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Rape myth acceptance among law enforcement

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RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE AMONG LAW ENFORCEMENT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisianan State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates a positive relationship between rape myth acceptance and sexist beliefs, as well as a negative relationship between rape myth acceptance and victim credibility. The current study assesses the interrelationships between rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility, and victim empathy among law enforcement officers. Law enforcement officers' individual characteristics are also assessed. An online survey was administered to 24 specialized sex crime law enforcement officers from a city in South Louisiana. There was no significant difference on measures of rape myth acceptance and sexism; however, individual items measuring victim credibility showed a distinct difference between law enforcement officers' belief in credibility among traditional victims (i.e., professional women and virgins) and non-traditional victims (i.e., prostitutes and men). Due to the low sample size of this study, results must be interpreted with caution. Replication of this study is warranted with a larger and more diverse sample.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	10
3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	38
4 METHODOLOGY.....	43
5 RESULTS.....	51
6 DISCUSSION.....	56
REFERENCES.....	65
VITA.....	72

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Sexual assault is a traumatic event that affects one in five women in America and is associated with increased risk of emotional and physical problems for victims (Black et al., 2011). A positive experience with law enforcement, medical professionals, and counselors is associated with better recovery (Campbell, 1998). For example, victims who are treated with empathy and respect are more likely to follow through with reporting procedures, cooperate with law enforcement investigation, and report satisfaction with the criminal justice system (Allen, 2007; Campbell, 1998). Current research indicates that because the role of police officers often includes expectations of outward physical and emotional strength and enforcement of rigid gender stereotypes, officers tend to subscribe to stereotypical thinking when investigating sexual assaults (Page, 2007). Agreement with stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about sexual assault and its victims is defined as “rape myth acceptance” (Burt, 1980; Page, 2008a). This in turn affects the way victims are treated during the immediate response of sexual assault, the investigation of the crime, and the trial process (Campbell, 1998). The purpose of the current research study was to explore correlates of rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers. Interrelationships among rape myth acceptance, sexism, perception of victim credibility, capacity for victim empathy, and certain characteristics of officers were examined.

Importance of the Problem

Scope of the Problem

Sexual violence is a widespread public health problem in America. Historically, rape and sexual assault have been considered one of several violent crimes targeted specifically at women and perpetrated by men (Cavanaugh et al., 2011). According to the Centers for Disease Control

& Prevention (CDC), 18.3 % of women in America, or 21.8 million, are victims of an attempted or completed sexual assault (Black et al., 2011). Of these 21.8 million American women, over half (51.1%) report being victimized by an intimate partner, whereas 40.8% report being victimized by an acquaintance and 8.1% by a stranger (Black et al., 2011). Rates of rape vary across race, ethnicity, and age. Based on results of the *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey* of 9,086 women, of the nearly one in five respondents who reported at least one incidence of rape in her lifetime, 33.5% identified as multiracial, 26.9% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 22% identified as African American or Black, 18.8% identified as Caucasian, and 14.6% identified as Hispanic (Black et al., 2011). In addition, over two thirds of women (79.6%) reported first experiencing rape before the age of 25 (Black et al., 2011).

Rape victims often face emotional and physical health consequences following a sexual assault, and the psychological process of recovering from rape has been well documented by researchers over the years (Allen, 2007; Brownmiller, 1975; Burgess, 1983; Campbell, 1998; Patterson, Greeson, & Campbell, 2009). This phenomenon, termed “rape trauma syndrome”, consists of several stages of recovery that can span months to years, depending largely upon the victim’s experiences following the assault (Burgess, 1983; Kaysen, Morris, Rizvi, & Resick, 2003; Maier, 2008). Immediate effects of rape can pose health risks, such as sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, HIV exposure, and bodily injury (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network [RAINN], n.d.). In the long term, victims of sexual assault can experience mental health problems ranging from depression and anxiety to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; RAINN, n.d.).

Rape is the most underreported crime in the United States (US) (Allen, 2007). The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) estimates that upwards of 60% of sexual assaults are not

reported to law enforcement (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In a qualitative study conducted with 29 rape survivors who chose not to seek support from legal, medical, or community-based response services, Patterson et al. (2009) found that over three fourths of respondents cited fear of disbelief or rejection from formal systems as the reason they chose not to seek help. This suggests that there are larger cultural issues at hand that influence a victim's decision whether to report a sexual assault to authorities (Grubb & Harrower, 2009).

Victims who choose to report sexual assault often face numerous obstacles when seeking support from the criminal justice system (Campbell, 1998). Rape is considered a crime of the state, and, as such, a victim's body is literally treated as a crime scene (Frazier & Haney, 1996). Unlike other crimes where the victim's body is not subject to procedures for collecting evidence, rape presents a unique challenge for law enforcement due to the very personal nature of the crime (Campbell, 1998). In addition, most victims of rape are female, while most law enforcement officers are male, which further complicates the challenge for law enforcement to appropriately intervene and assist rape victims in the investigation process (Allen, 2007). For this reason, Patterson et al. (2009) also cite a victim's perceived lack of confidentiality as a deterrent to reporting.

Studies have shown that law enforcement and the general public historically do not believe victims' reports of sexual assault (Burt 1980; Frese, Moya, & Megias, 2004; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Victim credibility often influences individuals' perceptions of the crime (Cohn, Dupuis, & Brown, 2009). For example, cultural attitudes and stereotypes about rape place the burden of prevention on victims; these stereotypes dictate that victims should not engage in risky behaviors, such as consuming alcohol or drugs and dressing provocatively, if they expect to avoid rape (Burt 1980; Cohn et al., 2009). When victims are sexually assaulted while engaging in

these activities, their credibility decreases, and they are often blamed for the rape (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011; Osman, 2011). These cultural beliefs contribute to rape myths and attitudes that normalize rape, which serve to draw attention away from perpetrators of sexual assault and place blame on victims (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010).

Rape myths, such as “in the majority of rapes the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation” and “women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserved,” have become so pervasive in society that these attitudes largely go unnoticed by individuals, and as a result, these beliefs have become institutionalized throughout the criminal justice system (Burt, 1980, p. 223). When victims attempt to access services through medical, legal, and community-based support systems after an assault, they are often faced with professionals who subscribe to rape myths (Campbell, 1998). Characteristics such as the victim-perpetrator relationship, the age and race or ethnicity of the victim, and the victim’s behavior during and after the assault all can serve as potential barriers to ensuring effective services and appropriate professional responses (Ask, 2010; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011).

Theoretical Significance

There are several theories that attempt to explain the prevalence of sexual violence in our culture. First, biological theory explains the occurrence of rape by connecting male biology and reproductive prowess to the need to dominate sexual partners (Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983). Feminist theory (Boake, 2009) and social control theory (Moffett, 2006) contribute to the understanding of rape myth acceptance by examining the root causes of rape that are connected to larger cultural attitudes that enforce rigid gender roles. This section will explore how biological theory, feminist theory, and social control theory contribute to sexual assault and rape myths.

Rape historically has been considered a product of men's biological need to act out sexual desires (Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983). According to Thornhill and Palmer (2000), it is advantageous for men to have several sexual partners to increase their chances of creating offspring, while the opposite is true for women, who seek a partner to invest in physically and emotionally to help them care for their children. Biological theory explains that rape stems from men's inability to find appropriate consensual sexual partners; therefore, men are compelled to force sexual encounters with women to improve their reproductive possibilities (Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983).

