

## An overview of the research literature on male sexual victimization

### An overview of the literature on female-perpetrated adult male sexual victimization

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## Abstract

The rape of women has been an issue of concern in research literature for the past 40 years. Conversely, rape against men has only relatively recently received investigation. The current paper reviews the existing research literature regarding male rape and sexual assault, with particular emphasis on female perpetrated male sexual victimization. The review covers issues regarding biased legal definitions, rape myths, feminist theory, and stereotypical or negative beliefs all of which create a problematic social environment for male victims of female perpetrated assault to report crimes. The review also discusses the prevalence of female perpetrated attacks against men, with evidence from self-reports by female sex offenders to highlight the existence of male sexual victimization and the aggressive manner in which the sexual activity is committed. The review concludes that male sexual victimization by women should be taken as seriously as that of women by men.

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The victimization of women by men has received extensive documentation in research literature particularly on the issue of rape, for at least the last 40 years (Brownmiller, 1975; Koss, 1992). In comparison, the subject of the rape of men remains significantly under-researched. According to Rogers (1998), the research, help, and support for male rape victims is approximately 20 years behind that of female victims. Considering that the prevalence of rape against women is substantially greater than the rape of men, approximately one in five women will experience rape or attempted rape in their lifetime (MacDonald, 2000), it is not surprising that there has been an abundance of research on female victims. However, reports of male sexual victimization have been increasing since the 1970s and rape centers across the country report a rising number of male victims treated after being raped, usually by other men (Struckman-Johnson, 1988). Walker, Archer, and Davies (2005) reported that in the year 2002, there were 852 recorded rapes of men in the United Kingdom. Although this is substantially lower than the 11,441 rapes of women reported for that year, the number of male victims is nevertheless significant.

Research literature states that, although male rapes are most frequently perpetrated by men, there is empirical evidence of the sexual victimization of men by women. Currently, the majority of literature on male rape emphasises 'the stigma of male rape' by referring to the 'established status of rape of women as a social problem' (Graham, 2006, p. 190). The literature tends to identify the similarities concerning the impact of rape, both psychologically and physically, on men and women. Furthermore, the literature indicates that male victims suffer potentially greater stigmatization than female victims due to negative attitudes, or beliefs towards male victims of sexual offenses (Graham, 2006). Consequently, much of the literature postulates that negative attitudes towards male victims cause the significant under-reporting of male sexual victimization. The literature makes these assertions in order to

legitimize the sexual victimization as a serious problem in society by stating that such offences are of equal importance to female sexual victimization.

Research literature has recently begun to recognize male rape; yet, the sexual victimization of males by females still remains relatively ignored and under-researched. The prime objective of the current paper is to review the research literature on sexual victimization of men, specifically by a female perpetrator. The review will pay particular attention to the current gender bias that permeates the legal definition of rape, determining that males can only be raped by other males and not by females. The prevalence of male sexual victimization will be reviewed, with reference to empirical evidence concerning the sexual persecution of men by women. To reinforce this evidence, literature on female sexual offenders will be discussed in relation to their perpetration of such sexual assaults.

Additionally, the review will highlight beliefs and gender stereotypes that perpetuate negative attitudes towards male victims of female sexual assault. Furthermore, the problems of such negative attitudes will be evaluated and the resulting consequences of victim blame will be discussed. The review aims to highlight the current problems that may influence, or be the result of, the still narrow and sexist legal definition of rape. Recognition of such problems may enable male victims to be more forthcoming with reporting incidents, and also may encourage readers to reassess their own attitudes towards male rape and encourage individuals to be more sympathetic, accepting and positive towards such victims. Therefore, an additional objective of this review is to propose that male rape or sexual assault, by females, is a significant phenomenon that should be recognised legally, socially and empirically.

## **1. Legal Definition of Rape**

### *1.1 United Kingdom*

‘Definitions are important for legal discourse’ (Graham, 2006, p. 191), they determine what is essentially viewed as a crime. Therefore, it is vital that the definitions of sexual crimes are up-to-date and encompass all non-consenting sexual acts against both genders. For example, previously, English Law narrowly defined rape as purely vaginal penetration and did not include anal penetration of men. The amendment to the Public Order and Criminal Justice Act (1994) redefined rape to include penetrative anal sex because there were concerns of inequality, as previously penetration of a man’s anus was defined as non-consensual buggery for which there was a lesser sentence than for anal or vaginal penetration of a female. The amendment was created to include the rape of a man by anal penetration, increasing the penalty for such violation to that of rape of female victims. However, this definition was still limited as penetration could only be with a penis, such that the male victim was only viewed as being raped by a male.

Today, the legal definition has been widened further yet it remains gender biased. According to the current legal definition of rape, defined by the Sexual Offences Act (2003): ‘A person (A) commits an offence if – (a) he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, (b) B does not consent to the penetration, and (c) A does not reasonably believe that B consents’ (p.2). Therefore, the legal definition assumes that only male perpetrators can rape as it states that penetration has to be by a penis to be legally determined as rape. Although this definition accepts the rape of men, it is biased on perpetrator gender, and consequently rape committed by females is not recognized.

