Law Students' Judgments of a Rape Victim's Statement: The Role of Displays of Emotion and Acceptance of Sexual Aggression Myths

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Female rape victims who display "appropriate" emotions (versus "inappropriate" or no emotions) are often judged to be more credible. The authors studied the interplay of different emotion displays with perceivers' acceptance of modern myths about sexual aggression (AMMSA) in predicting judgments of credibility and blame. Law students (N = 120) completed a 16-item AMMSA scale and watched a video showing a simulated interview with a rape victim (played by an actress). The emotion displayed by the victim (sad, angry, or neutral) was experimentally manipulated; her statement's verbal content was held constant. Main dependent variables were perceived victim credibility, victim blame, severity of the injury, and likelihood of recovery. Results showed that AMMSA strongly predicted all dependent variables across conditions. Effects of displayed emotions were less pervasive and depended on participants' gender and AMMSA: At higher (vs. lower) levels of AMMSA, women – but not men – judged the sad victim's statement to be most credible, and the angry victim's statement to be least credible, with the neutral statement falling in between. The findings suggest that perceivers may be better at keeping their judgements free from unwanted external influences (the emotional displays) than unwanted internal influences (their own AMMSA). The authors discuss future directions regarding the mechanisms involved and practical implications for the legal context.

Keywords: emotional victim effect; legal decision making; nonverbal behavior; rape myths; victimization

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Rape is a crime that is difficult to prosecute. In Germany, for example, conviction rates were always low and have been decreasing in recent years, from about 15 percent in 1999 to about 10 percent in 2015 (Hellmann 2018). In many rape cases, acquittals or terminations of proceedings are based on a lack of evidence. If there is neither physical evidence nor other witnesses, the only basis for a conviction is the presumed victim's statement (Kelly and Lovett 2009). However, the appraisal of victims' statements is often influenced by legally irrelevant factors, such as the display of emotions by the witness (Ask and Landström 2010; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Vrij and Fischer 1997; Winkel and Koppelaar 1991) or the judges' acceptance of common myths about sexual aggression (Goodman-Delahunty and Graham 2011; Wenger and Bornstein 2006). We address each of these factors in turn.

1. The Display of Emotions by Victims of Rape

People tend to hold expectations of "appropriate" behavior when a female victim reports a rape. In particular, they may expect a victim to show signs of sadness and emotional distress rather than displaying a calm, composed, or "numb" demeanor (Winkel and Koppelaar 1991; Wrede and Ask 2015). Such expectations are partly based on stereotypes of the typical rape victim (Brownmiller 1975) and on more general female gender-role stereotypes (Ellemers 2018; Wrede and Ask 2015). A rape victim whose behavior corresponds to these expectations may thus be more likely to be believed and less likely to be blamed. In addition, a highly emotional, expressive style of self-presentation may generally increase a speaker's credibility (Bell and Loftus 1985) and evoke more positive emotional responses in perceivers (Ask and Landström 2010). It is important to note, however, that displays of emotion do not appear to be valid cues to a victim's credibility, as many victims do show a *controlled* style of reporting, where feelings are "masked or hidden and a calm, composed, or subdued affect [is] seen" (Burgess and Holmstrom 1973, 1743).

Early evidence for an "emotional victim effect" was obtained in experiments by Calhoun et al. (1981) as well as Winkel and Koppelaar (1991). Participants in the latter study (students at a vocational high school) watched a video in which a witness (an actress) reported having been raped by an acquaintance after a party at her own home. While the

verbal content was held constant, the victim's emotional expression was experimentally varied: In an "emotional" condition, she displayed signs of distress and desperation, talking in a trembling voice and sometimes sobbing; in a "numbed" condition, she spoke "in an emotionally restrained and controlled manner" (Winkel and Koppelaar 1991, 33). Overall, participants believed the victim to be more credible and less responsible for what had happened to her when she spoke emotionally rather than in a numbed fashion. In an extended replication of this finding, Ask and Landström (2010) found that the emotional victim effect was mediated by participants' expectations regarding proper victim behavior as well as by their affective responses to the target.

Going beyond the comparison of emotional versus non-emotional expression, Kaufmann and colleagues (2003) examined the effects of "appropriate" and "inappropriate" emotions by presenting a rape victim behaving in a sad, neutral, or happy manner. Results showed that both the credibility of the victim and the probability of the defendant's guilt were judged to be highest in the "appropriate" (sad) emotion condition, and lowest in the "inappropriate" (happy) condition, with the neutral condition falling in between. An orthogonal variation of the statement's content – unambiguous (the woman clearly rejects the man's advances and actively resists) versus ambiguous (she withdraws after first inviting some degree of intimacy) – had no effect on participants' judgments. Nonetheless, when asked how much the *form* of the testimony versus its *content* had affected their judgments, participants reported that both had done so equally across conditions. Interestingly, when Wessel et al. (2006) replicated Kaufmann and colleagues' procedures with experienced court judges, they found no effect of emotional displays on credibility ratings.

