

Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape

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This article describes the "rape myth" and tests hypotheses derived from social psychological and feminist theory that acceptance of rape myths can be predicted from attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, sexual conservatism, and acceptance of interpersonal violence. Personality characteristics, background characteristics, and personal exposure to rape, rape victims, and rapists are other factors used in predictions. Results from regression analysis of interview data indicate that the higher the sex role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, and acceptance of interpersonal violence, the greater a respondent's acceptance of rape myths. In addition, younger and better educated people reveal less stereotypic, adversarial, and proviolence attitudes and less rape myth acceptance. Discussion focuses on the implications of these results for understanding and changing this cultural orientation toward sexual assault.

The burgeoning popular literature on rape (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977) all points to the importance of stereotypes and myths—defined as prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists—in creating a climate hostile to rape victims. Examples of rape myths are "only bad girls get raped"; "any healthy woman can resist a rapist if she really wants to"; "women ask for it"; "women 'cry rape' only when they've been jilted or have something to cover up"; "rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both." Recently, researchers have begun to document that rape myths appear in the belief systems of lay people and of professionals who interact with rape victims and assailants (e.g., Barber, 1974; Burt, 1978; Feild, 1978;

Kalven & Zeisel, 1966). Writers have analyzed how rape myths have been institutionalized in the law (Berger, 1977). Burt (1978) and Feild (1978) have quantified adherence to rape myths and other attitudes about rape, and have shown that degree of adherence differs in expected directions among known groups in the population (e.g., general public, police, social service workers, rapists). Also, Burt (in press) reports that rape myth acceptance affects the breadth or narrowness of rape definitions, and Borgida and White (Note 1) have demonstrated the effect of rape myths on verdicts in mock-jury rape trials.

To explore the antecedents of rape myth acceptance, this investigation operationalized and tested some of the tenets of feminist analysis of rape (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977; Griffin, 1971). In its theorizing, it also drew on social psychological research on reactions to victims, since the hypothesized net effect of rape myths is to deny or reduce perceived injury or to blame the victims for their own victimization (e.g., Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Jones & Aronson, 1973; Lerner, 1970; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976; Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976; Weis & Borges, 1973). The

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present research uses interviews with the general public to look at the attitudinal, personality, experiential, and demographic correlates of victim-distancing attitudes in the specific instance of rape.

Attitudinal Correlates

Researchers have explored the relationship of attitudes toward women, or sex role stereotyping, to rape attitudes or rape definitions (Feild, 1978; Klemmack & Klemmack, 1976) and found that sex role stereotyping varies directly with rape myth acceptance or restrictive definitions of rape. Feminist analyses of rape (Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977; Weis & Borges, 1973) maintain that other attitudes and beliefs are also part of a pervasive ideology that effectively supports or excuses sexual assault. The present author used feminist writing plus her own extensive field experience with rape victims, victim support workers, and audience response to public presentations about rape attitudes and beliefs to conceptually isolate three additional attitudinal variables. These conceptualizations were thoroughly discussed with other experts before proceeding. In the present study, they have been called *sexual conservatism*, *adversarial sexual beliefs*, and *acceptance of interpersonal violence*. This research quantified these concepts so that their hypothesized relationship to rape myth acceptance could be tested.

Sexual conservatism refers to restrictions on the appropriateness of sexual partners, sexual acts, conditions or circumstances under which sex should occur, and so on. It differs from sex role stereotyping in that it focuses solely on sexual behavior rather than familial, work, or social roles. An extreme position on sexual conservatism would hold that only heterosexual, legally sanctioned, penile-vaginal intercourse was acceptable sex. Since many instances of rape violate one or more aspects of this conservative position, a sexually conservative individual might feel so strongly threatened by and rejecting of the specific circumstances of a rape that he or she would overlook the coercion and force involved and condemn the victim for participating. The logic of this reasoning is similar

to the "just world" hypothesis, in which observers justify misfortune by attributing responsibility or fault to the victim. Such a belief protects the believer from sensing his or her own vulnerability to similar coerced events. Sexual conservatism would therefore be expected to vary directly with rape myth acceptance.

Adversarial sexual beliefs refers to the expectation that sexual relationships are fundamentally exploitative, that each party to them is manipulative, sly, cheating, opaque to the other's understanding, and not to be trusted. To a person who holds this view of male and female sexuality, rape might seem the extreme on a continuum of exploitation, but not an unexpected or horrifying occurrence, or one justifying sympathy or support. Adversarial sexual beliefs would therefore be expected to vary directly with rape myth acceptance.

Acceptance of interpersonal violence refers to the notion that force and coercion are legitimate ways to gain compliance and specifically that they are legitimate in intimate and sexual relationships. The assertion that violence is endemic to American life is widespread (National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 1969), but no empirical attention has yet been addressed to legitimizations for specifically interpersonal and sexual violence. Since much debate in the popular literature (e.g., Ben Horin, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Salerno, 1975) makes an issue of whether rape is a sexual or a violent act, it seems important to explore the relationship between attitudes that support violence and attitudes that support rape. We hypothesized that acceptance of interpersonal violence and rape myths would be strongly related.

Sex role stereotyping, sexual conservatism, adversarial sexual beliefs, and acceptance of interpersonal violence were hypothesized to form a generalized cultural background for attitudes focusing specifically on rape and sexual violence. Only one of the four, sex role stereotyping, had as yet received empirical investigation in relation to rape attitudes. The present research was intended to yield a better understanding of the relationship of

rape myth acceptance to these more generalized attitudes.

Personality Correlates

To date, research has not investigated the effects of personality on rape myth acceptance. The present study included selected personality variables based on the following reasoning. If much victim rejection occurs because people engage in defensive attribution, then people who feel stronger and more confident in themselves might be expected to rely less on this mechanism than people whose personal self-doubts already supply them with as much sense of vulnerability as they can handle. One would then expect to see less victim rejection—and less rape myth acceptance with its heavy component of victim blame—the more confident and satisfied the respondents felt with themselves.

The researcher chose three personality dimensions along which to test this hypothesis: satisfaction with one's own gender role performance, satisfaction with one's own sexual role behavior and experiences, and generalized self-esteem. The first two were selected because they seemed to be good personality correspondents to the attitudes of sex role stereotyping, sexual conservatism, and adversarial sexual beliefs. Own sex role satisfaction taps the familial, work, and interpersonal role elements relevant to sex role stereotyping, and romantic self image concentrates on satisfaction with oneself as a sexual actor, paralleling the generalized attitudes of sexual conservatism and adversarial sexual beliefs. A measure of global self-esteem was included to assess the general form of the hypothesis—that greater self-confidence produces more liberal attitudes in the highly charged domain of appropriate sexual and gender roles.

Experiential Correlates

The author selected a respondent's personal experiences of knowing rape victims or sexual assailants and having been sexually victimized her- or himself as a third set of variables whose relationship to rape myth acceptance should be tested. Exposure to popular media treatments of sexual assault and

aggressive sexuality was also included in this set of experiential variables.

Knowing rape victims or assailants or having been victimized oneself has been predicted to affect attitudes (Feild, 1978; Schultz & DeSavage, 1975). However, the direction of the effect produced by contact with an attitudinal object is almost always complex (Amir, 1969). Variables measuring contact or experiences with sexual assault were included in the present research to test whether they bear any linear relationship to the attitudinal structure that includes rape myths.

Much feminist writing on rape maintains that we live in a rape culture that supports the objectification of, and violent and sexual abuse of, women through movies, television, advertising, and "girlie" magazines (see, e.g., Brownmiller, 1975). We hypothesized that exposure to such material would increase rape myth acceptance because it would tend to normalize coercive and brutal sexuality.

The respondent's own experience with intra-familial violence constitutes the final variable in the experience cluster. It is included because of the analytic emphasis on the relationship between violence and rape, and because literature on the socialization of aggression (Bandura & Walters, 1959, 1963; Brown, 1965) indicates that violent treatment often begets violent or aggressive behavior. Hence one might predict that the more a respondent was exposed to violent behavior in his or her own family, the more accepting of interpersonal violence and rape myths that person would be.

Background Correlates

Feild (1978) found significant correlations among attitudes toward rape and respondents' age, race, sex, marital status, and education. Klemmack and Klemmack (1976) found a similar relationship for education and for occupational status, which Feild did not include. The present research collected data on all these and other background characteristics (e.g., urban-rural residence, religiousness, family income). Preliminary analysis indicated that age, education, and occupation bore the strongest relationships to the dependent variable, and they were retained in the final model. Respondent's sex was used

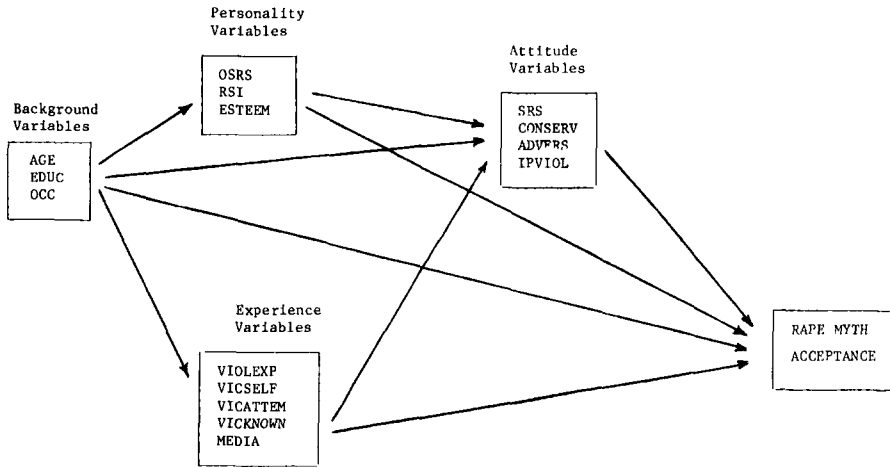


Figure 1. Theoretical model of antecedents of rape myth acceptance.

as a basis for splitting the sample to see whether the model replicated in the female and male subsamples.

Causal Ordering of the Variable Clusters

Although all of the variables just described were selected because of their potential effect on rape myth acceptance, the author believed that simply regressing rape myth acceptance on all the antecedent variables would waste much of the information contained in the data set. Rather, it seemed reasonable to assume that the antecedent variables were related to each other in a somewhat complex way and that these interrelationships should also be assessed. Figure 1 depicts the theoretical structure hypothesized for clusters of background, personality, experience, and attitude variables.

All of the variables appearing to the left of a given variable were assumed to affect that variable causally. It was assumed that stable personality traits and experiences were more likely to affect attitudes than vice versa, so these variable clusters were placed to the left of the attitude variables and rape myth acceptance. Background variables were assumed to precede all others in time, and hence causality, and were therefore placed on the extreme left and shown having an impact on all subsequent variables. Because there was no basis for assuming that personality affected experiences, or vice versa, no causal

paths were drawn between these two variable clusters. Similarly, no assumptions were made about the relationships of variables within clusters.

Method

The causal structure in Figure 1 was first analyzed as a fully recursive model on the entire sample, using multiple regression techniques. The results were inspected and non-significant paths between variables were eliminated. The resulting reduced theoretical model was then estimated for males and females separately to assess any differences in the cognitive structure between the two sexes and to serve as a replication of the theoretical model.

The data for this analysis were collected as part of an interview administered to a random sample of 598 Minnesota adults, aged 18 years and over, during the months of February–April, 1977. Households were selected randomly, and individuals within households were approached by an interviewer and selected using the Kish (1949) selection procedure to yield representative age and sex distributions. Interviewers were all experienced women recruited from U. S. Census Bureau interviewers in Minnesota. Prospective respondents were told that the interview would explore “your attitudes and feelings about the behavior of men and women toward each other in their everyday lives,

and also their romantic and sexual behavior. We are particularly interested in what you think about rape and sexual assault." Sample characteristics were age: $M = 42$, $SD = 17.6$; sex: 60% female; education: $M = 12.8$ years, $SD = 2.8$; occupational status: $M = 42.9$, $SD = 24.2$, coded in Duncan's (1961) socioeconomic status index. The variables needed to test the theoretical model were measured in the following ways.

Background Variables

Standard demographic questions were used to ascertain sex, age, education, and occupational status information.

Personality Variables

Own sex role satisfaction. Ten items were combined to form a scale measuring the respondent's satisfaction with his or her own sex role performance: $M = 31.9$, $SD = 9.5$, and Cronbach's alpha for the 10-item scale was .781. Table 1 gives the scale items.

Self-esteem. Items from Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale were used to measure self-esteem. Respondents used a 7-point scale to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the 10 statements comprising this instrument. Responses were summed to yield a total scale score, with $M = 51.9$, $SD = 8.7$, and Cronbach's alpha = .872.

Romantic self image. To measure this concept, the author used a scale developed in previous work (Estep, Burt, & Milligan, 1977). The interview form contained the entire original item pool from which the final 10 items were selected. Item and internal consistency analysis for the present sample confirmed that the items selected in Estep et al. (1977) were also the best items for a sample of the general public, with one exception: $M = 46.3$, $SD = 9.0$, and Cronbach's alpha for the scale on the present sample, with the one item replaced, was .665.

Experience Variables

Experience with intrafamilial violence. Using a 5-point response scale (always, frequently, sometimes, rarely, never), three questions assessed respondents' exposure to intrafamilial violence: "How often did your parents hit you when you were growing up?"; "In your family, when you were growing up, how often did your parents hit each other violently?"; "In your marriage, how often does/did the husband hit the wife?" Responses were summed to yield an index ranging from 3 (respondent answered "never" to all three items) to 15 (respondent answered "always" to all three items), with a mean of 5.67 and a standard deviation of 2.49.

Victim of an attempted (VICATTEM) or completed (VICSELF) sexual assault. Three questions explored respondents' personal experience with sexual assault: "Have you ever had anyone force sex on you against your will?"; "Have you ever had anyone attempt to force sex on you, but unsuccessfully?"; "Have you ever had sex with someone only because you were afraid physical force would be used against you if you didn't go along?" On the first question, 8.4% of the female and 1.7% of the male respondents answered *yes*; corresponding figures for the second and third questions are 26.6% and 3.2% for female and 9.6% and 0% for male respondents. Thus, 26.4% of the women and 10.6% of the men answered *yes* to one or more of these three questions. For purposes of the present analysis, the author created two dummy variables. If a respondent answered *yes* to the second question, VICATTEM was coded 1; otherwise it was coded 0. If a respondent answered *yes* to either the first or third question, VICSELF was coded 1; otherwise it was coded 0.