Acts of sexual violence perpetrated by females tend to be classed as assault by penetration or as sexual assault in much of the literature (e.g., King & Woollett, 1997; Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Sarrel & Masters, 1982; Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988;). Yet,

the legal definition of assault by penetration ('A person (A) commits an offence if- (a) he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of his body or anything else, (b) the penetration is sexual, (c) B does not consent to the penetration, and (d) A does not reasonably believe that B consents' (Sexual Offences Act, 2003, p. 2)), refers to a male conducting the penetration, as does the legal definition of sexual assault (which is defined as 'A person (A) commits an offence if- (a) he intentionally touches another person (B), (b) the touching is sexual, (c) B does not consent to the touching, and (d) A does not reasonably believe that B consents' (Sexual Offences Act, 2003, p. 2)).

Even though sexual victimization of men by women is becoming increasingly recognized in the research literature (Smith, Pine & Hawley, 1988), the legal definitions of such sexual offenses remain gender biased. Although various female sex offenses are described in the literature as sexual assault (Sarrel & Masters, 1982), the legal definitions still use gendered language. For example, for both assault by penetration and sexual assault, the definition uses the word 'he' to describe the perpetrator. Such gendered language infers that only males can commit such crimes. Yet, the existence of female sex offenders who report sexual abuse against adult males (Krahé, Waizenhöfer, & Möller, 2003) proves otherwise; however, the definition remains unaltered. If females can be sentenced for committing sexual assault, even though the definition states that a man commits such acts, then it should be possible for females to be charged for the act of rape against men. Currently, women cannot be charged for rape it is still considered a male perpetrated crime as the legal definition refers to the insertion of a penis into the orifices of the anus, vagina, or mouth. However, if a woman can be charged for sexual assault (according to the legal definition, a male perpetrated crime) then a woman should be viewed as capable of committing rape through anal penetration of a man with an object, or physically arousing him and conducting intercourse through forced vaginal penetration of the female offender.

The maximum sentence for rape or assault by penetration is life imprisonment. However, sentences for sexual assault are considerably shorter with a maximum of 10 years. Consequently, if the offense, conducted by a female, is deemed as sexual assault, the female perpetrator will receive a substantially lighter sentence than a male perpetrator because in a similar circumstance he will be considered as having committed rape. Consequently, the current gender bias in the legal definition of rape means that a female perpetrator who anally assaults a man, with a vibrator for example, or who sexually arouses him by touching and forcing vaginal penetration, will have a lesser sentence than a male perpetrator who penetrates a female.

### *1.2 United States*

There is no one national legal definition of rape in the U.S. Legal definitions of rape, and consequent rape laws, vary between each State. Many of the States have passed 'reform statutes rape' laws which define rape as 'nonconsensual sexual penetration' (Koss, 1992, p. 62). This definition is not gender biased and includes all forced sexual penetration performed by either gender against men and women. In contrast to the U.K legal definition, this does not state that penetration is conducted through insertion of a penis. The 'sexual penetration' includes 'sexual intercourse, cunnilingus, fellation, anal intercourse, or any other intrusion, however slight, of any part of a person's body but emission of semen is not required' (Koss, 1992, p. 62). Therefore, rape is determined as any form of unwanted penetration. This definition, unlike that in the U.K, neither determines that the perpetrator has to be male nor does it use biased language with the assumption that the perpetrator can only be male. Although the U.K definition has been expanded to include the rape of a man by a man through anal penetration with a penis, it ignores that women are capable of such penetration with the use of objects or forced vaginal intercourse. Therefore, the current narrow legal

definition should be amended to define rape as penetration of the orifices, as defined by the U.S 'reform statutes rape' (Koss, 1992) laws. This would recognize that both genders can be perpetrators and consequently, should be subject to potentially equal prison sentences.

Considering that legal definitions of rape determine what is viewed as a crime and influences individuals' beliefs about what rape involves, it is vital that male sexual victimization, by females, is recognized as a serious offense. Research literature on the issue of male sexual victimization tends to focus on prevalence, incidence, and characteristics of reported sexual assaults in order to demonstrate that the rape of men is a 'significant social problem' (Graham, 2006, p. 189) which requires further exploration.

## **2. Prevalence**

### *2.1 Prevalence of Sexual Victimization reported by Males*

According to Walker, Archer, and Davies (2005), in the year 2002 alone there were 852 recorded rapes of men in the U.K. This is substantially lower than the 11,441 rapes of women reported for that year; however, the number of male victims is nevertheless significant.

Graham (2006) stated that compared to the expanse of literature surrounding female rape, the empirical research on the rape of men is substantially smaller. She postulates that this lack of research does not signify that the rape of men is non-existent, rather that the incidence and prevalence of male rape remains currently under-researched. However, she states that from the limited research available, it is possible to assume that a small, yet significant, percentage of males will suffer rape or sexual assault during their adult lives.