In another study, Vrij and Fisher (1997) examined effects of two negative emotions that may be seen as more versus less appropriate: sadness and anger. They asked British university students first to read a brief description of a rape and then to view a two-minute video segment of a police interview with the victim conducted in Dutch. As none of the participants spoke Dutch, the authors hypothesized that they would be influenced by nonverbal and paraverbal displays of emotion, but not by the spoken verbal content. The results

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showed that female observers were unaffected by the emotion condition, but male observers judged a sad victim to be both more distressed and more reliable than an angry victim.

In sum, previous results suggest that victims who display signs of sadness and distress, – emotions that are assumed to be "appropriate" for a victim (but are not valid cues of truthfulness) – are believed more and evoke more positive responses in observers than are victims who display either no strong emotions or emotions assumed to be "inappropriate," such as anger or even happiness. Furthermore, the magnitude of these effects may depend on processing conditions and observer characteristics (including gender and expertise).

2. Sexual Aggression Myths

A factor that has been widely studied in relation to judgments about rape cases is the acceptance of rape myths (Burt 1980), or more recently, the acceptance of modern myths about sexual aggression (AMMSA; Gerger et al. 2007). Such myths may be defined as "descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about sexual aggression (i.e., about its scope, causes, context, and consequences) that serve to deny, downplay, or justify sexually aggressive behavior that men commit against women" (Gerger et al. 2007, 425).

Early scales of rape myth acceptance used rather blatant and openly misogynist item content (for example: "When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops, they are just asking for trouble"; Burt 1980, 223). This led to low levels of agreement, and highly skewed distributions in more recent studies. Inspired by research on modern sexism (Swim et al. 1995) and modern racism (McConahay 1986), Gerger and colleagues (2007) have thus developed the AMMSA scale, which assesses *modern* myths about sexual aggression using more subtle items. Specifically, the AMMSA scale reflects the following content categories: *denial of the scope of the problem* ("Many women tend to misinterpret a well-meant gesture as a 'sexual assault'"), *antagonism toward victims' demands* ("Although the victims of armed robbery have to fear for their lives, they receive far less psychological support than do rape victims"), *lack of support for policies designed to alleviate the effects of sexual violence* ("Nowadays, the victims of sexual violence receive sufficient help in the form of women's shelters, therapy offers, and support groups"), *beliefs that male coercion forms a natural part of sexual relationships* ("When a woman starts a relationship with a man, she must be aware that the man will assert his right to have sex"), and *beliefs that exonerate male perpetrators by blaming the victim or the circumstances* ("Alcohol is often the culprit when a man rapes a woman"). Despite its diversity in content, research has shown that it is suitable to treat AMMSA as a unidimensional construct (Gerger et al. 2007). We will use the AMMSA scale in our present research.

2.1 Sexual Aggression Myths: A Schema that Affects Case-related Judgments

Myths about sexual aggression may be understood as a general schema that guides and organizes an individual's interpretation of information about specific cases of sexual aggression (Bohner 1998; Bohner et al. 2009). People tend to rely on schematic processing particularly when the available information is ambiguous or nondiagnostic. As these conditions are often present in rape cases, higher acceptance of sexual aggression myths has been shown to go along with judgments of lower victim credibility (Wenger and Bornstein 2006), less perpetrator guilt, and greater victim blaming (for a review, see van der Bruggen and Grubb 2014). Comparable effects were obtained even with samples of experienced police officers (Goodman-Delahunty and Graham 2011; Sleath and Bull 2012) or prospective lawyers (Krahé et al. 2008). Such influences of AMMSA are greater when the case-related information is amenable to varying interpretations, for example when a large amount of *irrelevant* information has been presented (Eyssel and Bohner 2011). Furthermore, recent research using information-search and eye-tracking methodologies has shown that higher AMMSA may guide observers' attention away from the presumed perpetrator and toward the presumed victim when they search for clues toward guilt and blame (Süssenbach, Bohner, and Eyssel 2012; Süssenbach, Eyssel, Rees, and Bohner 2017).

Taken together, these findings suggest that individual differences in AMMSA may be linked to the emotional victim effect. To the extent that higher AMMSA includes more stereotypical views of victims and directs attention to the victim, it may intensify expectancy-based effects of displayed emotions. Indeed, participants with strong expectations about a rape victim's typical behavior were more likely to view an emotional victim as more credible than a non-emotional victim (Hackett, Day, and Mohr 2008). But even if the observer's AMMSA and the victim's emotional display do not interact in this way, including participants' AMMSA in the

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prediction of credibility and victim blaming judgments should increase the precision of estimating the unique effects of emotional displays.