In contrast, feminist theory suggests that rape is not biologically based, but instead is used as a tool of power that men use to dominate and control women (Brownmiller, 1975). Feminist theory posits gender as an important factor in the construction and perpetuation of rape myths, with the idea being that men benefit from the continuation of a society that systematically blames female victims for sexual violence (Boake, 2009). Brownmiller (1975) was the first to discuss patriarchy as a system that not only normalized, but also condoned violence against women, as an acceptable way for men to control women.

Social control theory, like feminist theory, also considers sexual violence rooted in larger social constructions of power differentials where violence is used as a means to control another person (Moffett, 2006). According to social control theory, men perpetuate sexual violence as a way to force women to conform to traditional gender stereotypes (Moffett, 2006). This theory also supports the normalization of rape myths. By using the threat of rape, male-dominated society profits from the social control of women, ensuring that women will never gain equal rights (Riger & Gordon, 1981). In addition, social control theory further emphasizes male control

in the majority of cases where victims are typically female and law enforcement officers are usually male (Allen, 2007).

Unique Contribution of Proposed Study

The current study explored interrelationships among rape myth acceptance and sexism, victim credibility, victim empathy, and officer characteristics. While numerous studies have examined rape myth acceptance among college students (e.g., Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Aosved & Long, 2006; Chapleau, Oswald, and Russell, 2007; Clarke & Stermac, 2011; Cohn et al., 2009), prosecutors and law enforcement officers (Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011; Page, 2007; Sleath & Bull, 2012), and victims (Allen, 2007; Campbell, 1998; Miller, Amacker, & King, 2010; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004), few have explored associations between rape myth acceptance and other empirically and conceptually relevant characteristics, such as personal experience with sexual violence, educational attainment, and formal training. Further, limited research has examined whether rape myth acceptance is associated with perception of victim credibility and victim empathy. This study focused on rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers because of their critical role in working with victims and investigating sexual assault cases (Campbell, 1998). Studies show that when police officers subscribe to rape myths, victims are reluctant to come forward, investigations are halted, and perpetrators are not held accountable (Ask, 2010; Campbell, 1998; Page, 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010).

Sexism (i.e., hostile beliefs about women) has been shown to influence rape myth acceptance (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Among studies undertaken with college students, Abrams et al. (2003), Chapleau et al. (2007), and Glick and Fiske (1996) found that both hostile sexism (i.e., overt forms of hatred towards women and those who do not conform to traditional gender

roles) and benevolent sexism (i.e., covert forms of sexism that include positive, yet limiting, roles for women) contributed to stereotypical beliefs about gender roles and predicted rates of rape myth acceptance among participants. Similar studies with law enforcement officers found that those who believed in traditional and modern forms of sexism were more likely to endorse rape myths, and were also more likely to blame victims for rape and excuse perpetrators (Page, 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010). Therefore, sexist beliefs are positively associated with rape myth acceptance.

Studies examining rape myth acceptance and victim credibility have shown that belief in stereotypes about rape is associated with a greater likelihood of blaming victims for rape (Clarke & Stermac, 2011; Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984). Cohn et al. (2009) found, for example, that victims who were assaulted by a friend or acquaintance and who were dressed provocatively were more likely to be blamed for the rape. Similarly, Clarke and Stermac (2011) found that victim appearance and weight influenced participants' view of victim credibility; for example, victims who were seen as traditionally attractive and thin were more likely to be blamed for the assault.

Belief in victim credibility is especially important among law enforcement officers who are tasked with investigating rape complaints. Among 401 police officers and prosecutors, Ask (2010) found that allegations of rape were more often than not investigated with skepticism. In a sample of 186 sexual assault cases, Du Mont, Miller, and Myhr (2003) found that increased skepticism for victims was present in instances where victims were raped by someone they knew, when alcohol or drugs were involved in the assault, and when victims did not present as distressed. In addition, Fisher et al. (2003) found that among 4,446 female college students, those who experienced rape were less likely to report it to law enforcement if the perpetrator was a

partner or acquaintance, if substance use was involved, when there were no serious bodily injuries or if they felt the incident was not severe enough to report, and if they felt that their complaint would not be taken seriously by the police. In addition, Campbell (1998) found that in cases where law enforcement believed the victim's story was credible, the victim experienced higher levels of satisfaction with the criminal justice system. Rape is the most underreported crime in America; therefore, it is critical to examine if law enforcement officers' belief in rape myths are linked to a victim's decision to remain silent about the assault (Allen, 2007).

Victim empathy, described as feelings of understanding toward or ability to empathize with a victim, is also associated with rape myth acceptance. Earnshaw, Pitpitan, and Chaudoir (2011) found that females were more likely to experience empathy and less likely to endorse rape myths than were males. Grubb and Harrower (2009) and Miller et al. (2011) found that participants who perceived themselves as similar to the victim were more likely to report empathy for the victim and less likely to blame her for the rape. Further, Osman (2011) found that participants who experienced sexual violence victimization were less likely to blame victims, while those who perpetrated sexual violence were more likely to empathize with perpetrators and blame victims for the assault. Therefore, victim empathy is inversely related to rape myth acceptance.

Officer characteristics, such as personal experience with sexual violence, educational attainment, formal training, and demographic factors have not been extensively researched. Page's (2007) study of 891 law enforcement officers showed that attainment of higher education was negatively associated with rape myth acceptance. However, Sleath and Bull's (2012) study of 123 police officers found that there was no difference in endorsement of rape myth acceptance

among officers with formal specialized training and education level and those with no training. Thus, officers' education level and specialized training are relevant to the proposed study.

Demographic factors, such as age and race, have not been studied in previous research examining correlates of rape myth acceptance. However, in a study of 100 police officers, Wentz and Archbold (2012) found that officer gender had little impact on rape myth acceptance, and that, in some instances, female officers endorsed rape myths at a higher rate than male officers. Thus, one study does not allow definitive conclusions to be drawn about officer gender and rape myth acceptance.

The current study examined associations among rape myth acceptance, belief in sexism, perceptions of victim credibility, ability to empathize with victims, individual officers' characteristics (i.e., education level, personal history of sexual violence, professional experience) and demographic factors. Law enforcement provides a crucial link between victims and the criminal justice system; therefore, it is important to understand the factors that may influence the way police officers identify and respond to victims of sex crimes. By examining interrelationships among key variables, this study sought to provide information about law enforcement officers' personal beliefs towards rape victims based on their endorsement of rape myths. Additionally, this study sought to explore how officers' personal history and background affect the way they perform rape investigations. This information is valuable to the field because it helps inform practice and policy when educating law enforcement.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Current State of the Knowledge

Studies have shown that Americans hold beliefs that tolerate sexual violence against women (Aosved & Long, 2006; Grubb & Harrower, 2009). These beliefs have been explored since the 1970s. For example, Burt (1980) and Field (1978) demonstrated connections between belief in rape-supportive attitudes and larger sexist attitudes that include expectations of rigid gender roles and acceptance of gender violence. Sexism contributes to the development of rape attitudes and myths, which include beliefs that women who dress or act provocatively are asking for sex, that women who say “no” really mean “yes”, and that women are likely to lie about rape in instances where they know their attacker (Page, 2008). Rape myth acceptance and sexism affect the way rape is viewed among college students, police officers, and victims. This section will provide current research on attitudes about women and rape, rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim’s experience, victim credibility, police culture, and rape reform laws.