Although minimal, there is statistical and empirical evidence of male rape and sexual assault in research literature. However, much of the research literature terminology represents



that of the legal definition. Thus, male rape statistics tend to only include rape of a male by another male. Consequently these statistics do not include forced sexual intercourse instigated by a female perpetrator. Female perpetrated forced intercourse or penetration with an object is classed as sexual assault, or assault by penetration in most research literature, as it is in the legal definition. Therefore, if a woman sexually arouses a man and then proceeds to have sexual intercourse without his consent, this is classed as sexual assault, or possibly assault by penetration, even though if the roles were reversed and the female was forced into sexual intercourse this would unequivocally be considered rape. Thus, in the absence of statistics of male rape by a female perpetrator it is necessary to look at research literature on female perpetrated sexual assault to determine the prevalence of male sexual victimization by women.

According to Smith, Pine, and Hawley (1988), reports of men being subject to forced sexual activity under threat of physical violence, by women, have been produced (e.g., Lehfeldt, 1952). However, they stated that these have been anecdotal and consequently female perpetration of sex offenses against adult males has received minimal empirical attention. Smith et al. (1988) stated that the first systematic empirical evidence in psychological literature of female sexual assault against males was conducted by Sarrel and Masters (1982). They described 11 case studies, of which 7 involved adult males who were sexually molested by women in an act that was described as a complete reversal of traditional sex roles by 'an act of overt female sexual aggression' (p. 125). These males were subjected to threats of physical abuse or the use of physical restraints and each male victim found the incident traumatic. One of the men found the assault so distressing that he suffered enduring negative effects on his social life, and emotional and sexual functioning. Moreover, Orman (1985) reported 24 male victims of female sexual assault and stated that each man found the heterosexual assault exceedingly traumatic and they viewed the assault as an act of

aggression against them rather than a sexual act. These men displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, they suffered impaired sexual functioning and aversion to sex. Such symptoms are also found in female victims of rape (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974) therefore, demonstrating that heterosexual rape or assault by a women against a man is no less traumatic than the rape of a woman by a man.

Further evidence of female sexual offenses against males was provided by Muehlenhard and Cook (1988), who reported that 23.8% of their male respondents had been threatened or suffered physical abuse from females to force them into sexual activity and 26.8% of males had been forced through verbal aggression. They found that for forced sexual intercourse alone, 6.5% were subjected to physical violence. O'Sullivan, Byers, and Finkelman (1988) found that 18.5% of the men in their sample had experienced sexual aggression, of which 3.8% of men reported that the perpetrator used alcohol or drugs to perform the assault. A further 1.5% had been threatened or received physical abuse as a form of domination, 8.5% reported that perpetrators attempted to take advantage of their intoxicated state and 2.3% reported attempted sexual violation through physical force. Moreover, Larimer, Lydum, Anderson, and Turner (1999) reported that 20.7% of men reported having been subject to forced sexual activity by a female in the year prior to their study. Further research on prevalence rates of female perpetrated sexual offenses against males has been recorded from self-reports by female offenders.

## *2.2 Sexual Offenses Reported by Female Perpetrators*

Literature concerning female sex offenders provides prevalence rates of self-reported sexual aggression against males. This gives further information on the rate of male sexual victimization present in society. For example, Struckman-Johnson (1988) discovered that, in a sample of 355 female college students, 2% admitted they had forced sexual intercourse on a

male partner at least once. Furthermore, Shea (1998) surveyed 171 female college students and discovered a lifetime prevalence of physical violence of 1.2% and verbal aggression of 19% to force a man into sexual activity. Hogben, Byrne, and Hamburger (1996) reported a lifetime prevalence rate of 24% for women forcing sexual acts upon a male and Anderson (1988) reported that female respondents used verbal aggression in 43% of attacks, took advantage of a man under the influence of alcohol or got him intoxicated in 36.5% of offenses, used physical force in 20% of the incidences, and threatened with a weapon in 8.9% of the assaults. Although these studies give an indication of the prevalence of female perpetrated sexual offenses against males, they are difficult to compare to distinguish the actual prevalence rate because they all class levels of unwanted sexual activity differently. For example, some studies include any unwanted sexual behavior such as kissing and touching in their prevalence rates. Other studies only include more aggressive sexual acts such as physical violence to secure domination over a man (Krahé, Waizenhöfer, & Möller, 2003). Moreover, these prevalence rates are currently dated, and research is needed to discover the prevalence rates of female perpetrated offenses in society today.