3. Gender Differences in Judgments of Sexual Assault

Besides sexual aggression myths, another predictor variable that has received attention in research on judgments of sexual assault cases is perceivers' gender (for a review, see Grubb and Harrower 2008). Several studies found that female perceivers attribute less responsibility to a rape victim than do male perceivers, and this pattern was observed both in studies using text vignettes (Brekke and Borgida 1988; Luginbuhl and Mullin 1981) and in studies using video material (Kleinke and Meyer 1990).

Other studies, however, did not find evidence for gender differences in judgments of victim responsibility (for example Krahé 1988). Gender differences were also absent in the first study on the emotional victim effect (Calhoun et al. 1981), but it should be noted that sample sizes in that study were small. Given the mixed findings regarding gender effects in the literature, we decided to explore potential effects of participant gender in our study.

4. The Present Research

This study's purpose was to investigate how a victim's emotional expression and observer AMMSA jointly affect judgments of victim credibility, victim blaming, and case severity. Based on the theoretical approaches and empirical findings discussed above, we formulated two main effect hypotheses and an interaction hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: A higher level of participant AMMSA is associated with lower ratings of victim credibility, higher ratings of victim blaming, and lower ratings of case severity.

Hypothesis 2: A victim's emotional expression of sadness leads to higher ratings of victim credibility, lower ratings of victim blaming, and higher ratings of case severity than does a neutral emotional expression; likewise, a neutral emotional expression leads to higher ratings of victim credibility, lower ratings of victim blaming, and higher ratings of case severity than does an emotional expression of anger.

Hypothesis 3: The effects described in Hypothesis 2 are more pronounced for participants higher (vs. lower) in AMMSA.

As the topic of this study is especially relevant to a legal context, the study's sample consisted of law students. Equal numbers of female and male students were assigned to each experimental condition, and gender was included as an independent variable in the analyses. One may speculate that law students may be less prone to influences of legally irrelevant factors such as their own AMMSA or a witness's emotions; if this were true (but see Krahé et al. 2008), using a law student sample would constitute a particularly conservative test of our hypotheses. On the other hand, it turned out that most students in our sample were still at an early stage of their training.

In order to present the victim's statement in an authentic way, we produced videos based on a real interview transcript, courtesy of a psychological expert who had conducted the interview for an expert testimony. We should note that the verbal content of the videos contained elements that may be perceived as ambiguous and open to interpretation (for example the victim drinking alcohol with the perpetrator and becoming intoxicated); but such ambiguity may be both ecologically valid and conducive to detecting influences of both AMMSA (Eyssel and Bohner 2011; Süssenbach, Albrecht, and Bohner 2017) and emotional expression. A further advantage of a video statement is that it allows for integration of visual and auditory information about emotion, which observers may perform routinely and relatively automatically (Vroomen, Driver, and de Gelder 2001).

5. Method
5.1 Participants, Design, and Procedure

One hundred and twenty law students (63 females, 57 males) from a medium-sized university in Germany volunteered to participate in a computer-assisted laboratory experiment. Participants' median age was 21 years (range = 18–24), and their median experience at law school was four semesters (range = 1–13). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three video conditions (sad, angry, neutral; n = 40 each) and seated individually in front of a personal computer. In the sad video condition there were 23 males and 17 females; in the angry video condition, 19 males and 21 females; in the neutral video condition, 15 males and 25 females. All materials were presented, and all responses assessed, via the experiment software Inquisit 5 Lab (see www.millisecond.com). All materials were presented in the German language.

Participants first completed the AMMSA scale. Then they watched a five-minute video in which a young woman named "Anna" tells a male interviewer how she was raped by a man named "Thomas". (While the script was based on a real

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case, both names were fictitious.) Afterwards, participants answered items on the credibility of Anna's statement, other aspects of the rape (including victim blame and severity of the case), the emotions that Anna displayed in the video (manipulation check), and their overall impression of Anna.

Participants were informed in advance that the study would contain materials related to sexual violence that might be experienced as distressing. At the end of the session, they were thoroughly debriefed. The procedures were approved by the university ethics committee.

5.2 Independent Variables

AMMSA. Participants completed the 16-item short version of the Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression (AMMSA) scale, which has been validated and used in previous research (see Eyssel and Bohner 2011, Expt. 1; Eyssel, Bohner, and Siebler 2006). It contained Items 4, 7, 8, 12–17, and 22–28 from the original 30-item AMMSA scale (Gerger et al. 2007, 439–40). For examples of items see Section 2. Responses to each item were made on a scale ranging from 1, *completely disagree*, to 7, *completely agree*. We defined the mean across the 16 items as a participant's AMMSA score (Cronbach's α = .80; M = 3.18, SD = 0.77).[2]

Victim's statement (videos). Participants watched one of three short videos (about five minutes in length) in which an actress re-enacted a rape victim's interview with a psychologist. The camera stayed focused on the victim (see Figure 1); the interviewer could not be seen, but his questions could be heard. The video was introduced as showing a real witness interview. The three videos differed, according to condition, in the emotional expression displayed by the victim, which was *sad* (distressed facial expression, subdued and sometimes trembling voice), *angry* (angry facial expression, more powerful voice and gestures), or *neutral* (calm facial expression, matter-of-fact tone of voice). Their verbal content was identical, and may be summarized as follows:[3]

> Anna states that she visited Thomas, a male acquaintance (the defendant), and they watched television and talked. When Thomas moved closer, she felt uncomfortable but accepted a beer, even though she did not like beer. When Thomas told her that he wanted to show her something in his bedroom, she did not understand his intention and followed him. As they were sitting on the edge of the bed, he started to caress her but she told him to stop. Thomas insisted, pushed her on the bed, and pulled her trousers down. She states that she had trouble resisting because of the alcohol, that he ignored her when she told him again to stop, and that he penetrated her. Afterwards, she locked herself in the bathroom for some time and, when she heard that the defendant had gone back to watching television, left the apartment.

Pilot test. To ensure that the displayed emotions would be perceived as intended, we asked pilot participants (N = 48) to watch one of the videos and rate the displayed emotions on 12 items (such as "Did you perceive Anna in the video as being *sad*?" – scale from 1, *not at all*, to 7, *completely*). Item responses were averaged into four subscales

Figure 1: Exemplary screenshots from the three experimental videos (from left to right: sad, angry, neutral condition)

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[2] The AMMSA scale was followed by eight items assessing subjective attitude strength in relation to AMMSA (see Süssenbach et al. 2013). This was done for exploratory purposes and will not be further discussed in this article.

[3] The full transcript (in German) may be obtained from the first author on request.

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Table 1: Ratings of emotional expression by video condition (pilot study)

Video condition	Rating dimension			
	Sadness	Anger	Calmness	Unemotionality
Sad	5.60$_a$	2.82$_b$	3.77	3.02$_b$
Angry	4.58$_b$	4.98$_a$	4.13	2.29$_b$
Neutral	4.41$_b$	3.03$_b$	4.51	4.85$_a$

Note: N = 48. Ratings were made on scales from 1 to 7. Within each column, means with different subscript letters differ at p < .05, Duncan test.

representing *sadness* (sad, desperate, distressed; Cronbach's α = .78); *anger* (angry, enraged, furious; α = .94); *calmness* (calm, composed, collected; α = .77); and *unemotionality* (unemotional, cool, reserved; α = .76). Results showed that the matching emotions were indeed rated highest in each condition (see Table 1).

5.3 Dependent Variables

After watching the video, participants answered several items using a horizontal slider ranging from 0 to 100.

Perceived credibility. The first two items read: "How likely do you think it is that Anna's statement represents the truth?", and "How likely do you think it is that Thomas has committed a crime?" (0, *highly unlikely*, to 100, *very likely*). As the answers were highly correlated, they were averaged into an index of perceived credibility (Cronbach's α = .81).[4]

Victim blaming, severity of the injury, and likelihood of recovery. The next nine items addressed various aspects of the case and were to be answered "under the assumption that Anna has told the truth". A factor analysis with maximum-likelihood extraction and promax rotation yielded three interpretable factors. The first, defined by two items, represented *victim blaming*: "How much responsibility does Anna have for what happened?" (0, *very little*, to 100, *very much*); and "Could Anna have prevented what happened?" (0, *not at all*, to 100, *yes, definitely*); Cronbach's α = .79.

The second factor, consisting of five items, represented the *severity of the injury*: "How appropriate would you find it if Anna were to seek psychological help to cope with what happened?", "How likely do you think it is that Anna needs social support?", "How likely do you think it is that she will suffer from psychological problems?" (each 0, *very unlikely*, to 100, *very likely*), "Could Thomas have known that Anna did not want sexual contact?" (0, *not at all*, to 100, *yes, definitely*), and "How much responsibility does Thomas have for what happened?" (0, *very little*, to 100, *very much*); Cronbach's α = .79. A third factor, consisting of two items, represented the *likelihood of the victim's recovery*: "How likely do you think it is that Anna may have attempted suicide?" (reverse-coded), and "How likely do you think it is that Anna will fully recover?" (both 0, *very unlikely*, to 100, *very likely*); Cronbach's α = .70).[5]

Perceived emotions (manipulation check). Next, participants rated the emotions displayed by the victim – sadness (α = .66), anger (α = .90), calmness (α = .75), and unemotionality (α = .72) – on the same 12 items as used in the pilot test. These ratings served as a manipulation check.

Impressions of the victim's personality. Participants also rated the victim's personality on 6 items: "How likable / friendly / arrogant / self-confident / emotional / cheerful do you rate Anna?" (scale from 1, *not at all*, to 7 *very much*).