Attitudes Towards Women and Rape

Rape is a gendered action; therefore attitudes towards women inform attitudes about rape (Page, 2008). As Mayerson and Taylor (1987) emphasized early on, sex role stereotyping is strongly related to beliefs about rape. Expectations of sex and gender roles are socially constructed and often are so pervasive that they remain largely unchallenged (Page, 2008). Both men and women are socialized to conform to gendered expectations and abide by the social scripts that dictate how they should act, dress, and interact with the opposite sex (McCormick, 2010; Page, 2008a; Ryan, 2011). These scripts typically instruct women to be feminine, nurturing, passive, and submissive; and for men, ideas about masculinity emphasize physical and emotional strength, dominance, and aggression (McCormick, 2010; Page, 2008a; Ryan, 2011).

Burt (1980) established the idea that within these gender norms, male violence is viewed as an acceptable means of enforcing and maintaining social control. Thus, rape and sexual assault can be viewed as one part of this culture of violence that is used by men to control and dominate women.

Attitudes about rape differ among men and women, and can be tied to an individual's personal experience. In a study conducted with male and female participants that includes vignettes describing accounts of rape, results showed that males are more likely than females to blame victims for rape, especially those cases in which the alleged perpetrator is an acquaintance (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). In addition, Grubb and Harrower (2009) found that respondents who identified with the victim were less likely to blame the victim, and conversely, that those who identified with the perpetrator were more likely to blame the victim. These findings are consistent with other studies where participants' empathy was measured as an indicator of their personal investment. For example, Osman (2011) found that when presenting acquaintance rape scenarios to study participants, females largely placed themselves in the role of the victim, while males often viewed themselves as the alleged perpetrator. Therefore, when researchers assessed the participants' empathy for both the victim and the perpetrator in the scenario, females were more likely to empathize with the victim and men were more likely to empathize with the perpetrator (Osman, 2011).

Pioneering research conducted by Deitz, Littmann, and Bently (1984) found that situational factors and characteristics of a sexual assault, in addition to perceptions of the victim and the perpetrator, also impact the way the general population views the crime. Current research has built upon this idea, showing that the level of victim resistance, the victim's appearance and weight, as well as the victim's previous sexual history are factors that can influence the way

individuals attribute blame for rape (Clarke & Stermac, 2010; Cohn et al., 2009). For example, using hypothetical rape scenarios with 413 adults, Clarke and Stermac (2010) found that in instances where rape victims were viewed as thin and traditionally beautiful, participants were more likely to blame the victim for the assault and excuse the perpetrator. In addition, victims that seem to deviate from prescribed traditional gender roles were more frequently seen as less credible and, in turn, were blamed for the sexual assault (Cohn et al., 2009; Viki & Abrams, 2002).

Researchers have explored the idea behind what is perceived as a real or legitimate rape with the general population, as well as with specific groups such as law enforcement and medical staff. According to Page (2008a), an account of rape that is perceived as most credible is a rape where the perpetrator is unknown to the victim, a weapon is used, and considerable physical injuries are inflicted upon the victim. This real rape ideal sets the standard for how the general public views sexual assault. Thus, beliefs in this real rape scenario shape cultural norms about who can be considered a real victim, and any rape or rape victim who differs from this prescribed formula is cause for concern and additional scrutiny (Page, 2008a). For example, in a review of 186 sexual assault cases, Du Mont et al. (2003) found that cases that met the definition of a real or legitimate rape were more likely to be reported to police and then believed by police and hospital staff.

Rape Myth Acceptance

“Rape myths”, first defined by Burt in 1980, are “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217). Thus, “rape myth acceptance” is the endorsement of rape stereotypes. Some examples described by Burt (1980) include “a woman can resist a rapist if she really wants to” and “women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they

deserved” (p. 223). Evidence indicates that rape myths are so omnipresent that the challenge of overcoming these stereotypes can be difficult for the general public, as well as for law enforcement and even victims (Aosved & Long, 2006).

Belief in rape myths affects the way society views sexual assault both as a cultural phenomenon and as a type of interpersonal violence. Rape myth acceptance is connected to larger oppressive social forces, such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, and religious intolerance (Aosved & Long, 2006; Earnshaw, et al., 2011; Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011). For example, in a study of 998 male and female college students, Aosved and Long (2006) found that higher levels of sexism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, and religious intolerance correlated with higher rates of acceptance of rape myths. Thus, it appears that these factors are shown to support a systematic cultural belief system that holds individuals—instead of society—accountable for social problems, including rape.

The process by which rape myths are systematically formed and supported by individuals is similar for men and women, as all socialization enforces rigid gender roles that inform rape attitudes (Jones, Russell, & Bryant, 1998). However, while studies show that both women and men are susceptible to rape myth acceptance, evidence shows that men tend to endorse rape myths at higher rates than women (Aosved & Long, 2006; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

Rape myths function as a way to excuse the actions of the perpetrator by causing society and individuals to doubt or disbelieve victims’ accounts of rape, therefore creating a lack of empathy for victims. Exploring this idea of victim empathy, Osman (2011) surveyed 591 college students to compare their personal experiences with sexual violence victimization and perpetration and how personal experience affects their ability to empathize with victims and perpetrators when presented with rape scenarios. Osman (2011) found that participants were

capable of experiencing empathy for both the victim and the perpetrator, indicating that situational factors of rape can make it difficult to attribute blame to just one person. Similarly, a study conducted by Miller et al. (2011) with 69 female college students showed that in instances where perceived similarity to the victim was low, rape myth acceptance was high.

The most notable and possibly most damaging correlate of rape myth acceptance is an individual's tendency to blame victims instead of perpetrators for instances of sexual violence. In a study of 413 adults, Clarke and Stermac (2010) found that individuals who attributed blame for the assault to the victim held higher levels of rape myth acceptance. Similarly, Frese et al. (2004) showed that among 182 college students, victim blame was highest in situations where the perpetrator was an acquaintance or dating partner, and lowest where the perpetrator was a stranger. Additionally, in a review of 38 rape allegations reported to the police, Norton and Grant (2008) found that individuals were more likely to attribute blame to perpetrators in situations where the offender was perceived as being motivated by power as opposed to having sexual gratification as a motive. These assaults are generally characterized by use of excessive violence and force inflicted upon the victim (Norton & Grant, 2008).

While it has been shown that the general public is likely to attribute blame of sexual assault based on situational factors, studies indicate that police officers who are tasked with investigating rape complaints also rely on these factors to inform their investigation. In a study conducted with 123 police officers, Sleath and Bull (2012) found that police officers' acceptance of rape myths was positively associated with victim attribution of blame. In addition, there was no difference in rape myth acceptance among officers with specialized training versus those who lacked training, nor did the officers' number of years with the force make a difference in rape myth acceptance (Sleath & Bull, 2012). Goodman-Delahunty and Graham (2011) found that in a

study of 125 police officers, those with high rates of rape myth acceptance were less likely to view the victim as a credible witness, more likely to believe that the assault was consensual, and less likely to charge a perpetrator with a crime. Thus, it appears that specialized training and exposure to rape victims has had little bearing on rape myth acceptance (Page, 2010; Sleath & Bull, 2012).

