One of the most widely recognised rape myths is the idea that "if women secretly desire to be raped." Recent research has demonstrated that although this statement may seem to derive from some individuals do fantasize about coercive sex and/or rape (Crittell & Bivona, 2008; Bivona & Crittell 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 and rape blame are similarly related. This study explores the existence of both erotic and asexual 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 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 victim.

**Hypotheses**

**General Hypotheses:**
1. There will be a relationship between rape fantasies and the way participants attribute blame within a specific rape scenario.
2. There will be a relationship between rape fantasies and the way participants attribute blame within a specific rape scenario.

**Specific Hypotheses:**
3. 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.
4. Women who experience asexual rape fantasies will demonstrate higher levels of rape victim empathy and lower levels of Rape Myth Acceptance than women with no rape fantasies and/or lower levels of rape victim empathy.
5. Women who experience erotic rape fantasies will demonstrate higher levels of rape victim empathy and lower levels of Rape Myth Acceptance than women with no rape fantasies and/or lower levels of rape victim empathy.
6. Women who experience erotic rape fantasies will demonstrate lower levels of rape victim blame within a specific rape scenario.
7. Women who experience erotic rape fantasies will demonstrate lower levels of rape 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 (44.9%) and the remainder of the sample consisted of students from a variety of different ethnicities; including Other White (14.4%), Black African (7.9%), Bangladeshis (2.6%), Other Black (2.6%), and Pakistani (1.3%).

**Measures**
- **Demographic Questionnaire** (devised by the researchers)
- **Rape Fantasy Questionnaire** (RFQ, ARF, ERF; devised by the researchers to explore the presence and content of rape fantasies).
- **Victim Blaming Questionnaire** (VBI; devised by the researchers) - used to measure specific levels of victim blaming allocated to a victim within a rape vignette.
- **The Attributions Toward Rape Victims Scale (ATRV); Ward, 1988**
- **The Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA; Burt, 1980)**
- **The Rape Victim Empathy Scale; (RVE; Ditzel et al., 1997)**
- **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 30-40 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 Aversion (not enjoyable).
- 14.4% of participants reporting having experienced rape fantasies that were Erotic (pleasurable).

**2. Nature of Rape Fantasies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Table depicting percentage of participants experiencing rape fantasies with different perpetrator identities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Black Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. White Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Aged Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Black Female</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**3. Proposed Pathway Model**

**Figure 1. Hypothesised Pathway Model Depicting Relationship between Variables**

**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, p < 0.001, with high levels of ARF being associated with high levels of ERF.
- There was a moderate negative correlation between ARF and GRF, r = -0.47, p < 0.005, with high levels of GRF being associated with low levels of ARF.
- There was a medium positive correlation between GRF and RMA, r = 0.38, p < 0.005, with high levels of GRF being associated with high levels of RMA.
- There was a medium positive correlation between GRF and RMA, r = 0.38, p < 0.005, with high levels of GRF being associated with high levels of RMA.
- There was a strong positive correlation between RMA and RBF, r = 0.68, p < 0.001, with high levels of RMA being associated with high levels of RBF.
- There was a strong negative correlation between ATRV and RMA, r = -0.35, p < 0.005, 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 Correlational Between Variables**

**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 engaging in rape fantasies, which is in line with Bivona and Crittell (2009) findings whereby 62% of their sample had reported engaging in rape fantasies. Participants were more likely to experience fantasies involving their current partner (42%), an acquaintance (42.4%) or a stranger (23.4%) and only 5.5% of individuals reported having fantasies that involved a relative. Erotic rape fantasies (14.4%) were more common than aversion ones (7.8%), indicating that participants first 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 RMA in a specific rape scenario. These findings indicate that the existence of 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 ARF and RMA indicates that those individuals who experience high levels of GRF are more likely to endorse rape myths to a greater extent than their peers who are lower levels of RMA. ATRV and ARF indicates that those who experience high levels of GRF are more likely to view general victims of rape positively. In addition to this, the positive relationship between GRF and RMA indicates that those who experience GRF are more likely to blame the victim than their peers who are lower levels of RMA. The results 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 (e.g. ARF) and as such are less likely to collate defensive attribution or put victim thinking which often leads to higher levels of victim blame. Conversely, 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 victims provides an increased level of similarity between the observer and the victim and this leads to positive attribution and just world thinking are more likely to lead to a lower level of rape blame culpability.

Interestingly, a similar finding has been found regarding the relationship between RMA and formation of attributes about specific and general rape victims. In the current sample, high levels of RMA are associated with low levels of ARF and high levels of RMA, indicating that those who endorse rape myths are more likely to view the rape victim as blameless and that rape is more likely to view general rape victims more positively. The finding contradicts the pre-existing literature regarding the negative effects of rape blame attributions, but again, suggests that the way we form attributions about specific individuals differ from the way rape attitudes are formed and treatment provided to sexual assault victims.

Specific findings relating to Erotic and Aversion Rape Fantasies indicated that these two variables do not appear to be related to other variables in the study, including general or specific attributes of rape victims. These variables were not significantly correlated with any of the other variables and therefore all four of the specific hypotheses were not rejected. These findings 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 rape victims and specific victims of rape is a complex one. While it is clear that rape fantasies play some role in the way we make judgments about rape victims, the direction of influence is diverse and dependent on the type of attribute being formed. The findings must be interpreted with caution as the sample size is limited and only a small range of female university students and as such may not be representative of the total population. It would be interesting to explore these findings with a larger representative sample of women, including a wider range in terms of age and ethnicity of participants.

**References**