Although research literature presents an enormity of differing prevalence rates, both from men's self reports of victimization and female's reports of perpetration, there appear to be similarities within the offense behavior. For example, it seems that women tend to use the same aggressive strategies to conduct the offenses (Byers & O'Sullivan, 1998). They tend to use verbal aggression such as threats and take advantage of men once the men are intoxicated more than using physical violence. However, these prevalence rates, albeit different in magnitude, reinforce that male sexual victimization perpetrated by females exists in our society and should be recognized as a 'serious and significant phenomenon' (Graham, 2006, p. 189).

### **3. Female Perpetrators of Sexual Assault**

Research literature involving the sexual assault of men by women is minimal compared to the substantial research on sexual assault of women by men (Graham, 2006). This neglect of female offenses in the literature has been postulated by Krahe (2001) to be a 'tendency in psychological research to focus on aggressive behavior as a male phenomenon' (Krahe et al., 2003, p. 219). The propensity to focus on male sexual aggression is proposed to be due to a preoccupation with physical aggression (Krahe et al., 2003), which is more dominant in male behavior than in females (Eagly & Steffen, 1986), rather than other forms of sexual aggression. Krahe et al. (2003) stated that the neglect of other forms of aggression, such as indirect or verbal aggression, causes this reliance on physical aggression in sexual assault cases. However, they stated that if these forms are recognized it becomes easier to perceive such behaviors as being conducted by women. They investigated the strategies used in female sexual aggression against males from a sample of 248 women. These women reported using exploitation of a man's incapacitated state (for example, if they were under the influence of alcohol), verbal and physical force in order to conduct sexual activity against the man's will. They used these strategies to force a man into oral sex, sexual touching, and sexual intercourse. Specifically, aggressive strategies were used by 9.3% of the women, 5.6% used exploitation of a man's incapacitated state, 3.2% used verbal aggression and 2% used physical force in order to perpetrate the offenses. As can be seen from this research and previous research on self-reported sex offenses, physical violence is only conducted in a small percentage of female perpetrated offenses. Consequently, it is important to recognize that the amount of inflicted physical injury on the victim does not necessarily identify the incident as a 'real rape' (Graham, 2006), because less physically violent attacks or even attacks which leave no physical evidence could still be rape. The focus on physical harm

equalling rape means that lack of physical abuse is often erroneously viewed as consent. Therefore, a man who does not display physical injuries after a female perpetrated assault, may be viewed by others as having been involved in consensual sex and later regretting it. Individuals' tendency to focus on harm, rather than consent, influences society's view that men are perpetrators of such offenses and females are victims, because the incidence of physical violence in male rapes against females is far greater.

#### **4. Negative Beliefs towards Male Victims of Female Perpetrated Sexual Victimization**

Conceptualizing men as perpetrators of sexual crimes, and women as victims, creates the assumption that there is a gender distinction between offenders and victims of crime (Newburn & Stanko, 1995). The focus on men's criminality instead of viewing men as possible victims makes the sexual victimization of men difficult for individuals to comprehend and perpetuates the belief that men cannot be victims of sexual offenses, particularly by a female because females according to this belief are the only victims of such crimes.

The literature on prevalence of female sex offenses, previously mentioned in this review, demonstrates that females can perpetrate such crimes. Therefore, it should be recognized that women, just as men, are capable of perpetrating sexual activity. However, the existence of male victims of rape and sexual assault, particularly in incidences in which the perpetrator was female, directly challenges our attitudes and beliefs about men's masculinity (Graham, 2006).

Much of the literature on male rape, or male sexual victimization, states that negative attitudes or beliefs regarding male victimization stem from rape myths or sex-role stereotypes (e.g., Doherty & Anderson, 2004; Sleath & Bull, 2009; Smith, Pine & Hawley, 1988).

#### *4.1 Rape Myths*

Rape myths are beliefs that are ‘widely and persistently held’ (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 133) in society which ‘deny, downplay or justify sexual violence’ (Bohner, 1998, p. 14). They form ‘prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists’ (Burt, 1980, p. 217), and result in vindicating the perpetrator’s actions by placing culpability on the victim (Costin & Schwarz, 1987). Rape myths were originally defined in relation to rape against women. The myths were viewed to ‘contribute to the cultural acceptance of sexual violence (and the maintenance of patriarchy) by framing rape as a sexual rather than violent act and by providing a repertoire of justification and exoneration for acts of rape’ (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). As with female rape myths, such as ‘Women often provoke rape through their appearance or behavior’ (Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006, p. 286), male rape myths place blame on the victim and vindicate the perpetrator.