Because rape victims are part of a larger culture that constructs and enforces beliefs in rape myths, victims are not immune to the acceptance of these myths, and therefore can experience feelings of guilt about the assault or can be reluctant to define the incident as rape. Frese et al. (2004) explains that pervasive rape myths result in victims being more likely to blame themselves for the assault because they too are socialized into a culture that places the burden of prevention on victims. In a study conducted with 86 undergraduate women, Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) found that among respondents who experienced an incident that met the legal definition of rape, those who subscribed to rape myths were less likely to label the experience as rape.

Sexism

“Sexism” is defined as a multi-dimensional oppressive system that is characterized by antagonistic beliefs about women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Glick and Fiske (2001) conducted research with 15,000 individuals across 19 different countries (e.g., US, Europe, South Africa, Japan and South Korea) to measure levels of sexism among participants and found that sexist beliefs are prevalent across all cultures. This supports the idea that sexist ideologies arise from gender constructs that are common across human groups (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In a study conducted by Berg (2006) with 382 female participants in the US, 100% reported experiencing sexism within the previous year.

Notably, Glick and Fiske (1996) identified two different types of sexism: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. “Hostile sexism” is defined as overt discrimination and prejudice against women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). “Benevolent sexism”, on the other hand, is defined as “a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but are subjectively positive in feeling tone” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). This covert type of sexism is exhibited in relatively harmless ways, but is meant to undermine women’s status in society. For example, when a woman is praised on her appearance instead of her work performance by a co-worker, this serves to devalue a woman’s intellectual abilities and overvalue her attractiveness.

Both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism fuel rape myth acceptance (Chapleau et al., 2007; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010). Belief in hostile sexism contributes to a male’s negative perception of females, in which a female is perceived as trying to dominate or overcome male power (Glick & Fiske, 2001). According to Cohn et al. (2009), hostile sexism is a significant factor in attribution of blame in rape cases. In their study of 250 undergraduate students, Cohn et al. (2009) found that participants who held beliefs of hostile sexism were most likely to also support rape myth acceptance, regardless of gender. Additionally in a study with 65 undergraduate students, Abrams, et al. (2003) found that those who subscribed to hostile sexist beliefs tended to believe that the victim actually liked being raped or wanted to be raped.

Like hostile sexism, benevolent sexism also strongly correlates with rape myth acceptance. Chapleau et al. (2007) conducted a study with 409 males and females and found that those who had beliefs consistent with benevolent sexism were more likely to blame acquaintance rape victims, believing that the victim somehow provoked the attack. Additionally, Masser et al. (2010) explored the correlation between benevolent sexist beliefs and the role of gender

conformity in acquaintance rape scenarios. These authors' study with 120 undergraduate students found that those who subscribed to benevolent sexist beliefs were more likely to attribute blame to victims who did not conform to traditional gender stereotypes, such as women who were not stereotypically feminine and women who were perceived as unapologetically promiscuous (Masser et al., 2010). Thus, benevolent sexist attitudes serve to place the burden of rape prevention on the female victim.

Victim's Experience

Studies have explored victims' experiences in numerous areas: coping with the trauma of a sexual assault (Burgess, 1983; Frieze, Hymer, & Greenburg, 1987; Kaysen et al., 2005; Kubany et al., 1995); deciding to report or not to report to law enforcement (Allen, 2007; Fisher et al., 2003; Madigan & Gamble, 1991; Winkel & Koppelaar, 1991); the effect of police officers' investigative techniques (Ask, 2010; Wentz & Archbold, 2012); and ways in which the medical, legal, and victims services response aid or hinder in recovery (Campbell, 1998).

A body of research from the 1980s specifically examined the consequences of sexual assault. For example, sexual victimization can result in short- and long-term impairment to victims' emotional and psychological well-being (Frieze et al., 1987). It has been shown that victims exhibit depressive symptoms immediately following a sexual assault that can continue up to 4 months post-assault (Atkeson, Calhoun, Resick, & Ellis, 1982). Burgess (1983) identified patterns of response to sexual assault, a phenomenon termed "rape trauma syndrome", which includes three distinct phases of recovery: acute phase, defensive or denial phase, and reorganization or renormalization phase. These phases can last months to years, and can affect the way a survivor copes with the trauma of sexual assault throughout her or his lifetime.

Early research conducted by Williams (1984) has shown that because of widely accepted stereotypes and myths about rape, victims often blame themselves for a sexual assault, which can affect the way that a victim responds to a sexual assault as well as the victim's recovery process. Many victims of child sexual abuse, rape, and interpersonal violence suffer from "trauma-related guilt", which is defined as guilt associated with feeling responsible for abuse or assault (Kubany et al., 1995). In a study of 50 females who experienced domestic and sexual violence, Kubany et al. (1995) found that trauma-related guilt was associated with increased risk of developing serious emotional and mental health problems, such as PTSD, depression, shame, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, and social anxiety.

The extent to which a victim resists during an assault can influence a victim's experience. "Peritraumatic responses", or an individual's response to fear during a trauma, differ among victims depending on the circumstances of the assault (Kaysen et al., 2005). Kaysen et al. (2005) found that female rape victims who felt that their lives were in imminent danger were less likely to fight back against an attacker for fear that it would make the assault worse, whereas female victims who felt that they were not in danger of being killed were more likely to actively resist and fight back. Therefore, in situations where the victim did not resist for fear of death, it may appear that the victim submitted, or even consented, to the rape, which can affect the way the victim characterizes or classifies the assault (Kaysen et al., 2005).

When victims have a negative experience with law enforcement and medical response systems, their health and recovery is adversely affected. A victim's negative experience with the reporting and investigation of a sexual assault has been termed the "second rape" or "secondary victimization" (Madigan & Gamble, 1991). Several different disciplines are responsible for the various stages of post-assault investigation and recovery. These systems, each with a different

purpose and focus, make up the community response to victims: the medical system is responsible for collecting the evidence and tending to the victim's physical injuries; law enforcement investigates by questioning the victim to learn details of the crime and apprehends the perpetrator; and rape crisis centers and social service agencies provide support and referrals to victims (Campbell, 1998). In a study conducted by Maier (2008) that documented stories of rape victim advocates, overwhelmingly advocates felt that the police and medical systems often re-traumatize victims of sexual assault. This re-traumatization occurs when the officer's manner of questioning relies heavily on interrogation techniques and medical personnel lack compassion (Maier, 2008).

Reporting Rates of Rape

Rape has been shown to be the most underreported crime in America: An estimated 40% of cases are reported to law enforcement each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Reporting rape is important because it allows victims to seek justice. Reporting connects victims to medical, legal, and mental health support systems and provides information to law enforcement to get perpetrators off of the streets (Allen, 2007). Studies have shown that there are several factors that affect a victim's decision to report to law enforcement, including the relationship of the victim and perpetrator, the presence of a weapon or major injuries, the consumption of drugs or alcohol during the rape, and perceived breaches in confidentiality and privacy.

Evidence indicates that over 80% of rapes are perpetrated by someone known to the victim, which can contribute to a victim's reluctance to report the crime to law enforcement (Bachman, 1998; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Victims may feel conflicted in reporting rape when a family member, friend, or partner is the perpetrator because they could potentially face a number of social and financial repercussions, in addition to threats of health and personal safety

(Allen, 2007). In a large study of 4,446 undergraduate female students, Fisher et al. (2003) found that fewer than 1 in 20 college women made an official report of an incidence of sexual violence to law enforcement. This latter study revealed that victims were more likely to report the assault to the police in incidences where the attack was by a stranger and a weapon was used (Fisher et al., 2003).

