraph 15: “In June 2002, police records show, she stole the taxi man to who she was giving a lap dance at a Durham strip club. The records say she led a sheriff’s deputy on a winding chase at speeds of up to 70 MPH, and tried to run him down as he approached the cab on foot.”

Dominique Strauss-Kahn Articles

Article 1: Secret, Mosi. (2011, May 15). Police Seek Evidence from I.M.F. Chief on Sex Attack. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/16/nyregion/maid-picks-imf-chief-as-attacker-in-lineup.html>>.

- No myths present.

Article 2: Schneider, Howard and Goldfarb, Zachary. (2011, July 1). Dominique Strauss-Kahn Released from House Arrest; Sexual Assault Case in Limbo. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/questions-about-accuser-leave-dominique-strauss-kahn-sexual-assault-case-in-limbo/2011/07/01/AGnzQdtH_story.html>.

- Myth E, category 5: A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.
 - In paragraph 3: “As the investigation proceeded in recent weeks, Illuzzi-Orbon said, there had been ‘salient, confirmed impeachment’ of the woman’s story – from a concocted tale of political repression and gang rape in Guinea that was used to gain political asylum in the United States in 2004 to her shifting account of what happened on the day of the alleged attack.”

Article 3: McCoy, Kevin. (2011, August 22). Prosecutors: Drop Strauss-Kahn Sex-Abuse Charges. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <
<http://www.usatoday.com/money/world/story/2011/08/AP-source-DA-likely-to-drop-Strauss-Kahn-case/50085112/1>>.

- No myths present.

Article 4: No author listed. (2011, May 19). Ex-IMF Chief Granted Bail Amid Sexual Assault Allegations. *CNN News*. Retrieved from
 <<http://www.cnn.com/2011/CRIME/5/19/new.york.imf.kahn.resigns/index/html>>.

- No myths present.

U.S. Soldier Articles

Article 1: Sang-Hun, Choe. (2011, November 1). South Korea Sentences U.S. Soldier to 10 Years. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/02/world/asia/american-soldier-sentenced-for-raping-a-south-korean-woman.html>>.

- No myths present.

Article 2: Rowland, Ashley and Chang, Yoo Kyong. (2011, October 5). Korea to Take Custody of U.S. Soldier Accused of Rape. *Stars and Stripes*. Retrieved from <<http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/korea/korea-to-take-custody-of-u-s-soldier-accused-of-rape-1.156950>>.

- No myths present.

Article 3: No author listed. (2011, October 7). U.S. Military Starts Curfew after Rape Claims. *CNN News*. Retrieved from <<http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/korea/korea-to-take-custody-of-u-s-soldier-accused-of-rape-1.156950>>.

- No myths present.

Article 4: Kim, Sam. (2011, October 8). US Soldiers Accused of Raping Teens in South Korea. *MSNBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44826697/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/us-soldiers-accused-raping-teens-south-korea/>.

- No myths present.

Myths did not appear within articles as a direct match to those in the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale; articles did not include lines that read “Rape accusations are

often used as a way of getting back at men” or “Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them.” Rather, any indication of a rape myth was treated as the presence of a rape myth. For example, if the article implied that the victim was only raped because she kissed the victim, the myth “If a woman is willing to ‘make out’ with a guy, then it is no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex” was deemed present. The myth that occurred most frequently was: “A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems” (in category 5). The second most frequently used myth was: “Usually, it is only women who do things like hang out in bars and sleep around that are raped” (in category 7); the third myth most frequently used in articles was: “Many women actually enjoy sex after the guy uses a little force” (in category 4).

Using the ranking system previously mentioned (which was created for this study), eight articles had no mention of a rape myth, seven had 1-2 categories of rape myths (low presence), four articles had 3-4 categories of rape myths (moderate presence) and one article had 5-6 categories of rape myths (high presence). The highest number of myths an article contained was nine.

Exactly 50 percent of the articles that contained a rape myth also contained a counterargument to this myth. For example, in several articles one of the rape myths that were included involved the fact that the victim engaged in other sexual relations in close proximity to her attack, suggesting that she was promiscuous; this myth appeared frequently in the articles on the Duke Lacrosse case and several times in the Kobe Bryant case articles. In some cases, the statement regarding other sexual partners was matched by either explaining away this evidence or by a statement from the victim’s attorney

claiming that the use of the victim's sex life was only mentioned in order to slander the woman.