Male rape myths have only relatively recently been introduced into the research literature (Graham, 2006). Kassing, Beesley, and Frey (2005) listed six categories which classify male rape myths. The first category determines men’s physical strength and size to mean that they are incapable of being overpowered and forced into sexual activity. The next category states that men instigate sexual intercourse and consequently would not be targets for rape. Another category is that men who are victims of rape lose their masculinity and there is also the myth that the rape of men is rare. Subsequently, there is the myth that men are emotionally and physically strong enough to cope with being raped and finally is the myth that male rape only occurs in prison. Sleath and Bull (2009) listed examples of male rape myths, such as ‘A man can enjoy sex even if it is being forced on him’, ‘Any healthy man can successfully resist a rapist if he really wants to’, ‘Most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting off the woman’ and ‘if a man

obtained an erection while being raped it probably means that he started to enjoy it' (Sleath & Bull, 2009, p. 11). Sleath and Bull (2009) recognized the rape of men by women in their male rape myths suggesting that they believed it is possible for a woman to rape a man, even though the legal definition states otherwise. Therefore, it is surprising that the academic literature recognises that females can rape males; yet, the legal definition does not emulate such recognition. Furthermore, Sleath and Bull (2009) identified the rape myth that obtaining an erection during rape denotes enjoyment or even consent to the activity.

Research literature on male sexual arousal presents that men can become sexually aroused in various heightened emotional states such as fear and anger (Bancroft 1980). Consequently, an erection can be induced by fear and is not necessarily indicative of pleasure or consent. Such heightened emotions can create unwanted arousal in men and if stimulated, in some cases, ejaculation can occur, similar to that of female victims who have reported 'vaginal lubrication and orgasmic responses while being traumatically raped' (Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988, p. 103).

Acceptance of male rape myths creates negative attitudes towards male victims of sexual victimization. Myths diminish the seriousness of male rape, or sexual assault, and create an assumption that such incidences are not offenses because the male would receive pleasure from the activity; otherwise, he would be able to defend himself against the perpetrator. Sleath and Bull (2009) discovered that male rape myth acceptance was strongly related to victim blame. For example, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) reported that participants agreed with male rape myths which stated that a strong man could not be raped and would be able to prevent the incident or escape the assailant, thus placing blame on the male victim for not preventing the assault. Conversely, they also reported that there was not significant evidence that male rape myths are widely held or accepted.

Furthermore, Johnson, Kuck and Schander (1997) found that, rather than myths being widely accepted by the majority, myths are only accepted by a minority of individuals.

#### *4.2 Feminist Theory and Male Rape*

Feminist Brownmiller (1975) defined the ‘criminal act of rape’ as an incident in which ‘a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will’ (p.18). Feminist theorists argue that rape is motivated by the ‘desire to assert power over women’ (Buss & Malamuth, 1996, p. 269) and maintain patriarchal control. Caput and Russell (1990) argued that ‘the aim of violence against women, conscious or not, is to preserve male supremacy’ (p. 34). Therefore, rape is considered to be a ‘direct expression of sexual politics, an assertion of masculinist norms, and a form of terrorism that preserves the status quo’ (Caput & Russell, 1990, p. 34) in order to sustain control.

Brownmiller (1975) suggested that man’s physical attributes, such as strength, size and sexual anatomy, ‘led to the realization that women could be controlled and traumatized by using sex as a tool of domination’ (Buss & Malamuth, 1996, p. 270).

Buss and Malamuth (1996) stated that empathy and tenderness are encouraged in females but discouraged in males. They stated that men need to conform to typically masculine behaviors, such as aggression (Frey & Douglas, 1992), and their fear of their own ‘feminine side results in male’s devaluation of women, hostility toward them and sexual arousal from dominating them’ (Buss & Malamuth, 1996, p. 270). Frey and Douglas (1992) give the following example taken from a book written for young Christian men describing Christian male adulthood. ‘A man of steel is a masculine man. He is aggressive, determined, decisive and dependent’ ‘he rejects softness and timidity. When he has made a decision based upon the best of his judgement, he is as unbendable as a piece of steel. These qualities of masculinity set him apart from women and children and weaker members of his own sex’



(Andelin 1974, p. 1819). This quote claims that the typical “masculine” traits are aggression, strength and dominance over women, the subordinated sex.

Rape is viewed by feminists as a method of control and domination, a 'conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep *all* women in a state of fear' (Brownmiller 1975, p. 15). Feminists further argue that rape myth acceptance contributes to this fear. They state that women believe they are subject to the constant threat of being raped unless they conform to traditional female roles, which place men at a higher social power status. Fear of rape 'keeps women at home' 'keeps women passive and modest for fear that they be thought provocative' (Griffin, 1979, p. 21).

Rape myths are therefore viewed by feminists as simply an excuse for men to shift the blame for the sexual offense they have committed and to instill fear in women in order to gain power over women and reduce 'women's freedom of movement' (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003).

Although feminists recognise the existence of rape myths, the traditional aspects of feminism would view them as only being detrimental to women because according to feminist theory only women can be the victims of rape. Feminism has made a considerable contribution to the area of rape, sexual assault, and rape myth acceptance. However, traditional feminist theory is based on the premise that the victim of rape or sexual assault is always female and the rapist is always male. This view that the rapist is always male is not illogical considering it represents that of the legal definition and the fact that the majority of rape victims are female. Furthermore, the phenomenon of male rape (or male sexual assault), particularly by a female perpetrator, as a social problem has only emerged relatively recently. Therefore, Graham (2006) stated (and the present authors agree) that it is understandable in a predominantly female sexually victimised society that feminist literature would focus purely on female victims.