Rape cases in which a weapon is used, the victim experiences significant physical injuries, or both, are more likely to be reported and acknowledged as credible by legal and medical systems (Bachman, 1998; Campbell, 1998). Du Mont et al. (2003) reviewed 186 cases and found that approximately half of the women decided not to report to law enforcement; however, women who experienced physical injury during an assault were three times more likely to report. Similarly, in a study of 268 rape crisis advocates, Campbell's (1998) results showed that in instances when the rape involved a stranger using a weapon and the assault resulted in physical injuries, victims were more likely to report a sexual assault to the authorities and report higher rates of satisfaction with the community response. Conversely, in cases where victims knew their attacker, did not have extensive injuries, and were consuming alcohol or drugs during the assault victims were more likely to be viewed as less credible by the systems to which they reported, and report having less satisfaction in the community response (Campbell, 1998).

Drug and alcohol consumption can also contribute to a victim's decision to report rape to law enforcement. Fisher et al.'s (2003) study of 4,446 women showed that 7 in 10 victims reported using alcohol prior to the sexual assault. Among those who did not report, 70% reported that they believed the rape was not serious enough to report, but they did, however, feel that it was serious enough to disclose to others (Fisher et al., 2003). Victims who are sexually assaulted while under the influence of drugs or alcohol can feel like they share at least some of the blame,

and believe that they could have prevented the assault had they not been intoxicated (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011).

According to the *National Crime Victimization Survey*, lack of confidentiality was indicated as a strong deterrent for victims to report sexual assault (Bachman, 1998). Victims of rape can consider the crime to be extremely personal and private; therefore, disclosure to law enforcement is viewed as a loss of privacy (Allen, 2007). In addition, victims cite a lack of trust in the legal system, coupled with a general frustration that their case will not be prosecuted, as reasons to withdraw complaints of rape (Frazier & Haney, 1996). Among 29 rape survivors who chose not to seek support from legal, medical, or community-based response services, researchers found that the majority of respondents (75%) cited fear of disbelief or rejection from formal systems as the reason for not seeking help (Patterson et al., 2009).

Victim Credibility

The manner in which victims present to authorities post-assault can be used as indicators for victim credibility by law enforcement; such indicators can include whether the victim appears calm or distressed, the amount of time it takes the victim to report, and whether the victim provides physical evidence of the crime. Winkel and Koppelaar (1991) found that among 80 female victims, those who presented to the authorities in distress were more likely to receive better treatment by law enforcement and medical systems. Ask (2010) surveyed 401 police officers and prosecutors and found that legal systems expect rape victims to present as emotionally distressed and visibly upset upon reporting an assault. However, foundational research conducted by Burgess in 1983 showed that survivors can appear either overtly emotional and expressive or dissonantly controlled and calm, and both types are just as common. Therefore, while law enforcement may use non-verbal clues to help determine victim credibility,

in reality, victim presentation has not been shown to prove or dismiss false allegations of sexual assault (Ask, 2010).

Once a rape occurs, the victim holds information and physical evidence regarding the crime, which he or she may decide to reveal to the authorities. From the victims' perspective, the evidence of the crime is very personal in nature; conversely, the criminal justice system views the evidence as a means to apprehending the alleged perpetrator (Campbell, 1998). Thus when law enforcement officers investigate the complaint of sexual assault as part of a routine crime investigation, they may not be fully aware of the very personal aspects of the crime and the way their line of questioning can affect the victim (Allen, 2007). A victim's credibility often comes into question when some parts are omitted, or there is a significant delay in reporting (Campbell, 1998). However, Westera, Keibell, and Miline (2011) surveyed 136 police officers and found that officers tend to use closed questioning and leading questions to intentionally confuse or mislead rape victims. Law enforcement officers believe this technique will help gauge whether or not the victim is making a legitimate claim of rape, when in reality, it can cause rape victims to experience even more trauma (Westera et al., 2011).

Police Culture

While studies have shown that belief in rape myths are common among several different groups, one group that confronts rape myths in their daily work is law enforcement. Police officers are tasked with responding to complaints made by sexual assault victims and investigating allegations of sex crimes. However, the criminal justice system, as an institution, is at odds with the feminist construct of gender stereotyping, sexism, and rape myth formation that perpetuates sexual violence on a systematic level (Campbell, 1998). Police culture, procedures for investigation of sex crimes, and protocols for working with rape victims all indicate that law

enforcement, by its very nature, does not provide the supportive environment to properly intervene in cases sexual assault (Page, 2008a).

Police officers are indoctrinated a subculture that promotes beliefs in emotional and physical strength, loyalty, and rigid attitudes about social expectations (Page, 2007). Police culture reflects the larger cultural expectations of masculinity, thus, a problem can surface when law enforcement officers are tasked with investigating sexual assault cases. Page (2008a) conducted a study with 891 sworn police officers and found that levels of rape myth acceptance among law enforcement reflect levels found among the general population. Ask (2010) surveyed 401 police officers and prosecutors and found that police believed that at least one in six reports of rape were false. Unlike the general population, when law enforcement officers endorse rape myths, it can affect the way sex crimes are investigated.

Rape myths may also prompt law enforcement officers to abandon potential cases, or to force victims to drop complaints based on perceived lack of credibility of the victim (Campbell, 1998; Frazier & Haney, 1996). In a review of 861 sexual assault cases reported to law enforcement, Frazier and Haney (1996) found that police officers and prosecutors encouraged victims to pursue charges of rape crimes when the cases were more likely to result in successful outcomes for prosecutors in court. However, in instances where the alleged perpetrator was an acquaintance, and where there was limited physical evidence or injury, police officers were more likely to try to persuade the victim to withdraw charges (Frazier & Haney, 1996). This not only affects the victim's experience with the criminal justice system, but also is detrimental to arresting and charging perpetrators.

Rape Reform Laws

Since the 1970s, the legal definition of rape has changed across every state. Prior to 1970, the law defined rape very narrowly. For example, “rape” was defined as sexual intercourse by force or against a woman’s will; the law did not recognize marital rape or assaults against men (Bachman, 1998). Under these outdated rape laws, there were two types of rape: “real rape” and “simple rape” (Campbell & Johnson, 1997, p. 256). “Real rapes” were considered those committed by strangers and “simple rapes” were those committed by acquaintances or friends (Campbell & Johnson, 1997). Traditionally, rapes were legally characterized by use of excessive force, where the victim resisted to the utmost (Bachman, 1998). Since rape reform laws have passed, the law has become more inclusive, and now recognizes several different types of sexual activities which, when forced upon an individual, can be legally charged as rape (e.g., oral and digital penetration; Campbell & Johnson, 1997).

While rape laws have undergone reform, police officer bias, endorsement of rape myths, and lack of training for law enforcement still exists and can result in victim dissatisfaction with police response and rape investigation (Page, 2008a). Campbell and Johnson (1997) surveyed 91 police officers and found a low degree of consistency between rape law and police officer’s definitions of rape. Although rape laws have evolved over the past 40 years to include more pervasive forms of violence, Campbell and Johnson (1997) found that police officers’ beliefs were more consistent with traditional rape laws, which reflect assaults perpetrated by a stranger with a weapon and use of excessive force.