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[4] A third item addressed the appropriate sentence for Thomas (response options: acquittal, 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 5 years). As it did not correlate highly with the previous two items, it was not included in the analyses.

[5] An additional item ("How likely do you think it is that Anna will forget what has happened some time in the future?") also loaded on the recovery factor, but would have reduced the

subscale's internal consistency and was therefore not included in the analyses. Two further items addressed the perceived appropriateness of labels that Anna could use to describe herself ("How appropriate would you find it if Anna called herself a 'victim' [a 'survivor']?"; see Papendick and Bohner 2017); these will not be further discussed in the present article.

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Table 2: Ratings of emotional expression by video condition (main study)

Video condition	Rating dimension			
	Sadness	Anger	Calmness	Unemotionality
Sad	5.27ₐ	2.24_b	4.04_b	2.93_b
Angry	3.78_b	5.05ₐ	4.07_b	3.02_b
Neutral	4.60_c	2.28_b	4.76ₐ	4.34ₐ

Note: N = 120. Ratings were made on scales from 1 to 7. Within each column, means with different subscript letters differ at $p < .05$, Duncan test.

Although we did not advance any hypotheses regarding these ratings, we wanted to explore whether the emotional expressions, in addition to affecting judgments about the rape, might also contribute to general impressions of the victim's personality.

6. Results

6.1 Effectiveness of the Manipulation

The manipulation of displayed emotion was clearly effective. As in the pilot test, those emotions intended to be displayed in a given condition were consistently rated highest (see Table 2). Condition effects were strong, explaining 62 percent of the total variance for anger; 22 percent for sadness, 22 percent for unemotionality, and 7 percent for calmness.

6.2 Testing the Hypotheses

Preliminary analyses showed that male participants (M = 3.41, SD = 0.78) had higher AMMSA scores than female participants (M = 2.97, SD = 0.70), $t(118)$ = 3.31, p = .001. As we included participant gender as an independent variable, along with video condition and AMMSA, this gender difference was controlled for in the analyses that follow. Specifically, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses with centered predictors (see Cohen et al. 2003, 261–67). Before centering, the three-level variable "video condition" was coded as two orthogonal contrast variables: The first of these variables represented the contrast expressed in Hypothesis 2 (sad = +1, neutral = 0, angry = -1) and was

thus labeled HYPCON; the second variable represented a more generic emotional victim effect (EVE – which had not been hypothesized) by pitting the two emotion conditions against the neutral condition (sad = +0.5, neutral = -1, angry = +0.5) and was thus labeled EVECON. In a first step, we entered AMMSA, gender, HYPCON and EVECON; in the second step, we entered product terms representing the two-way interactions among AMMSA, gender, HYPCON, and EVECON; and in the third and final step, we entered product terms representing the three-way interactions of AMMSA by gender by HYPCON and AMMSA by gender by EVECON. The dependent variables in four consecutive hierarchical regression analyses were: victim credibility, victim blaming, severity of the injury, and likelihood of recovery, respectively.

To test Hypothesis 1, we examined the main effects of AMMSA on each of the four dependent variables. We found that higher AMMSA did go along with lower judgments of victim credibility, β = -.42, $t(115)$ = -4.83, $p < .001$, η² =.17, more victim blaming, β = .46, $t(115)$ = 5.19, $p < .001$, η² =.19, lower ratings of severity, β = -.40, $t(115)$ = -4.50, $p < .001$, η² =.15, and higher ratings of recovery likelihood, β = .40, $t(115)$ = 4.42, $p < .001$, η² =.15. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was fully supported.

To test Hypothesis 2, we examined the main effects of HYPCON on each of the dependent variables. We found a trend in the predicted direction only for severity of the injury (observed means: M_{sad} = 86.99; $M_{neutral}$ = 84.53; M_{angry} = 82.18), β = .15, $t(115)$ = 1.72, p = .089, η² =.025. For victim credibility (overall M = 73.45), victim blaming (overall

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M = 39.70), and likelihood of recovery (overall M = 40.78) there were no significant effects of HYPCON, all p > .18. Hypothesis 2 thus received little support.

To test Hypothesis 3, we examined the two-way interactions of AMMSA and HYPCON on each of the dependent variables. We found no significant effects, all p > .19. Thus, Hypothesis 3 received no support overall. However, there were significant three-way interactions involving participant gender for three of the dependent variables. These suggested at least qualified support for Hypothesis 3 among female participants, as well as some additional, unanticipated effects (see next section).

6.3. Effects Moderated by Participant Gender

The hierarchical regression analysis on victim credibility yielded a three-way interaction effect of AMMSA by HYPCON by gender, β = .22, t(108) = 2.33, p = .022, η^2 = .05. Separate follow-up analyses for each gender revealed that the effect predicted in Hypothesis 3 was not obtained for male participants, β = .13, t(51) = -0.89, p = .377, but did emerge for female participants, β = .30, t(57) = 2.43, p = .018, η^2 = .09. As displayed in Figure 2, women high in AMMSA showed the stereotypical pattern as stated in Hypothesis 2: They rated the sad victim to be most credible and the angry victim to be least credible, with the neutral condition falling in between. Women low in AMMSA, by contrast, generally rated victim credibility to be high, no matter which emotions the victim expressed.

Two additional, and complementary, three-way interactions of AMMSA by EVECON by gender emerged for severity of the injury, β = .17, t(108) = 1.99, p = .049, η^2 = .035, and likelihood of recovery, β = .18, t(108) = 2.04, p = .044, η^2 = .037. Separate follow-up analyses for men and women revealed that there were no significant AMMSA by EVECON interaction effects for men, both p > .25. For women, however, the AMMSA by EVECON interaction emerged as a trend on severity, β = .19, t(57) = 1.72, p = .091, η^2 = .049, and as a significant effect on likelihood of recovery, β = -.28, t(57) = 2.45, p = .017, η^2 = .10. As displayed in Figures 3 and 4, women high in AMMSA showed a generic emotional victim effect; they rated severity particularly low and likelihood of recovery particularly

Figure 2: Female participants' ratings (observed means) of perceived credibility of the victim by level of AMMSA and video condition
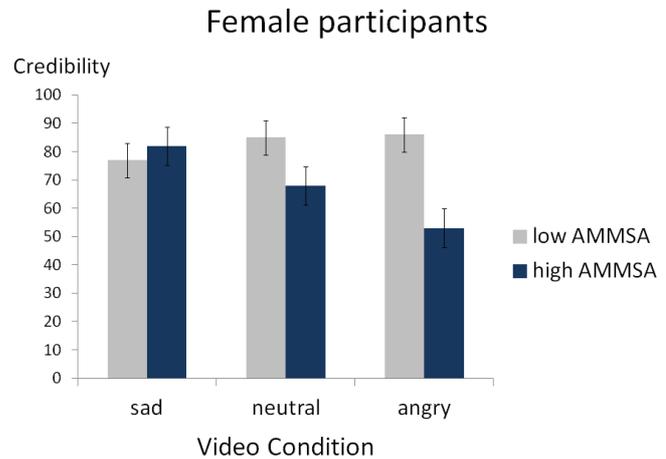
Note: "Low AMMSA" means that the AMMSA score was below or equal to the females' median of 3.00; "high AMMSA" means that the AMMSA score was above the females' median of 3.00. The error bars represent standard errors.

Figure 3: Female participants' ratings (observed means) of severity of the injury by level of AMMSA and video condition
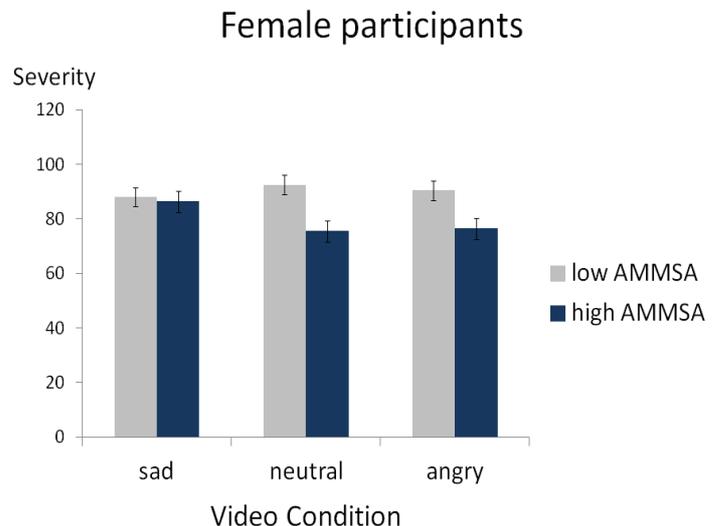
Note: "Low AMMSA" means that the AMMSA score was below or equal to the females' median of 3.00; "high AMMSA" means that the AMMSA score was above the females' median of 3.00. The error bars represent standard errors.

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high in the neutral condition as compared to both of the emotional conditions. Interestingly, women low in AMMSA showed an opposite trend, apparently being more concerned about the victim in the neutral condition than in the two emotional conditions.

6.4 Impressions of the Victim's Personality

As the overall effects of the video conditions on the main dependent variables were rather weak, we explored whether emotional displays might have affected general ratings of the victim's personality. This was indeed the case. Table 3 shows those ratings by video condition, along with the results of exploratory one-way ANOVAs and post-hoc comparisons. The data suggest that the victim displaying a sad expression was perceived as most likable and friendly, and also as least arrogant and self-confident. Conversely, the victim displaying an angry expression was perceived as least likable and friendly, but as most arrogant and self-confident.

Figure 4: Female participants' ratings (observed means) of likelihood of recovery by level of AMMSA and video condition
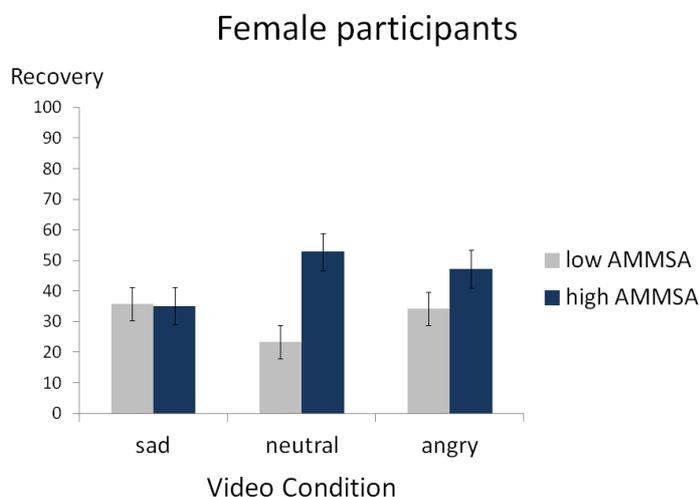

Note: "Low AMMSA" means that the AMMSA score was below or equal to the females' median of 3.00; "high AMMSA" means that the AMMSA score was above the females' median of 3.00. The error bars represent standard errors.

Table 3: *Ratings of the victim's personality by video condition (main study)*

| Item | Video condition | | | | | | | |
| | Sad | | Neutral | | Angry | | | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*(2,117)	*p*
Likable	4.80$_a$	0.85	4.03$_b$	1.14	3.75$_b$	1.50	8.31	< .001
Friendly	5.53$_a$	0.96	5.03$_{ab}$	1.12	4.53$_b$	1.40	7.27	.001
Arrogant	1.95$_b$	0.88	2.38$_b$	1.17	3.13$_a$	1.49	9.76	< .001
Self-confident	2.88$_b$	1.29	3.25$_b$	1.50	4.43$_a$	1.39	13.44	< .001
Emotional	4.85	1.29	4.35	1.41	4.40	1.46	1.57	.212
Cheerful	4.03	1.29	3.78	1.49	4.08	1.42	0.52	.594

Note: Ratings were made on scales from 1 to 7. Within each row, means not sharing a subscript letter differ at *p* < .05, Duncan test.

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7. Discussion

This study replicated previous findings showing that the acceptance of sexual aggression myths guides judgments regarding rape victims and other case-related judgments. It also produced some new insights into the effects of a victim's emotional expression in interaction with observer AMMSA. These results have implications for both theory and practice.

7.1 Strong Effects of Sexual Aggression Myths

Specifically, fully in line with our first hypothesis and replicating previous research, we found that both male and female participants who endorsed (vs. did not endorse) sexual aggression myths were less likely to believe the victim (cf. Wenger and Bornstein 2006), were more likely to blame the victim (cf. Bohner et al. 2009; van der Bruggen and Grubb 2014), perceived the rape to be less severe, and judged the likelihood of recovery to be higher (cf. Eyssel and Bohner 2011; Papendick and Bohner 2017). In terms of effect sizes, these effects of AMMSA were medium-sized to large (expressed as Pearson's r, they were between .38 and .44; Cohen 1988). Thus, the law students in our sample were not immune to sexual aggression myths coloring their judgments of a rape case. This may not be surprising, however, as most of them were still at a stage of their training where sexual offenses were not yet part of their curriculum. Furthermore, prior research has shown that even the judgments of advanced law students and legal experts were biased by rape myths (Goodman-Delahunty and Graham 2011; Krahé et al. 2008; Sleath and Bull 2012).

7.2 Weaker Effects of Emotional Expression

By comparison, our second hypothesis received little support. Main effects of the victim's emotional expression were very weak or absent in this study, with a trend in the predicted direction only for perceived severity of the injury, which tended to be highest in the sad condition and lowest in the angry condition (effect size expressed as Pearson's r = .16). This happened even though the manipulation of different emotional expressions was successful: In both the pilot test and the main study, participants did perceive the intended emotions very clearly, as indicated by the manipulation checks. Furthermore, four of the six general personality ratings, which were assessed after the case-related judgments, did show clear-cut and meaningful effects of the emotion manipulation. Thus, the sad victim was perceived

to be most likable and friendly, and the angry victim to be most self-confident but also most arrogant. These results fit well with the idea that a rape victim's sad expression is more expectancy-congruent than an angry expression (Wrede and Ask 2015).