Graham (2006) stated that 'sexual assault generates much attention in social research, but male victims are largely neglected by a predominantly traditional feminist perspective that seeks to highlight the gendered nature of sexual assault as a social phenomenon' (p. 187). She stated that feminist theory dominates research literature resulting in a lack of empirical research on male rape because its focus is on female victims. Graham (2006) did not dismiss the importance of feminist research, she recognised its significance and influence in the 1970s, before which minimal attention was given to the relationship between gender and sexual violence (Newburn & Stanko, 1995). However, she argued that 'focusing exclusively on female victimization is problematic' (Graham, 2006, p.187) because as Owen (1995) reported 'in necessarily attempting to rectify the invisibility and marginalization of women's experiences, little feminist research has considered the male experience' (p. 256). It is comprehensible that feminists wish to highlight the sexual victimization of women by men as this still remains statistically the most prevalent issue. However, by conceptualizing men solely as the offenders and women as victims, it creates difficulties for men that have been victims of rape or sexual assault, particularly those that are victims of female perpetrated sexual offenses, to come forward and report their victimization (Graham, 2006).

#### *4.3 Traditional Gender or Sex-Role Stereotypes*

Sleath and Bull (2009) stated that male rape myths are linked to traditional beliefs about masculinity and gender roles, particularly myths such as 'A man who has been raped has lost his manhood' (Sleath & Bull, 2009, p. 11). Sex-role or traditional gender stereotypes depict females as submissive and passive and men as dominant and assertive. With regards to sexual victimization, these traditional gender stereotypes reinforce male rape myths that men cannot be raped, particularly by a female, and they reinforce the legal definition of rape or sexual assault stating that only men could conduct such activities. According to this

stereotype, females are the only victims because they are weak and men cannot be victims because they are physically strong enough defend themselves from such an attack. It is these views that feminists argue permeate society keeping women submissive to men, and in fear of rape, believing that if they conform to such gender-roles they will be less likely to be raped. Consequently, feminist beliefs and sex role stereotypes do not recognize the existence of a male victim, even though feminists, clearly recognize the detriments of a gendered approach to victims. As a result if a man was to report a sexual attack committed by a woman he could, under these premises, be considered as having lost his masculinity.

Accounts of male rape victims have demonstrated that such societal expectations regarding men's masculinity discourages men from reporting sexual attacks because of fear that they will be labeled effeminate and essentially weak (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). Furthermore, sexual victimization conducted by a female towards a male may produce further stigmatization against, or suspicion of, the male victim because men are perceived as more sexually assertive, more sexually orientated, and more likely to initiate sexual activity. Thus, this gender stereotype determines that it is unlikely that a man would be an unwilling victim of forced sexual activity by a female. Smith, Pine, and Hawley (1988) postulated that such stereotypes will increase blame against the male victim and are more likely to increase the attribution of enjoyment to the victim, which they argued displays a lack of understanding of the trauma a man may experience from being sexually assaulted by a female.

Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) stated that, with regard to sexual intercourse, there is a double standard. Women are not expected to have intercourse unless they are in a committed relationship, whereas for men it is normally expected that they will have sex even when they are not in a relationship. Consequently, it is difficult to believe that a man would not have initiated sex or enjoyed forced sex by a woman. Evidence of such beliefs is presented by Howard (1984), who discovered that male victims of sexual assault received more blame

when they did not try to resist the attack, because then they are perceived by others as failing to match the traditional male stereotype, in which men are believed to be physically strong and capable of defending themselves in confrontational circumstances. However, Walker, Archer, and Davies (2005) reported that some men behave in a passive manner instead of resisting the attacker in many rape incidences. They discovered that over 80%, of the 40 male rape victims analysed, did not resist at any point during the rape. Instead they remained frozen with helplessness through shock, especially when threats towards their life were made, regardless of any prior combat or martial arts training. Davies, Rogers, and Bates (2008) stated that police and victim support services need to be aware of how frequent these reactions to assaults are and they proposed that further exploratory research is needed to report the prevalence, in order to educate society, of these natural reactions in such situations and to explain that the male victim is not any less masculine.

#### *4.4 Belief in A Just World*

Similar to acceptance of rape myths and traditional gender stereotypes in which individuals believe that the victim is to blame for their assault, the Belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1980) states that there is never an innocent victim, that bad things only happen to bad people, therefore, the victim must have deserved their fate. In relation to male victims of sexual attacks, belief in this theory asserts that the male victim must be an inherently bad person or have conducted a wrongful act and, therefore, the assault is a form of punishment that they deserve. This view can be linked with the male rape myth 'Men who have been raped have a history of promiscuity' (Sleath & Bull, 2009) suggesting that the male must be promiscuous to have been raped; and those who endorse the Just World beliefs presume that it was because of his promiscuity that he deserved to be raped.

Whatley and Riggio (1993) reported that individuals with strong beliefs in a just world were more likely to attribute blame to the victim of rape compared to those with significantly less belief in the theory. Conversely, Ford, Liwag-McLamb, and Foley (1998) reported that belief in the Just World Theory only affected attribution of blame towards the perpetrator, in male rape cases where the victim was heterosexual. Moreover, female perpetrators were attributed more blame than male perpetrators. However, both Whatley and Riggio (1993) and Ford et al. (1998) used the Belief in a Just World Scale (Rubin & Peplau, 1975) which was criticized as being psychometrically problematic (Whatley & Riggio, 1993). In addition, Ford et al.'s (1998) research produced an alpha coefficient of .48 which has been argued to be 'lower than acceptable' (Sleath & Bull, 2009, p. 7). Sleath and Bull (2009) argued that literature which examines the relationship between victim blaming and belief in the Just World has proved inconsistent in ascertaining whether such a theory can explain why victims of rape are blamed. They stated that presently there is limited research connecting victim blame with the just world belief and that further research is necessary to determine whether such a link exists.

## **5. Consequences of Negative Attitudes and the biased Legal Definition**

As previously mentioned, negative attitudes due to the endorsement of rape myths, sex-role or traditional gender stereotypes, and the belief in a just world can cause victim blaming. Anxiety related to such blame causes victims to refrain from reporting an incident through fear of being stigmatized. Research literature states that under-reporting of female rape is rife with 75% to 95% of rapes not being reported to the police. However, although under-reporting of female rape is high, the under-reporting of male rape is possibly even higher (Sleath & Bull, 2009). Walker et al. (2005) reported that 'few male rapes appear in police files and other official records' (p. 69). They noted that only 5 out of a sample of 40

male rape victims had reported the rape to the police, of which four later regretted reporting as police handled the case insensitively and negatively, treating the victim as if he were to blame. Moreover, one participant stated that the court proceedings were more traumatic than the rape itself, as the members of the judicial system displayed negative attitudes towards the rape of men, depicting beliefs of male rape myths and gender-stereotypes; consequently, they were immediately dubious of his innocence (Walker et al., 2005).

Literature on endorsement of negative beliefs against rape victims states that if such beliefs are held throughout the judicial system men who have suffered sexual victimization, particularly by a female perpetrator, will be less likely to report the incident (Sleath & Bull, 2009). This is because the male victims believe they will be judged as encouraging the offense, as according to the gender stereotype men are sexually assertive and initiate sexual activity, and that they could have resisted the female assailant if they really wanted to. Furthermore, a man who reports rape by a female may not be presumed innocent in court because the legal definition supports male rape myths that state that a man cannot be raped by a woman because of its use of gendered language. The gendered legal definition states that men can neither claim assault by penetration nor sexual assault because according to this definition these are only committed by males. This is inferred through the use of 'he' when referring to the perpetrator. Even though the literature uses the terms rape and sexual assault when referring to sexual victimization of a man by a woman, the legal definition does not yet replicate this view. Therefore, even members of the judicial system may display negativity towards men who claim they have been raped or assaulted by penetration by a woman, because according to the legal definition, this can only be perpetrated by a man. Horvath and Brown (2009) postulated that Jurors 'are influenced by the attitudes they bring with them into the jury room' (p. 6), therefore if they endorse beliefs which state that without penetration by a penis a man cannot be raped, and consequently cannot be raped by a woman, then the jury

is more likely to rule in favour of the defendant (the female perpetrator). Thus, the female assailant is not punished for the crime and is free to continue sexually attacking men without fear of retribution. When the legal system fails to punish a woman for the offense, it consequently communicates to society the view that women cannot rape men.

Victims have the right to be treated with care and sensitivity and to be given support when necessary, all of which is vital for an enduring recovery. They should be confident that all departments of the Criminal Justice System (from the police to judicial system) will do their utmost to arrest, charge and convict the perpetrator for the crime. Apprehending, convicting, and rehabilitating offenders is essential to prevent further sexual offenses being committed.

Lees (1997) reported that in rape trials there is ‘a spectacle of degradation visited upon the victim rather than the offender’ (p. 73). Campbell and Johnson (1997) stated that victims of rape are often dealt with by unsympathetic police, lawyers (Frohmann, 1991), and juries (Koss, 2000) who all discriminate against victims of sexual offenses because they accept rape myths that diminish the seriousness of the sexual offense. Therefore, rape myths ‘create a climate’ that is ‘hostile to rape victims, portraying them as often willing participants of sexual encounters or even instigators of them’ (Alison & Wrightsman, 1993, p. 99). If rape myths pervade the judicial system, victims are less likely to report the offense through fear of being stigmatized as the guilty party, which ultimately allows the perpetrator to avoid punishment.