Previous Empirical Investigations

The current study explored the interrelationships between rape myth acceptance, sexism, belief in victim credibility and capacity for victim empathy among law enforcement officers.

This section describes previous empirical investigations that have explored these variables. Previous studies have been conducted with college students, police officers, and victims in an effort to build knowledge about co-occurrence of rape myth acceptance and attitudes towards rape, attitudes towards women, and approval of sexist and other intolerant beliefs.

Variables Associated with Rape Myth Acceptance

In 1980, Burt was the first researcher to compare rates of rape myth acceptance with sex role stereotyping, oppositional sexual beliefs, sexual traditionalism, and approval of interpersonal violence. Rape myth acceptance has also been demonstrated to be associated with attribution of blame in rape cases, belief in large oppressive systems (e.g., sexism and racism) and participant gender. Since this groundbreaking study, researchers have explored the prevalence of rape myth acceptance and its correlates among college students, police officers, and victims.

College Students. Participant gender and rape myth acceptance has been a widely explored area of research. Stahl et al. (2010) surveyed 36 college students (18 men and 18 women) between the ages of 19 and 38 to study whether gender had a bearing on acceptance of rape myths and attribution of blame for rape cases. Results show that males were more likely to blame female victims and support rape myths, while females were less likely to blame female victims, yet females were still susceptible to endorsing rape myths (Stahl et al., 2010). In a similar vein, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) surveyed 429 college students (199 men and 240 women) who were, on average, 18.6 years of age, and found that rape myth acceptance was highly correlated with acceptance of hostile beliefs towards women. In addition, this latter study confirmed that rape myth acceptance was higher among males than females (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995).

The relationship between rape myth acceptance and other societal factors has also been studied. Johnson et al. (1997) surveyed 149 primarily white (80%), female (60%), and young (82% under age 25) college students to explore associations among rape myth acceptance, gender, race, and other sociodemographic factors. Results from this study showed that, overall, males exhibited higher levels of rape myth acceptance than females, the race of the victim affected the attribution of blame, and those who held traditional beliefs about gender roles were more likely to endorse rape myths (Johnson et al., 1997). Similarly, Aosved and Long (2006) similarly surveyed 998 college students to compare rates of rape myth acceptance and endorsement of other oppressive intolerance belief systems, such as sexism, racism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and religious. The sample in this latter study was composed of 492 male and 505 females who were, on average, 21.2 years of age and were primarily white (84%). Results showed that belief in oppressive systems increased participants' proclivity to endorse rape myths, and, overall, males demonstrated a higher level of rape myth acceptance than females (Aosved & Long, 2006).

Studies have also compared endorsement of rape myths and situational factors of the assault, such as victim-perpetrator relationship, victim appearance and attire during the assault, and the use of a weapon or excessive force during the rape. Frese et al. (2004) surveyed 182 college students to explore whether rape myth acceptance was correlated with situational factors of the assault and found that levels of rape myth acceptance predicted attribution of blame in rape cases. The sample in Frese et al.'s (2004) study consisted of similar proportions of men and women, and the median age was 19.2 years. Results showed that in cases that were inconsistent with rape myths (e.g., rapes perpetrated by an acquaintance) those who endorsed rape myths were more likely to blame the victim (Frese et al., 2004).

Police Officers. Rates of rape myth acceptance have been explored among police officers to determine whether training and education influence likelihood of endorsing rape myths. Page (2007) surveyed 891 police officers to compare rates of rape myth acceptance and level of educational attainment. Page found that officers with higher education levels were less likely to endorse rape myths. However, Sleath and Bull's (2012) study of 123 officers, found that formal training and educational attainment were unrelated to attribution of blame for rape cases. The somewhat contradictory findings of these latter two studies suggest that education and formal training may influence endorsement of some, but not all types, of rape myths.

Police officer gender and rape myth acceptance have also been explored in empirical research. Wentz and Archbold (2012) conducted interviews with 100 police officers to examine levels of rape myth acceptance across gender. The sample in Wentz and Archbold's (2012) study consisted largely of white (95%) and male (79%) participants. Results showed that gender had no effect on rape myth acceptance, and that, in fact, female officers were more likely than male officers to subscribe to rape myths when investigating sexual assaults (Wentz & Archbold, 2012).

The relationship between victim credibility and rape myth acceptance has also been studied using law enforcement officers. Goodman-Delahunty and Graham (2011) surveyed 125 police detectives and found that while victim attire and intoxication levels had little effect on whether the alleged perpetrator was arrested, the officers' level of rape myth acceptance influenced their view of the victims' credibility, which, in turn, determined whether an arrest was made. Participants in Goodman-Delahunty and Graham's (2011) study included 90 male and 35 female officers, all of whom completed specialized training in investigative techniques with sexual assault victims. Results showed that when drugs or alcohol were consumed prior to or

during an assault, police officers were more likely to question the victim's credibility and resort to harsher methods of interrogation (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011).

Victims. Research indicates that victims are also susceptible to rape myth acceptance, and that victims who endorse rape myths are less likely to report the assault to the police and view their experience as rape. Peterson and Muehlenhard's (2004) study of college women who reported experiencing forced sex consisted of females who were mostly white (90%), heterosexual (97%), and young ($M=18.6$). Results showed that those who endorsed rape myths were less likely to label their experience as a crime, even when the assault met the legal definition of rape (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004).

Variables Associated with Sexism

Sexism has been researched among college students and police officers to learn if belief in sexist systems affects the way individuals view rape. Both benevolent and hostile sexism have been positively correlated with rape myth acceptance (Chapleau et al., 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Masser et al., 2010; Viki & Abrams, 2002). Additionally, individuals who subscribe to sexism are also more likely to blame victims for rape (Abrams et al., 2003). Among police officers, lower education levels have been linked to sexism, and, conversely, higher levels of education are less likely to be linked to sexist beliefs (Page, 2008a).

College Students. College students have been studied to explore the association between sexism and participants' views toward rape. Glick and Fiske (1996) conducted a study with 2,250 (1,228 female and 942 male) mostly white (81%) college students to measure levels of hostile and benevolent sexism. This latter study showed high levels of benevolent sexism across both genders, yet hostile sexism was more frequent among males (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Masser et al. (2010) confirmed these findings in a study of 120 college students using similar measures.

Masser et al.'s (2010) sample consisted of 50 male and 70 female undergraduate students with a median age of 21. Results showed that benevolent sexism was positively associated with victim attribution of blame (Masser et al., 2010). Chapleau et al. (2007) surveyed 409 college students to determine how beliefs in benevolent sexism contribute to acceptance of rape myths. The sample was composed of predominately female (65%), white (86%), and young ($M=19.6$ years) participants (Chapleau et al., 2007). Results of this latter study showed that benevolent sexism was positively associated with rape myth acceptance (Chapleau et al., 2007).