7.3 Interplay of Emotional Expression, Observer Gender, and Sexual Aggression Myths

Our analyses including participant gender suggested some highly interesting avenues for future investigation. Specifically, whereas male observers' judgments of victim credibility remained unaffected by the victim's emotional expression, female observers did show the predicted interaction of emotional expression and AMMSA (Hypothesis 3) in their judgments of victim credibility: The higher women's AMMSA, the more they showed a pattern of disbelieving the victim who expressed anger compared to the victim who expressed sadness, with the unemotional victim condition falling in between; conversely, the lower women's AMMSA, the more they tended to believe the victim independent of her emotional expression. We presently have no explanation for why this pattern was obtained only for women but not for men, especially as previous research by Vrij and Fischer (1997) had found a similar pattern for men but not for women (albeit under conditions where participants had to rely solely on nonverbal information).

Furthermore, when examining ratings of the rape's severity and consequences, suggestive patterns emerged also for female participants only: Women high in AMMSA downplayed the severity and consequences of the rape more when the victim displayed a neutral expression, but less when she expressed either sadness or anger, whereas an opposite trend was evident for women low in AMMSA. As the severity and recovery ratings were made under the assumption that the victim was telling the truth, the divergence in patterns, if replicable, may point to interesting implications for a victim's optimal self-presentation depending on whether the perpetrator's guilt is yet in doubt (as in a criminal trial) or has already been determined (as in a civil lawsuit for compensation). In the former case, a victim who displays anger may be at a disadvantage when facing judges or jurors high in AMMSA because they may not believe her; in the latter case, however, she may have a greater chance of receiving compensation because the same decision-makers may judge the damage as more severe once the defendant's guilt has been proven. This would be in line with female jurors high in

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AMMSA behaving in line with a just-world principle (cf. Sinclair and Bourne 1998).

7.4 Limitations and Future Directions

One potential limitation of the present research is that participants were probably both able and motivated to pay close attention to the content of the victim statement. In real life situations (for example in court), processing conditions may often be less optimal, as lay judges or jurors may be distracted or overloaded with competing information. We are currently seeking to replicate the present study under varying processing conditions (such as under cognitive load induced by a concurrent task), to determine if the effect of nonverbal and paraverbal emotional displays might increase when observers may allocate fewer cognitive resources to processing the statement's content.

Should we find that the general pattern of strong effects of AMMSA and weaker effects of emotional expression replicates, another question to be tackled would be why it may be easier for perceivers to resist the unwanted external influences of the witness's emotional expression than to resist their own prejudices in terms of AMMSA (see also Krahé et al. 2008). One important factor in this respect may be the relative salience of emotion cues and AMMSA. In the present study, both should have been quite salient, as the AMMSA scale was presented at the beginning of the session, just before participants watched the video. This may, however, also be seen as a limitation of our study. Our own prior research has indeed shown that influences of rape myths increase when these beliefs have been made salient (Bohner et al. 1998, 2005). If we assume that, in everyday life, AMMSA acts as a schema in the cognitive background, studies in which participants complete the AMMSA scale at the end of the experiment or in a separate session would be more ecologically valid and might produce weaker effects of AMMSA. It is also possible, however, that engaging with the victim's statement per se might sufficiently activate observers' rape-related beliefs; in that case the point in time at which AMMSA is assessed would be less relevant.

Another limitation of our study is that we did not assess the motivations presumed to underlie effects of displayed emotions. Thus, we do not know to what extent our participants perceived the expression of sadness to be more appropriate and the expression of anger (or the lack of emotional expression) to be less appropriate. The same is true for the assumed mediating processes, such as expectancy violation, which were not directly assessed either. Which emotions observers perceive as appropriate may be subject to historical change. Women's public outcry against male violence that characterized the #metoo movement in 2017 (at the time our study was conducted) used the emotion of anger to fuel societal change (yet expressions of anger in this context remain contentious; for example Lim 2018). Against this background, an angry victim statement may nowadays be perceived as more normative and expected than used to be the case a decade ago. Future research should thus explicitly address both people's expectancies and their perceptions of "appropriate" victim behavior. This could be done in pilot studies to ensure expedient operationalizations, but also as part of the main experiments in order to test mediation effects.

Besides expectancy violation, another candidate for a mediating process would be participants' own emotional state – either in terms of more positive responses to a victim showing congruent emotions (Ask and Landström 2010) or in terms of emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1993). Sad states often lead to more piecemeal processing of social information (Bohner et al. 1992; Schwarz, Bless, and Bohner 1991), angry states to more holistic processing (Bohner, Hauschildt, and Knäuper 1993, 1994), which may include greater reliance on both internal and external cues.

A final limitation we should mention is that our sample was rather specific, being highly educated and relatively young (although there was some degree of social, ethnic, cultural, and interpersonal diversity within this sample). It would be useful to replicate our study with different samples comprising, for example, older and less educated participants. Future research should also continue to compare the responses of legal professionals and laypersons (as did Wessel et al. 2006). Such research should contribute to a better understanding of secondary victimization of rape survivors both in court and in society more generally (Bohner et al. 2009; Winkel and Koppelaar 1991).

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