Number of sexual assault victims known (VIC-KNOWN). Respondents were asked: "Have you ever known someone who was a victim of a sexual assault, that is, someone who was forced to engage in sex against their will?" and "How many sexual assault victims have you known?" The actual number of victims known was used as the measure of VICKNOWN. For males, $M = 1.25$ and $SD = 5.59$. For females, $M = 1.06$ and $SD = 7.45$.

Exposure to media treatments of sexual assault (MEDIA). Respondents were asked about the extent of their exposure to television, motion picture, dramatic, and newspaper treatments of rape or sexual assault. Responses to each of four questions were coded as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 or more exposures; they were summed to yield an index (MEDIA) with a mean of 7.82 and a standard deviation of 3.07.

Attitude Variables

Each of the four attitude variables—sex role stereotyping (SRS; $M = 37.6$, $SD = 10.5$), sexual conservatism (CONSERV; $M = 27.8$, $SD = 10.5$), adversarial sexual beliefs (ADVERS; $M = 29.0$, $SD = 8.5$), and acceptance of interpersonal violence (IPVIOL; $M = 18.2$, $SD = 5.9$)—was created in the same way. Pretests using large item pools were conducted to select promising items for each scale. The final interview form contained approximately twice as many pretested items to measure each attitude as were desired for the final scale. All items used a 7-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Responses to all items measuring a single attitude were subjected to item analysis, and the best items were selected for the final scales. Table 1 gives the final items for each scale, along with the Cronbach's alpha for each scale and the item-to-total correlation of each item with the total scale of which it is a member, excluding the particular item.

Table 1

Own Sex Role Satisfaction, Sex Role Stereotyping, Adversarial Sexual Beliefs, Sexual Conservatism, and Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale Items

Scale	Item-to-total correlation
Own sex role satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = .781)	
How satisfied are you with:	
Your sympathy and understanding for others	.444
Your competence and skillfulness	.569
The amount of socializing you do	.420
The amount of money you earn	.297
Your independence and ability to make decisions by yourself	.538
Your participation in sports and athletic activities	.319
Your ability to express your emotions	.449
Your initiative, or "get-up-and-go"	.562
Your dependability in times of crisis	.542
Your attractiveness to the opposite sex	.455
Sex role stereotyping (Cronbach's alpha = .800)	
A man should fight when the woman he's with is insulted by another man.	.345
It is acceptable for the woman to pay for the date.	.440
A woman should be a virgin when she marries.	.631
There is something wrong with a woman who doesn't want to marry and raise a family.	.435
A wife should never contradict her husband in public.	.549
It is better for a woman to use her feminine charm to get what she wants rather than ask for it outright.	.389
It is acceptable for a woman to have a career, but marriage and family should come first.	.431
It looks worse for a woman to be drunk than for a man to be drunk.	.466
There is nothing wrong with a woman going to a bar alone.	.469
Adversarial sexual beliefs (Cronbach's alpha = .802)	
A woman will only respect a man who will lay down the law to her.	.489
Many women are so demanding sexually that a man just can't satisfy them.	.432
A man's got to show the woman who's boss right from the start or he'll end up henpecked.	.566
Women are usually sweet until they've caught a man, but then they let their true self show.	.562
A lot of men talk big, but when it comes down to it, they can't perform well sexually.	.420
In a dating relationship a woman is largely out to take advantage of a man.	.580
Men are out for only one thing.	.452
Most women are sly and manipulating when they are out to attract a man.	.578
A lot of women seem to get pleasure in putting men down.	.381
Sexual conservatism (Cronbach's alpha = .811)	
A woman who initiates a sexual encounter will probably have sex with anybody.	.507
A woman shouldn't give in sexually to a man too easily or he'll think she's loose.	.556
Men have a biologically stronger sex drive than women.	.442
A nice woman will be offended or embarrassed by dirty jokes.	.579
Masturbation is a normal sexual activity.	.432
People should not have oral sex.	.595
I would have no respect for a woman who engages in sexual relationships without any emotional involvement.	.411
Having sex during the menstrual period is unpleasant.	.492
The primary goal of sexual intercourse should be to have children.	.469
Women have the same needs for a sexual outlet as men.	.405
Acceptance of interpersonal violence (Cronbach's alpha = .586)	
People today should not use "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" as a rule for living.	.206
Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women.	.363
Many times a woman will pretend she doesn't want to have intercourse because she doesn't want to seem loose, but she's really hoping the man will force her.	.345
A wife should move out of the house if her husband hits her.	.254
Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force.	.396
A man is never justified in hitting his wife.	.318

Note. Responses to all items are recorded on a 7-point scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA)

The same procedures used to develop the attitude scales were used to develop the rape myth acceptance scale ($M = 49.4$, $SD = 11.9$). Table 2 gives the 19 items included in this scale, along with the Cronbach's alpha and the item-to-total correlations.

Results

The multiple regression analysis available in the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (Nie et al., 1975) was used to determine the effects of respondent's age, education, and occupation on rape-relevant attitudes and to ascertain the relationship between sex role stereotyping, attitudes toward normal male-female sexual interaction, atti-

tudes toward interpersonal violence, certain personality characteristics, rape-related experiences, and certain beliefs about rape.

To determine which variables should be retained in a final model, the analysis first looked at the relationships shown in Figure 1 as a fully recursive model (including all the paths among variables compatible with the temporal assumptions made about which blocks of variables were expected to affect which other blocks), using the entire general public sample ($N = 598$) for this analysis. That is, each variable except the background variables became a dependent variable in a regression equation and was regressed on all variables to the left of it in Figure 1. Table 3 shows the zero-order correlations among all

Table 2
Rape Myth Acceptance Scale Items

Item	Item-to-total correlation
A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex.	.271
Any female can get raped.	.363
One reason that women falsely report a rape is that they frequently have a need to call attention to themselves.	.423
Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to.	.533
When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops, they are just asking for trouble.	.545
In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation.	.532
If a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her.	.560
Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve.	.539
A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson.	.617
Many women have an unconscious wish to be raped, and may then unconsciously set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked.	.512
If a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with a man she's just met there, she should be considered "fair game" to other males at the party who want to have sex with her too, whether she wants to or not.	.598
^a 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?	.561
^a 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?	.512
^b 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?	.355
an Indian woman?	.578
a neighborhood woman?	.587
a young boy?	.462
a black woman?	.607
a white woman?	.599

Note. Cronbach's alpha = .875. Responses to all items were recorded on a 7-point scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," except: items marked ^a used "almost all, about $\frac{3}{4}$, about half, about $\frac{1}{4}$, almost none," and items marked ^b used "always, frequently, sometimes, rarely, never."

Table 3
Zero-Order Correlations for Variables in the Fully Recursive Model for Antecedents of Rape Myth Acceptance

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. AGE	—															
2. EDUC	-.420	—														
3. OCC	.050	.593	—													
4. OSRS	-.062	-.105	-.117	—												
5. RSI	-.258	.194	.155	-.154	—											
6. ESTEEM	-.287	.375	.237	-.444	.598	—										
7. VIOLEXP	-.295	-.026	-.131	.072	-.112	-.092	—									
8. VICSELF	.029	-.181	-.126	.081	-.032	-.059	.043	—								
9. VICATTEM	-.057	.173	.072	-.038	.048	.086	.123	-.595	—							
10. VICKNOWN	-.051	.246	.042	.128	.021	.001	.038	-.135	.152	—						
11. MEDIA	-.109	.272	.072	-.133	.133	.069	.046	-.005	.025	.080	—					
12. SRS	.374	-.468	-2.18	-.002	-.107	-.157	-.223	-.004	-.063	-.058	-.129	—				
13. CONSERV	.415	-.470	-.234	.126	-.395	-.293	-.180	-.029	-.052	-.040	-.180	.623	—			
14. ADVERS	.216	-.287	-.253	.067	-.438	-.390	.019	-.017	.003	.020	-.128	.383	.525	—		
15. IPVIOI	.089	-.239	-.171	.012	.001	-.279	.077	.042	.010	-.039	-.010	.289	.095	.286	—	
16. RMA	.348	-.411	-.257	.031	-.151	-.229	-.046	.037	-.072	-.041	-.107	.483	.386	.404	.499	—

Note. $N = 598$. AGE = age, EDUC = education, OCC = occupational status, OSRS = own sex role satisfaction, RSI = romantic self image, ESTEEM = self-esteem, VIOLEXP = experience with intrafamilial violence, VICSELF = victim of a completed sexual assault, VICATTEM = victim of an attempted sexual assault, VICKNOWN = number of sexual assault victims known, MEDIA = exposure to media treatments of sexual assault, SRS = sex role stereotyping, CONSERV = sexual conservatism, ADVERS = adversarial sexual beliefs, IPVIOI = acceptance of interpersonal violence, RMA = rape myth acceptance.

variables in this model. The standardized regression coefficients estimated for all the equations in this model are given in Table 4.

Inspection of the standardized regression coefficients for rape myth acceptance in Table 4 (the last column) reveals that of the demographic variables, only education maintained a significant direct impact when combined in a regression equation with all the other antecedent variables. Therefore, in subsequent analyses age and occupation were retained as direct antecedents of the personality, experience, and attitude blocks of variables but dropped as direct antecedents of rape myth acceptance. Of the personality variables, none produced a direct effect on rape myth acceptance, so all were removed as variables in the regression equation representing direct effects on RMA. In addition, respondents' own sex role satisfaction produced only negligible and insignificant effects on the other attitude variables in the model, so it was dropped entirely from the model. For the same reason, three of the experience variables (victim of a completed or attempted sexual assault and victims known) were dropped from subsequent analyses.

Tables 3 and 4 reveal that of the variables in the attitude cluster, only sexual conservatism failed to affect rape myth acceptance significantly. Acceptance of interpersonal violence was the strongest attitude predictor to rape myth acceptance. Romantic self image and self-esteem showed zero-order correlations in the predicted direction with the attitude variables and with rape myth acceptance (lower self-confidence associated with more stereotypic attitudes). When included in regression analyses, they retained their impact on the attitude variables but exerted no remaining direct effect on rape myth acceptance. Thus they did bear the expected relationship to the attitude variables they were selected to parallel: The more one sees oneself as a sexually and generally self-assured person, the less one adheres to sexually conservative and adversarial attitudes. But the attitude variables mediated the relationship of these personality variables to rape myth acceptance.

The experiential variables displayed the least consistent and the least important effect on subsequent variables. However, effects

of the background variables of age, education, and occupation permeated the model. In general, the older the respondents, the less satisfied they were with their own sex role performance and with their sexual role experiences as measured by romantic self image. They also reported less intrafamilial violence. Older people were also stronger adherents of the attitude variables. The significant zero-order correlation of age with rape myth acceptance observed in Table 3 disappeared in the regression analysis reported in Table 4, and its effect was mediated by the attitude variables. Occupational status had effects opposite to those of age—the higher the occupational status, the greater the romantic self image and self-esteem, and the more liberal the attitudes expressed on sex role stereotyping, sexual conservatism, and adversarial sexual beliefs. More education also produced more liberal responses on sex role stereotyping and sexual conservatism, affected self-esteem positively, and retained a significant direct effect on rape myth acceptance even when the regression equation contained all of the attitudinal variables. Taken all together, the combined impact of all antecedent variables produced a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .466, or 46.6% of the variance in rape myth acceptance. This figure is given in the bottom row of Table 4, as are the R^2 s that correspond to the explained variance in the equations for each dependent variable listed across the top of Table 4.

Since the foregoing analysis confirmed expectations that rape-supportive beliefs were systematically related to other pervasive cultural attitudes like sex role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, and acceptance of interpersonal violence, we proceeded to estimate reduced models for males and females separately.

Rape Myth Acceptance for Males and Females—Reduced Model

Table 5 gives the zero-order correlations among the variables in the analysis for males and females. Table 6 presents the standardized regression coefficients describing the causal antecedents of rape myth acceptance for each sex separately.

Table 4
Standardized Regression Coefficients for Antecedents of Rape Myth Acceptance—Fully Recursive Model

Antecedent variable	Dependent variable												
	OSRS	RSI	ESTEEM	VIOLEXP	VICSELF	VICATTEM	VICKNOWN	MEDIA	SRS	CONSERV	ADVERS	IPVIOL	RMA
AGE	-.103	-.162	(-.070)	-.379	(-.026)	(-.101)	(-.010)	(.007)	.334	.264	.174	.113	(.092)
EDUC	-.130	(.065)	.213	(-.091)	(-.044)	(-.017)	.134	.220	-.215	-.178	(.074)	(-.085)	-.123
OCC	(.023)	.131	.129	(-.056)	(-.100)	(.088)	(-.029)	(-.046)	-.138	-.131	-.153	(-.072)	(-.083)
OSRS									(-.046)	(.038)	(-.005)	(-.017)	(.015)
RSI									(.032)	-.299	-.282	.291	(-.055)
ESTEEM									(.039)	(-.001)	-.138	.389	(.132)
VIOLEXP									-.114	-.127	(-.014)	(.095)	(-.001)
VICSELF									(-.041)	(-.070)	(.032)	(.049)	(-.071)
VICATTEM									(-.017)	(-.019)	(-.033)	(.072)	(-.057)
VICKNOWN									(.000)	(.014)	(-.046)	(-.033)	(.024)
MEDIA									(-.047)	(-.071)	(.047)	(.005)	-.133
SRS													.191
CONSERV													(.092)
ADVERS													.141
IPVIOL													.279
R ²	.019	.062	.106	.138	.017	.014	.016	.039	.309	.372	.292	.164	.466

Note. $N = 598$. AGE = age, EDUC = education, OCC = occupational status, OSRS = own sex role satisfaction, RSI = romantic self image, ESTEEM = self-esteem, VIOLEXP = experience with intrafamilial violence, VICSELF = victim of a completed sexual assault, VICATTEM = victim of an attempted sexual assault, VICKNOWN = number of sexual assault victims known, MEDIA = exposure to media treatments of sexual assault, SRS = sex role stereotyping, CONSERV = sexual conservatism, ADVERS = adversarial sexual beliefs, IPVIOL = acceptance of interpersonal violence, RMA = rape myth acceptance. Coefficients in parentheses are not significantly different from zero at the $p = .05$ level.

In combination, the predictor variables in the reduced model explained 42.6% of the variance in rape myth acceptance for females and 46.5% of the variance for males. The relationships among the variables roughly paralleled those found in the fully recursive model.