Studies also show that those who subscribe to sexist belief systems are more likely to endorse rape myths and blame victims for sexual assaults. Viki and Abrams (2002) surveyed 57 college students to examine the association between benevolent sexism and propensity to blame rape victims who were portrayed as adulterous. Similar numbers of men (29) and women (28) composed the sample, which was mostly young (90% under age 27) and white (78%; Viki & Abrams, 2002). Results showed that participants who scored higher on benevolent sexism were more likely to blame the victim (Viki & Abrams, 2002). Abrams et al. (2003) conducted an additional study with 259 college students to compare levels of benevolent and hostile sexism with attribution of blame using acquaintance rape and stranger rape scenarios. The sample for Abrams et al.'s (2003) study was mostly male (77%), white (82%), and young (90% under age 25). Results showed that participants with high levels of benevolent sexism were more likely to blame acquaintance rape victims, but not victims of stranger rape (Abrams et al., 2003).

Police Officers. Research on sexism among police officers has explored whether educational attainment is associated with belief in sexist attitudes. Page (2008b) surveyed 891 police officers to study their acceptance of sexist beliefs across different levels of educational attainment. The sample consisted of mostly male (80%) and white (64%) participants, and the

majority (41%) had some college education but no degree (Page, 2008b). Findings indicated that officers with higher education levels were less likely to hold sexist beliefs (Page, 2008b).

Variables Associated with Victim Characteristics

Victim characteristics, such as appearance and dress, behavior prior to and during an assault, emotional state following a sexual assault, and reputation, have been shown to influence the way rape is viewed by college students, law enforcement, and victims (Ask, 2009; Cohn et al., 2009; Kaufmann et al., 2003; Rose, Nadler, & Clark, 2006; Westera et al, 2011).

College Students and Faculty. According to the research, belief in victim credibility is often determined by the victim's behavior during the assault and the way in which a victim presents post-assault. For example, Kaufmann et al. (2003) surveyed 169 predominately female (52%) and young ($M=24.4$ years) college students and found that belief in victim credibility was based on the victim's emotional display post-assault; that is, victims who were seen as expressive and emotional (as opposed to calm) were considered to be more believable. In addition, Rose et al. (2006) surveyed 118 college faculty using hypothetical rape scenarios and found that participants were more likely to view victims who were emotionally distressed as being more credible. Finally, Cohn et al. (2009) surveyed 524 college students to explore whether victim behavior influences attribution of blame in acquaintance rape scenarios. Study participants were mostly women (54%) with a median age of 18.3 years, and results showed that victims who had reputation for promiscuity were seen as less credible than victims without such a reputation (Cohn et al., 2009).

Research shows that empathy for victims influence the way participants view rape. Osman (2011) studied 591 college students, between the ages of 18 and 22, to examine whether participants' experiences with sexual assault victimization and perpetration influences the extent

to which they empathized with victims and perpetrators. Osman's (2011) results showed a positive correlation between participants' prior victimization experience and empathy for victims, and a negative correlation between participants' prior perpetration experience and empathy for victims. The highest levels of perpetrator empathy were expressed among these latter respondents (Osman, 2011). In a similar vein, Miller et al.'s (2011) study of 69 female college students showed that participants who perceived themselves as similar to the victim were more likely to empathize with the victim and see the victim as credible.

Police Officers. Law enforcement also determines a victim's credibility based on the victim's presentation after an assault and how the victim responds to questioning during police interviews. Ask (2009) surveyed 211 police officers and 190 prosecutors to assess their beliefs regarding the behavior of crime victims. Of the 211 police officers, the majority was male (60%) and between the ages of 45 and 54 (38%), and had served over 20 years in law enforcement (63%) (Ask, 2009). This latter study found that law enforcement officers expect rape victims to present as emotional and distressed and to be forthcoming with information about the assault (Ask, 2009). Westera et al. (2011) surveyed 136 police officers on their opinions of questioning and interviewing techniques utilized during videotaped interviews with rape victims. Results of this latter study showed that law enforcement officers endorsed the use of closed and intentionally leading questions, which were believed to yield better investigative details, yet often confused victims (Westera et al., 2011).

Victims. Situational factors of an assault also affect the way victims respond to rape. Fisher et al. (2003) surveyed 4,446 predominately white (84.6%) and young ($M=21.4$ years) college women and found, overall, that victims whose assaults included characteristics that were viewed as more credible (i.e., rapes involving a stranger, weapon, and physical injuries) were

more likely to report the assault to the police. Further, women whose rape involved an acquaintance and voluntary alcohol or drug intoxication were less likely to report it to the police, and more likely to blame themselves for the assault (Fisher et al., 2003).

Research indicates that victims weigh the emotional and social costs of reporting the rape to law enforcement when deciding whether or not to come forward. Patterson et al. (2009) interviewed 29 female rape survivors who chose not to report the assault to law enforcement; the sample was predominantly African American (52%) with a median age of 32.5 years. Patterson et al. (2009) found that survivors chose not to report their rape because they felt that doing so would cause additional psychological harm.

Research indicates that victims who decide to report rape to the police may risk facing additional trauma and emotional distress. For example, Patterson (2011) interviewed 20 rape victims to explore how the investigating detective's interview style affected their level of disclosure. Patterson (2011) found that the manner of investigative interviewing (i.e., tone, nonverbal communication, type of questioning) was associated with victims' level of distress and willingness to disclose information about the assault.

Seminal Investigations

There are four notable studies that provide the conceptual framework for the current study. Page (2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010) used a sample of 891 police officers and prosecutors to examine factors that are associated with rape myth acceptance (e.g., sexism, victim credibility, and educational attainment). The participant sample included mostly male (80%) and white (64%) police officers who reported some college education (41%; Page 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010). Page's research examined correlates of rape myth acceptance among police officers and prosecutors such as sexism, victim credibility, and educational attainment.

In one study, Page (2008b) examined correlates of rape myth acceptance using the *Rape Myth Attitudes-Revised* scale (RMA-R), the *Victim Credibility Scale* (VCS) to measure victim credibility, and the *Old Fashioned Sexism and Modern Sexism Scale* (OFMSS) to measure sexism. Page (2008a) found that although officers did not subscribe to patently sexist attitudes, a substantial number of participants did not answer several questions on the OFMSS, thus rendering the measures of sexism unreliable. Participant scores on the RMA-R and VCS showed that although police officers and prosecutors reported a general understanding of rape and its devastating consequences for victims, respondents were not likely to view some victims as credible based on situational factors of the assault (e.g., the victim-offender relationship, the presence of a weapon during the assault, and whether or not the victim suffered substantial injury during the crime).

In a separate study conducted in 2008(a), Page measured participants' understanding of rape reform laws using a closed-ended questionnaire that consisted of questions from the RMA-R to assess rape myth acceptance and items from the *Non-Genuine Victim Scale* (NGVS) to measure levels of understanding of rape reform laws. Results from this latter study showed that although the majority of participants were familiar with updated definitions of rape, police officers and prosecutors were still susceptible to rape myths in their application of the law, and that officers and prosecutors still hold personal biases towards rape that are inconsistent with the law (Page, 2008a).

In two additional studies that used the same sample of 891 police officers and prosecutors, Page (2007, 2010) examined rates of rape myth acceptance and belief in sexist attitudes among participants with varying levels of educational attainment. Findings of Page's 2007 study showed that officers with higher education and training were less likely to hold sexist

beliefs and endorse rape myths, thereby suggesting that officers with higher levels of education were better able to establish victim credibility independent of rape myths. The results of Page's (2010) study showed that approximately 6% of respondents demonstrated hostile sexism that was associated with high levels of rape myth acceptance.