When the victim was identified as a minority or immigrant, this fact was noted often. All of the articles regarding the Dominique Strauss-Kahn case indicated that the maid was an immigrant, while all of the Duke articles indicated that the defendants were white and the victim was not only African American, but an exotic dancer. In general, few articles even used the word 'victim'; more often, the victim was referred to as the 'alleged victim,' 'the accuser' or 'the woman.' These demographic factors that are included as well as the terminology used to describe the victim are another way of biasing readers in favor of the defendant.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies. Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, and Vandello (2008) found that the articles they examined contained an average of 1.66 rape myths per article, though these authors utilized a different, more general scale. The specificity of the IRMA Scale sheds some light on why numbers were low; for example, in many articles it was suggested that the victim was lying (e.g. by saying allegations were false), but there is no rape myth within the IRMA Scale that says only "She's Lying" (though it is a category). As such, I did not count that statement as a rape myth because it did not correspond with a specific item on the IRMA Scale.

There are many other reasons to why the number of rape myths in articles was not as high as I anticipated. Many online news articles are very brief. Though some go into

greater detail, many are only a few short paragraphs long. With such a limited amount of space available, there is not much room for speculation (which is where most rape myths are found). Secondly, in general the articles were all very unbiased. In the pieces I read, it seemed as though the authors took great care to remain neutral and to paint an accurate picture of what the facts of the case were. Most often, rape myths were found in quotations from prosecutors, defense attorneys, the police, and people close to the victim or perpetrator. For this reason, I made sure to not label the news source itself as biased, as in most cases the rape myths were included as a means of giving both sides of the story.

Another reason more rape myths were not present is that the articles I found came from major news sources like *CBS* or *ESPN*, who tend to use *The Associated Press* as contributing authors. This was often noted at the end of these articles. *The Associated Press* is well known for its neutrality and unbiased reporting; as such, the various publications would have had to embellish the basic stories they received from *The Associated Press* in order to include more rape myths.

There are several limitations to this study, however. To begin with, the articles chosen could have been selected in a more scientific manner. When looking for articles, I used a search engine to find articles using phrases like “Kobe Bryant rape” or “Dominique Strauss-Kahn assault”. When the results were displayed, the various sites were examined in order to find articles that were lengthy enough to be able to actually analyze in detail. Some of the articles were only a few sentences long, making them far too short to contain rape myths. Further, the age of some of the cases also posed difficulties. All of these cases have been settled in one way or another; thus, it was

difficult to find earlier articles that were written before it was known that the victim was definitely lying. Additionally, older links tended not to work and many articles essentially said the same things (if they were not verbatim copies of one another). In order to gain a more scientific representation of articles, a list could be compiled from various sources and then articles could be randomly selected from that list. In this way, more articles (no matter how long or how similar they may be to one another) would have a chance of being included.

Another limitation of this study is that the articles were only analyzed by one person. Each person inherently brings their own biases into a study; this is unavoidable. As such, it is possible that another individual would have interpreted statements made within the articles differently, leading to a finding of either more or fewer rape myths. However, the methodology section of this study clearly explains how myths were found, so the result can be verified by others.

I do not think these limitations completely negate the importance of this study, however. This limited analysis of online news articles still demonstrated several important concepts. To begin with, athletes seemed to be the most likely to have articles biased in their favor. The Bryant, Roethlisberger, and Duke cases all had the highest level of rape myths present; this is interesting because neither the Bryant nor Roethlisberger cases were definitively declared unfounded. On the other hand, the Strauss-Kahn and US soldier cases contained almost no rape myths. There could be many reasons for this, but I propose that this is due to the fact that not much could be found out about the victims. While the Strauss-Kahn articles did discuss maid's immigrant status and previous

tendencies to lie, she was not engaged in any of the “risky” behaviors described in rape myths at the time. In the case of the US soldiers in South Korea, almost no information was available on the victims; as such, it would be difficult to use any of their personal habits against them.

The women in the three cases involving athletes had their personal lives used as evidence against them, even if the articles did not use these factors to include rape myths. In the Bryant case, the woman willingly went to Bryant’s room and began kissing him before refusing his advances; thus, she put herself in a bad situation and led him on. In the Roethlisberger case, the woman also went to the player’s room, though she did not engage in any consensual intimate activity before being attacked. In the Duke case, the woman who was allegedly raped was an exotic dancer who willingly went into a house full of young men wearing revealing clothing. Though these risky behaviors were not always included in the articles in such a way to constitute a myth according to the IRMA scale, the fact that they were mentioned at all unfairly prejudices readers against the victims.

The fact that two of the cases (Strauss-Kahn and Duke) were later determined to be unfounded does not discount theories on rape myths. One of the main arguments included in theories of rape myths is that cases that are unfounded are often highly publicized; this gives the public the perception that many rape cases are unfounded and are based on fallacious allegations (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). This may also lead people to assume that all rape cases brought against the rich and famous are untrue; in cases where the victim also sought monetary damages in civil court, the fact that they

were seeking financial reparations tended to be highly emphasized. This could cause readers to believe that either A) the woman was not raped, but just wants money B) the woman engaged in consensual sex but decided to use the incident for financial gain or C) the woman was raped, but is more concerned with getting a payoff out of the ordeal than getting a conviction.

Even the few rape myths included in these articles are significant. Though rape myths were not found frequently, the few that were included could very well still serve to prejudice readers not only in the cases they pertain to but also in further interactions. If a person repeatedly hears that victims who are intoxicated or who willingly put themselves in bad situations are assumed to be lying or otherwise responsible for their victimization, these readers may begin to internalize these statements and apply them to all situations. Furthermore, the fact that rape myths were found in such short, allegedly “unbiased” news articles suggests that they also tend to be present in other forms of reporting as well. Thus, this study has shown that rape myths can be present in even the most basic of articles pertaining to cases of rape.

The inclusion of counterarguments is important to look at as well, however. Some of the articles that contained the highest number of myths also contained the highest number of counterarguments. This demonstrates the author’s attempt to try and maintain the neutrality of the article; even though they may be using a rape myth, they may also be trying to balance out these myths. The effect of these contradictory arguments is unclear. Franiuk, Seefeldt, Capress, and Vandello (2008) found in their study that those who read an article including rape myths were more likely to side with the defendant, while those

who read an article challenging rape myths were more likely to side with the victim. However, they did not study articles that contained both rape myths and counterarguments, so we still do not know how the combination of the two ends up playing out. It would be interesting to conduct a study that focused on this specific interaction to determine whether this combination results in bias towards the victim or defendant or whether it varies by article.

There are several directions that would be beneficial for social scientists to pursue in this area. First, the present study could be expanded to television coverage of cases. I believe that the unscripted nature of television reporting could potentially lead to more extreme views on cases; for example, it is likely that someone like Rush Limbaugh would have very different opinions on a case than someone like Nancy Grace would. Additionally, television coverage of cases can be short, but there is also an opportunity for reporters to talk about the same cases at great length; thus, there is a much greater window of opportunity to utilize a rape myth.

Another way research could be furthered is by looking at cases that are not so high-profile; I believe it would be interesting to look at cases that involve average people, both as victims and perpetrators. However, cases like these do not frequently make the news except for an initial reporting of the incident. If I had the opportunity to study this topic further, I would most likely want to look at court transcripts. By doing so, I could examine what myths (if any) were used by prosecutors and defense attorneys to attempt to sway the jury in favor of either side. I believe that this proposed study could add even greater insight into the use of rape myths by discovering those that were used in regards

to average persons rather than those used when discussing cases involving famous individuals. Moreover, studying transcripts from rape trials could also help explain how the victim's participation in risky behaviors affects convictions and sentencing directly rather than through speculation.

Due to the prejudicial nature of rape myths, it would be beneficial to teach more people about these stereotypes, especially journalists. Prior to reading Mary Stewart's book *Ordinary Violence* several years ago, I personally was not aware that these myths existed and had bought into them before. By educating men and women about the dangerous consequences of using these myths, we can ensure that victims of rape receive justice. If women are able to report rapes without being judged, slandered, and doubted, more women (but not all) will report their victimization. These women will also be more likely to endure the entirety of the trial, even if the defense attorney attempts to defame her character. If jurors are aware of rape myths and the way that they unfairly cause bias against the victim, they may take this into mind when deciding on a verdict or sentence. By simply providing basic education on rape myths, we can strengthen our criminal justice system and ensure that dangerous criminals are punished for their crimes. The difficult part of this endeavor is finding a way to educate the public, however. This is an issue that the social science community should investigate further in the future in order to begin to put an end to a massive problem that is trivialized in our society.

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