An important question to ask of the two estimations for the reduced model is how well they replicate each other—do substantially similar patterns among variables emerge in the data for males and females? The answer depends on which end of the model one believes has most importance—that immediately antecedent to rape myth acceptance or that most causally removed. The present research was undertaken primarily to describe the patterns among rape

myth acceptance and the other attitude variables, with additional variable clusters included because there was reason to hypothesize that personality, experience, and background variables would also affect rape myth acceptance. The strongest similarities between the male and female data occur precisely among the attitudinal variables and rape myth acceptance. The data for both females and males show the same general priority of variables and similar magnitude of effect, with acceptance of interpersonal violence producing the greatest effect, sexual conservatism the least (nonsignificant) effect, and sex role stereotyping and adversarial sexual beliefs making smaller but significant impacts. With regard to these variables, the two subsamples replicate each other quite well.

Table 5
Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients of Variables in Reduced Model Estimating Antecedents of Rape Myth Acceptance for Males and Females

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Females (<i>n</i> = 357)												
1. AGE	—											
2. EDUC	-.341	—										
3. OCC	.093	.458	—									
4. RSI	-.129	.196	.241	—								
5. ESTEEM	-.040	.252	.240	.538	—							
6. VIOLEXP	-.386	.054	.178	-.072	-.072	—						
7. MEDIA	-.054	.110	-.012	.199	.034	.106	—					
8. SRS	.498	-.395	-.099	-.148	-.148	-.257	-.130	—				
9. CONSERV	.430	-.373	-.163	-.346	-.210	-.288	-.210	.674	—			
10. ADVERS	.287	-.374	-.246	-.349	-.349	-.055	-.213	.434	.528	—		
11. IPVIOL	.117	-.247	-.139	.069	-.285	.065	.025	.240	.056	.270	—	
12. RMA	.376	-.386	-.234	-.240	-.240	-.039	.013	.452	.368	.426	.493	—
Males (<i>n</i> = 241)												
1. AGE	—											
2. EDUC	-.420	—										
3. OCC	.050	.053	—									
4. RSI	-.258	.194	.067	—								
5. ESTEEM	-.287	.375	.238	.709	—							
6. VIOLEXP	-.295	-.026	-.088	-.183	-.126	—						
7. MEDIA	-.109	.272	.134	.022	.114	-.036	—					
8. SRS	.374	-.468	-.334	-.142	-.166	-.161	-.121	—				
9. CONSERV	.415	-.470	-.310	-.478	-.427	-.050	-.130	.528	—			
10. ADVERS	.216	-.287	-.263	-.465	-.455	-.104	-.024	.332	.546	—		
11. IPVIOL	.089	-.239	-.210	-.151	-.277	.090	-.071	.400	.196	.312	—	
12. RMA	.348	-.411	-.277	-.148	-.208	.050	-.236	.528	.412	.380	.522	—

Note. AGE = age, EDUC = education, OCC = occupational status, RSI = romantic self image, ESTEEM = self-esteem, VIOLEXP = experience with intrafamilial violence, MEDIA = exposure to media treatments of sexual assault, SRS = sex role stereotyping, CONSERV = sexual conservatism, ADVERS = adversarial sexual beliefs, IPVIOL = acceptance of interpersonal violence, RMA = rape myth acceptance.

Table 6
Standardized Regression Coefficients for Estimating Antecedents of Rape Myth Acceptance—Reduced Model for Females and Males

Antecedent variable	Dependent variable								
	RSI	ESTEEM	VIOL EXP	MEDIA	SRS	CONSERV	ADVERS	IPVIOL	RMA
Females (<i>n</i> = 357)									
AGE	(-.136)	(.007)	-.377	(.003)	.398	.276	.197	.157	—
EDUC	(.043)	.183	(-.012)	(.148)	-.213	-.177	-.169	(-.135)	-.135
OCC	.234	.156	(-.137)	(-.080)	(-.049)	(-.079)	(-.097)	(-.055)	—
RSI					(.109)	-.230	-.265	.366	—
ESTEEM					(-.123)	(-.013)	-.138	-.425	—
VIOL EXP					(-.085)	-.162	(-.032)	(.106)	—
MEDIA					(-.092)	(-.110)	-.125	(-.025)	(.071)
SRS									.188
CONSERV									(.112)
ADVERS									.154
IPVIOL									.371
R ²	.082	.083	.169	.017	.334	.351	.331	.205	.424
Males (<i>n</i> = 241)									
AGE	-.225	-.201	-.347	(.025)	.241	.220	(.119)	(.012)	—
EDUC	(.082)	.221	-.236	.314	-.264	-.196	(-.007)	(-.105)	(-.079)
OCC	(.029)	(.117)	(.072)	(-.053)	-.229	-.190	-.212	(-.097)	—
RSI					(-.136)	-.411	-.304	(.064)	—
ESTEEM					(.139)	(.042)	(-.149)	-.248	—
VIOL EXP					(-.124)	(-.081)	(.047)	(.063)	—
MEDIA					(.004)	(-.009)	(.058)	(.075)	-.139
SRS									.232
CONSERV									(.089)
ADVERS									.121
IPVIOL									.357
R ²	.076	.168	.117	.075	.307	.432	.300	.116	.465

Note. AGE = age, EDUC = education, OCC = occupational status, RSI = romantic self image, ESTEEM = self-esteem, VIOL-EXP = experience with intrafamilial violence, MEDIA = exposure to media treatments of sexual assault, SRS = sex role stereotyping, CONSERV = sexual conservatism, ADVERS = adversarial sexual beliefs, IPVIOL = acceptance of interpersonal violence, RMA = rape myth acceptance. Coefficients in parentheses are not significantly different from zero at the $p = .05$ level.

The more removed a variable cluster was from rape myth acceptance, the more variation appeared in its effects, although even with more remote variables the differences occurred mostly in magnitude and emphasis rather than in direction. The data in Table 6 indicate that the effects of occupation shown in Table 4 were due largely to the male portion of the sample, whereas the effects of education, especially on rape myth acceptance, were attributable more to the female respondents. Age affected the attitude variables more for females than for males but had more impact on personality variables for males than for females. Experience with intrafamilial violence seemed to make women less sexually conservative, but did not have this effect on men, and media exposure produced less rape myth acceptance in men but not in women. Expectations for the effects of the experience variables were not supported either in the fully recursive or the reduced models.

To summarize, estimations for the male and female reduced models replicated each other with respect to the relationships for which the author had the strongest expectations of association—among the attitudinal variables and RMA. Estimations for the rest of the model were less precisely duplicative, but remained within the general expectations for how the variables would behave. Thus, in both the fully recursive model and the two reduced model estimations, the data supported the hypothesis that rape myth acceptance forms part of a larger and complexly related attitude structure that includes sex role stereotyping, feelings about sexuality, and acceptance of interpersonal violence.

Discussion

The research reported here presented a unique opportunity to assess the predictive validity of feminist theoretical ideas about the rape-supportive nature of American culture.

These theoretical developments are particularly valuable because until quite recently the whole area of rape research proceeded on largely atheoretical grounds while at the same time implicitly incorporating many cultural stereotypes into its hypotheses, methodologies, and interpretations of results (Albin, 1977; Burt, in press; Marolla & Scully, 1979; Swift, 1978).

Thus, although people active in the rape area have recently been discussing and refining the ideas tested here, the author knows of no other published research that attempts to document the complex web of attitudes and beliefs surrounding rape in this culture. The present research, therefore, constitutes a first effort to provide an empirical foundation for a combination of social psychological and feminist theoretical analysis of rape attitudes and their antecedents.

The results reported here have two major implications. First, many Americans do indeed believe many rape myths. Second, their rape attitudes are strongly connected to other deeply held and pervasive attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, distrust of the opposite sex (adversarial sexual beliefs), and acceptance of interpersonal violence. When over half of the sampled individuals agree with statements such as "A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on the first date implies she is willing to have sex" and "In the majority of rapes, the victim was promiscuous or had a bad reputation," and when the same number think that 50% or more of reported rapes are reported as rape only because the woman was trying to get back at a man she was angry with or was trying to cover up an illegitimate pregnancy, the world is indeed not a safe place for rape victims.

At the same time, the data reported here imply that changing adherence to rape myths will not be easily accomplished, since they are so closely interconnected with other strongly held and pervasive attitudes. They do suggest that a fruitful long-range strategy would begin by fighting sex role stereotyping at very young ages, before it is complicated by sexual as well as sex role interactions, and continuing to combat the extension of sex

role stereotyping into the sexual arena as sexual interaction becomes more salient in adolescence. Only by promoting the idea of sex as a mutually undertaken, freely chosen, fully conscious interaction, in contradistinction to the too often held view that it is a battlefield in which each side tries to exploit the other while avoiding exploitation in turn, can society create an atmosphere free of the threat of rape. Rape is the logical and psychological extension of a dominant-submissive, competitive, sex role stereotyped culture.

The final important implication of the present data concerns violence. Acceptance of interpersonal violence was the strongest predictor of rape myth acceptance. If sex role stereotyping is the precondition for targeting women as potential sexual victims, acceptance of interpersonal violence may be the attitudinal releaser of assaultive action. Excessive violence has long been a theme in American life; rape is only one of its modes of expression. But the data presented here suggest that the combination of pressures of sex role stereotyping and the psychological availability of violence have helped to produce a rape rate in the United States that is the highest of any industrialized country. When viewed from this perspective, it appears that the task of preventing rape is tantamount to revamping a significant proportion of our societal values. Developing an accurate theoretical understanding of rape attitudes and assaultive behavior will help make social change efforts more effective.

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