Although Page's research has substantially contributed to knowledge about rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers and prosecutors, there are a number of critical variables that merit additional exploration, such as victim empathy and officer rank. The current study built on Page's research by using similar measures to examine relevant correlates of rape myth acceptance (sexism, victim credibility, and certain officer characteristics) among specialized law enforcement officers.

Limitations of Empirical Investigations

The studies analyzed in the above review have contributed to about rape myth acceptance among different types of respondents. However, there are limitations related primarily to sampling and measurement issues.

All of the studies utilized nonprobability sampling strategies to locate participants (i.e., Aosved & Long, 2006; Chapleau et al., 2007; Clarke & Stermac, 2011; Frese et al., 2004; Grubb & Harrower, 2009), which may have influenced a participant's motivation for being involved in the project, thus compromising the generalizability of study findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). The studies that examined rape myth acceptance among college students used a convenience sample (i.e., Aosved & Long, 2006; Frese et al., 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Peterson & Muelenhard, 2004). A nonprobability sampling method was also employed by Page (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010), who used snowball sampling to locate police officers and prosecutors. A probability sampling approach is more than a nonprobability sampling method because it allows

the researcher to identify sampling error, as well as allows greater generalizability of findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

Numerous studies examining rape myth acceptance were conducted with predominantly white, young college students (i.e., Johnson et al., 1997; Jones et al., 1998; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Peterson & Muelenhard, 2004). Although this sampling pool is often easily available to researchers, it does not allow for generalizability of findings to other populations.

Research conducted by Page (2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010) with law enforcement officers used sampled that showed little diversity with respect to race (over 90% white) and gender (over 80% male). The four studies by Page (2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010) utilized one sample consisting of 891 police officers and prosecutors. To collect data, Page (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010) sent surveys to 11 different criminal justice agencies and requested that these agencies distribute surveys to their members. Page (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010) was unable to determine exactly how many prospective participants were granted access to the study; however, 891 completed the survey and returned the instruments. Because criminal justice entities may be reluctant to disclose high rates of rape myth acceptance and sexist attitudes, it is likely that the officers who endorsed rape myths and sexist attitudes did not bother to complete the survey. Thus, the self-selection process, coupled with social desirability, may have compromised the reliability and validity of the measures. The measurement validity and reliability problems would be limitations for the four separate studies (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010) that used the same sample and instruments.

Summary of Literature Review

This section discusses the implications of the reviewed research for this current study. Summaries of the research and identified gaps in knowledge are expanded. In addition, this

section describes the expected contributions of this study to the knowledge base of police officers' rates of rape myth acceptance across variables that will measure levels of sexism, victim empathy, and officer characteristics.

Major Findings

There is a notable body of research that has explored rape myth acceptance among college students, police officers, and victims. From these studies, several conclusions can be made about rates of rape myth acceptance. First, rape myth acceptance is more common among males than females, which indicates that gender and cultural attitudes are strongly correlated (Burt, 1980; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Grubb & Harrower, 2009). In addition, individuals who subscribe to sexist and other intolerant or oppressive belief systems are more likely to endorse rape myths (Abrams et al., 2003; Aosved & Long, 2006; Masser et al., 2010; Russell, 2007). This, again, reflects larger cultural attitudes that allow sexism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, and religious intolerance to continue.

Research with police officers shows that law enforcement, like the general public, are also susceptible to rape myths (Page, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). Police officers are often the first point of contact for rape a victim, which means that they play an important role in responding to and supporting victims to ensure the proper collection of evidence to aid in investigation of the case. When police officers rely on rape myths to determine whether or not a sexual assault case warrants an investigation, sexual violence is allowed to continue unchallenged and justice is abandoned. Even though rape reform laws have passed, and many officers have completed specialized training to investigate sexual assault cases, police officers still subscribe to rape myths (Campbell, 1997; Page, 2008b).

Studies with law enforcement officers have not explored how an officer's characteristics affect his or her endorsement of rape myths and sexist attitudes. In addition, current research does not explore the interrelationships between officer gender, race, and rank on rape myth acceptance. This study seeks to explore the connections between rape myth acceptance and years of service in law enforcement, formalized training on sexual assault, and individual characteristics, such as personally knowing someone who committed a sexual assault and/or knowing a victim of sexual assault.

Concluding Statements

The current study examined police officers' rates of rape myth acceptance. This study also compared officers' rates of rape myth acceptance with attitudes about rape, sexism, victim presentation, and officer characteristics. By studying the interrelatedness of these factors, this study sought to contribute to the current body of research by exploring different factors that affect officers' endorsement of rape myths.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Purpose

This purpose of the proposed cross-sectional study was to examine correlates of rape myth acceptance, sexism, perceptions of victim credibility, capacity for victim empathy, and officers' characteristics among law enforcement officers. To examine these variables, the proposed study employed a web-based survey that was administered to a sample of 300 officers in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. The proposed study sought to answer the following questions: 1) to what extent do law enforcement officers endorse rape myths and 2) what are the interrelationships between rape myth acceptance and belief in sexism, perception of victim credibility, capacity for victim empathy, and officers' characteristics?

Key Terms

Rape and Sexual Assault

“Rape” is legally defined as “an act of anal, oral, or vaginal sexual intercourse with a male or female person committed without the person's lawful consent” (LA Rev Stat § 14:41, 2001). Louisiana law classifies rape into three categories: “simple rape”, “forcible rape”, and “aggravated rape” (LA Rev Stat § 14:41, 2001). These classifications are based on the situational factors of the assault, such as the amount force used during the assault, the use of a weapon, the number of assailants, and the age and mental capacity of a victim (LA Rev Stat § 14:41, 2001). “Sexual assault” is a term adopted by the public health movement, which is defined as actions and behaviors that involve coercion, lack of consent, and forced sexual activity (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [CDC], 2009). Whereas rape is a type of sexual assault, which includes anal, oral, or vaginal penetration, sexual assault is a broader term that includes non-consensual touching and non-touching behaviors of a sexual nature (CDC, 2009).

Law Enforcement Officers

“Law enforcement officers” are members of local and state police forces that work to ensure the safety of the public (Ask, 2010). Law enforcement officers are tasked with investigating complaints of rape and sexual assault, which includes interviewing rape victims, questioning and arresting alleged perpetrators, and building a credible case to enhance the prosecution of sex crimes (Ask, 2010; Page, 2007, 2010).

Rape Myths and Rape Myth Acceptance

In society there exist cultural myths that support rape. Burt (1980) defined “rape myths” as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” that create a cultural acceptance of sexual violence towards women (p. 217). Thus, “rape myth acceptance” is a belief in culturally devised and widely accepted false ideas about rape (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Rape myth acceptance normalizes the act of rape and serves to blame victims for the occurrence of sexual violence (Cohn et al., 2009; Stahl et al., 2010). Acceptance of rape myths condones masculine violence while blaming the victim for causing sexual violence (Frese et al., 2004). According to Page (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010), acceptance of rape myths is high among law enforcement officers; in addition, rates of rape myth acceptance among law enforcement are increased when officers have less educational attainment, when they subscribe to sexist beliefs, and when they report low victim credibility.

Sexism

Sexism is defined as adversarial beliefs about women and conformity to traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Glick and Fiske (2001) define two types of sexism: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. “Hostile sexism” is defined as a male’s negative perception of females, in which a female is perceived as trying to dominate or overcome male power (Glick & