

Introduction

One of the most widely recognised rape myths is the idea that “all women secretly desire to be raped”. Recent research has demonstrated that although this statement is far from accurate, some individuals do fantasise about coercive sex and/or rape (Critelli & Bivona, 2008; Bivona & Critelli 2009). The relationship between Rape Myth Acceptance and Rape Fantasy is one which has yet to be empirically or academically explored. Research has consistently demonstrated a link between Rape Myth Acceptance and individual's attributions about the victims of rape. In addition to this, Rape Victim Empathy has also been found to be negatively correlated with rape blame attributions. If attitudes towards rape victims in general influence the way responsibility and blame is attributed to individuals in rape scenarios, it is likely that rape fantasy also plays a role within rape blame culpability attributions. This study explores the existence of both erotic and aversive sexual rape fantasies within a sample of female university students and examines the potential relationship between rape fantasies, rape myth acceptance, rape victim empathy and rape blame attribution. The findings are discussed with reference to the implications for the legal and criminal justice system response to the victims of rape.

Aims & Objectives

- To identify whether rape fantasies exist within a sample of female undergraduate students.
- To determine whether there is a relationship between the existence of rape fantasies and RMA/RVE and whether Rape Fantasy impacts upon the way individuals/observers form attitudes about rape victims.

Hypotheses

General Hypotheses:

- There will be a relationship between rape fantasies and the way participants form attitudes about rape victims generally (including ARVS, RMA & RVE).
- There will be a relationship between rape fantasies and the way participants attribute blame within a specific rape scenario.

Specific Hypotheses:

- Women who experience erotic rape fantasies will demonstrate less positive attitudes towards rape victims in general, higher levels of Rape Myth Acceptance and lower levels of rape victim empathy.
- Women who experience aversive rape fantasies will demonstrate more positive attitudes towards rape victims in general, lower levels of Rape Myth Acceptance and higher levels of rape victim empathy.
- Women who experience erotic rape fantasies will attribute higher levels of victim blame within a specific rape scenario.
- Women who experience aversive rape fantasies will attribute lower levels of victim blame within a specific rape scenario.

Methodology

Participants

The sample consisted of 73 female undergraduate students from Coventry University with a mean age of 20.5 years (SD = 3.42) and an age range of 18 – 44. The majority of the participants were white British (43.4%) and the remainder of the sample consisted of students from a variety of different ethnicities; including Other White (18.4%), Black African (7.9%), Indian (7.9%), Bangladeshi (2.6%), Other Black (2.6%), and Pakistani (1.3%).

Measures

- Demographic Questionnaire (devised by the researchers)
- Rape Fantasy Questionnaire (GRF, ARF, ERF; devised by the researchers) – measures frequency and content of rape fantasies.
- Victim Blaming Questionnaire (RBA; devised by the researchers) – used to measure specific levels of victim blaming allocated to a victim within a rape vignette.
- The Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale (AVRS; Ward, 1988)
- The Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA; Burt, 1980)
- The Rape Victim Empathy Scale (RVE; Deitz et al., 1982)
- The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1988)

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Coventry University Ethics committee. Participants were recruited using the SONA system in line with the Psychology Research Participation scheme at Coventry University. Participants were required to complete an online questionnaire which took approximately 30-45 minutes in total and were awarded course credits for taking part in the research.

Results

1. Existence of Rape Fantasies

- 53.4% of participants reporting having experienced some form of rape fantasy at least once a year.
- 7.8% of participants reporting having experienced rape fantasies that were **Aversive** (not enjoyable).
- 14.4% of participants reported having experienced rape fantasies that were **Erotic** (pleasurable).