Attending court can be traumatic enough for victims of rape or sexual violence as they will often face cross-examination on the specific intimate details of the case. Fear of the court process is enough to make a victim retract their allegations without the further fear of feeling persecuted by the court because of the court members’ acceptance of myths on sexual aggression. Such degradation of victims is a form of “secondary victimization” (Williams,

1984) because initially they suffer the primary sexual offense and subsequently are blamed for the incident by the Criminal Justice System. Such victimization can create further detrimental effects for a victim's psychological recovery.

The endorsement of rape myths, gender stereotypes or just world beliefs linked with the narrow legal definition, will deter men from reporting sexual offences committed against them by women. This will contribute to the 'dark figure' (Graham, 2006, p. 189) of assaults against men that go unreported. Consequently, people will not recognize the existence of male rape or assault by women as they will be unaware of the true prevalence of such incidences in society. Moreover, if the male victims do not report the offense, or confide in anyone, they will not receive the psychological or physical treatment necessary.

As can be seen from Sarrel and Masters (1982) and Orman (1985), men, like women, suffer long-term psychological and physical problems from sexual assault. Sexual dysfunction is particularly problematic after a heterosexual assault against a male because it affects relationships with existing and future partners, even more so if the partner is female. For example, Walker (1993) reported that 90% of the male victims in her study could not perform sexually after the assault, and one of the main problems was due to fear of recreating the assault. As not all female assaults are physically aggressive, female perpetrators can perform sexual acts that are similar to consensual sexual activity. Consequently, these men may be unable to conduct sexual activity with a female partner because intercourse reminds them of the sexual assault.

Therefore, it is essential that men feel they can seek the treatment and support necessary after sexual assault, and be reassured that they will be treated with sensitivity. It is important that therapists are aware of such assaults and do not endorse negative attitudes such as rape myths, traditional gender stereotypes, or just world beliefs. Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) stated that men have more difficulties discussing their victimization than women, due



to a fear that others will believe they have lost their masculinity, or that they initiated or enjoyed the event. They stated that some therapists do not believe such reports of sexual abuse. This is likely to increase the incidence of unreported rapes. As a result, there may potentially be a rise in mental health issues because the men are unable to seek counseling for the emotional trauma suffered.

## **6. Future Research and Conclusion**

Contemporary literature regarding the experience of sexual victimization provides empirical evidence to claim that the rape of men is a serious and significant problem in need of recognition by society (Graham, 2006). The literature presents prevalence rates of victim and perpetrator reports to demonstrate the existence of male victimization by a female and research determines that negative attitudes towards male victims arise from rape myths, gender stereotypes, and just world views. However, future research is necessary to identify whether these beliefs have influenced the biased legal definition, or whether the legal definition reinforces these negative beliefs stating that a man cannot be raped or sexually assaulted by a woman. Moreover, the current literature recognizes that females can conduct sexual assault and rape (Sleath & Bull, 2009), yet, the legal definition does not. This review has highlighted that the biased legal definition could be a factor causing the under-reporting of male rape, however further research is needed to investigate those effects on male victims.

Further research is also needed to discover whether the legal definition influences members of the judicial system rather than the endorsement of stereotypical beliefs. It is possible that rape myths or gender stereotypes have permeated the legal system and consequently negative beliefs, such as “a man cannot be raped by a woman”, are encompassed in the legal definition. Alternatively, it is possible that the narrow legal definition has influenced individuals’ beliefs so that they hold negative stereotypes and are

more inclined to endorse rape myths. Further research on this relationship is needed to discover the origins and dispel the myths.

This review has presented existing empirical research literature on male sexual victimization, particularly by a female perpetrator, in order to; (i) emphasize the recognition of such victimization in society, and (ii) highlight the negative attitudes towards male victims influenced by the biased legal definition and stereotypical beliefs about rape. The review has also demonstrated the consequences of negative attitudes towards male victims. Although the literature recognizes the existence of male rape and sexual assault by women, it is vital that this recognition is found in the entire judicial system and that the legal definition is altered to consider the rape of men by women. The Home Office (2007) stated that victims ‘deserve to be supported, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to see their offenders brought to justice’ (pi). In order to give male victims the support, treatment, and respect they deserve it is essential that rape myths, gender stereotypes, and just world beliefs are dispelled and that there is a policy change so that the legal definition includes the rape of a man by a woman.

It was recognized in Sarrel and Masters (1982) that an increased identification, treatment, and medical and psychological services for male victims of female perpetrated rape were needed. Yet, there still has not been a change in the legal definition to incorporate female perpetrated rape against men. Amending the definition may result in a societal recognition of male sexual victimization by women and may, in turn, create a reduction in acceptance of rape myths, gender stereotypes, and just world beliefs. This will eventually enable men to feel more comfortable in reporting such offenses as they will be more assured they will be treated with care and sensitivity. If this occurs, there may be a significant rise in reported rapes of men by women. More importantly, an increase in reporting will mean that the men will be able to receive the psychological and physical treatment they need and deserve.

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