2. Nature of Rape Fantasies

Table 1. Table depicting percentage of participants experiencing rape fantasies with different perpetrator identities

Perpetrator Identity	Percentage
1. Current Partner	26.0%
2. Ex-Partner	15.1%
3. Stranger	21.9%
4. Acquaintance	24.7%
5. Authority Figure	13.7%
6. Faceless Individual	20.5%
7. Relative	5.5%

3. Proposed Pathway Model

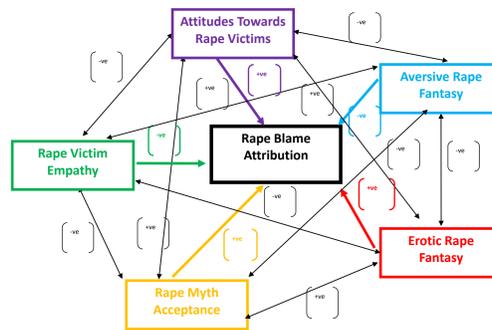


Figure 1. Hypothesised Pathway Model Depicting Relationship between Variables

3. Correlational Analyses

The relationships between the 7 variables being investigated were analysed using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (please see Table 2 for the inter-correlation matrix).

- There was a strong positive correlation between ARF and ERF, $r = 0.81$, $n = 73$, $p < .0005$, with high levels of ARF being associated with high levels of ERF.
- There was a medium negative correlation between ARF and GRF, $r = -0.47$, $n = 73$, $p < 0.005$, with high levels of GRF being associated with low levels of ARF.
- There was a medium positive correlation between GRF and ERF, $r = 0.38$, $n = 73$, $p < .0005$, with high levels of GRF being associated with high levels of ERF.
- There was a medium positive correlation between GRF and RBA, $r = 0.32$, $n = 73$, $p < .0005$, with high levels of GRF being associated with high levels of RBA.
- There was a strong positive correlation between GRF and RMA, $r = 0.55$, $n = 73$, $p < .0005$, with high levels of GRF being associated with high levels of RMA.
- There was a medium negative correlation between GRF and ATRV, $r = -0.32$, $n = 73$, $p < .0005$, with high levels of GRF being associated with low levels of ATRV.
- There was a strong positive correlation between RMA and RBA, $r = 0.66$, $n = 73$, $p < .0005$, with high levels of RMA being associated with high levels of RBA.
- There was a small negative correlation between ATRV and RBA, $r = -0.24$, $n = 73$, $p < .05$, with high levels of ATRV being associated with low levels of RBA.
- There was a medium negative correlation between ATRV and RMA, $r = -0.35$, $n = 73$, $p < .0005$, with high levels of ATRV being associated with low levels of RMA.
- RVE did not correlate significantly with any of the other variables.

Table 2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Variables

	1. Aversive Rape Fantasy (ARF)	2. Erotic Rape Fantasy (ERF)	3. General Rape Fantasy (GRF)	4. Rape Blame Attribution (RBA)	5. Rape Victim Empathy (RVE)	6. Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA)	7. Attitudes Towards Rape Victims (ATRV)
1.	–	0.81**	-0.47**	0.19	-0.05	0.17	-0.07
2.		–	0.38**	0.06	0.11	0.12	-0.13
3.			–	0.32**	0.15	0.55**	-0.32**
4.				–	0.17	0.66**	-0.24*
5.					–	0.03	-0.04
6.						–	-0.35**
7.							–

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Results

4. Confirmed Pathway Model

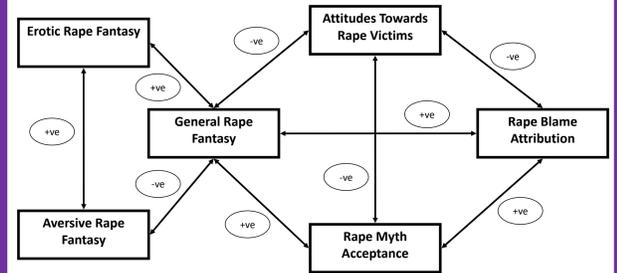


Figure 2. Confirmed Pathway Model Depicting Relationships Between the Variables

5. Multiple Regression Analysis

- Standard multiple regression was used to assess the ability of the 6 variables (GRF, ARF, ERF, RMA, RVE and ATRV) to predict levels of RBA.
- The total variance explained by the model as a whole was 46.3%, $F = (6, 73) = 9.48$, $p < .0005$.
- Only RMA was statistically significant as a predictor, with RMA recording the highest Beta value ($B = 0.65$) and accounting for 27.7% of the variance in the model.

Discussion

The findings indicate that rape fantasies exist and are more common within women than previously thought. Over half of the current sample (53.4%) reported having experienced some form of rape fantasy at least once a year, which is in line with Bivona and Critelli's (2009) findings whereby 62% of their sample had experienced such fantasies. Participants were more likely to experience fantasies involving their current partner (26.0%), an acquaintance (24.7%) or a stranger (21.9%) and only 5.5% of individuals reported having fantasies that involved a relative. Erotic rape fantasies (14.4%) were more common than aversive ones (7.8%), indicating that participants find at least some of the fantasies they experience as pleasurable.

The findings indicate partial support for Hypothesis 1 whereby significant correlations have been identified between GRF and ATRV and RMA respectively. Hypothesis 2 has also been fully supported by the identification of a significant correlation between GRF and RBA in a specific rape scenario. These findings indicate that the existence of general rape fantasies play a role in the way individuals make attributions about rape victims both generally and specifically.

Despite this support, the findings are somewhat contradictory regarding attributions made about general victims of rape and specific victims of rape. The positive relationship between GRF and RMA indicates that those individuals who experience high levels of GRF are more likely to endorse rape myths to a greater extent whereas the negative relationship between GRF and ATRV indicates that those who experience high levels of GRF are more likely to view general victims of rape more positively. In addition to this, the positive relationship between GRF and RBA indicates that those who experience GRF are more likely to blame specific victims of rape for their misfortune.

The reasons for these findings are unclear but suggest potentially that there is a difference in the way we make attributions about specific rape victims or more general attitudes about victims of rape. It may be that those individuals who experience GRF are less likely to identify with or feel similar to general rape victims as they have little information about the victim provided within general rape victim attitude measures (e.g. ARVS) and as such are less likely to utilise defensive attribution or just world thinking which often leads to higher levels of victim blame. Contrastingly, it may be that those who experience GRF are more likely to identify with a specific rape victim within a scenario because the information provided about the victim provides an increased level of similarity between the observer and the victim and ergo defensive attribution and just world thinking are more likely to be engaged, resulting in a higher level of rape blame culpability.

Interestingly, a similar finding has been found regarding the relationship between RMA and formation of attributions about specific and general rape victims. In the current sample, high levels of RMA are associated with low levels of ATRV and high levels of RBA, indicating that those who endorse rape myths are more likely to blame specific victims for their plight but are more likely to view general rape victims more positively. This finding contradicts the pre-existing literature relating to RMA and rape blame attributions, but again, suggests that the way we form attributions about specific individuals differs from the way we form attitudes more generally.

Specific findings relating to Erotic and Aversive Rape Fantasies indicated that these two factors do not appear to be related to the way individuals form general or specific attributions about rape victims. These two variables were not significantly correlated with any of the other variables and therefore all four of the specific hypotheses were rejected. These findings would suggest that it is the existence of rape fantasies that is important, as opposed to the type of the fantasy experienced.

The findings confirm that the relationship between women's rape fantasies and the way they form attributions about general and specific victims of rape is a complex one. Whilst it is clear that rape fantasies play some role in the way we make judgements about rape victims, the direction of influence is diverse and dependent on the type of attribution being formed. The findings must be interpreted with caution as they are based on a fairly small sample of female university students and as such may not be representative of the total population. It would therefore be prudent to conduct further research with a more representative sample of women, including a wider range in terms of age and ethnicity of participants.

References:

Bivona, J. & Critelli, J. (2009) The nature of women's rape fantasies: An analysis of prevalence, frequency and contents. *Journal of Sex Research*, 46(1), 33-49; Burt, M. (1980). Cultural myths and support for rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, 217-230; Critelli, J. & Bivona, J. (2009). Women's erotic rape fantasies: an evaluation of theory and research. *Journal of Sex Research*, 45(1), 57-70; Deitz, S., Blackwell, K., Daley, P., & Bentley, B. (1982). Measurement of empathy toward rape victims and rapists. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43, 372-384; Paulhus, D. (1988). Assessing self deception and impression management in self-reports: the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding. *Unpublished Manual*; Ward, C. (1988). The attitudes towards rape victims scale: Construction, validation and cross cultural applicability. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 12(2), 127 – 146.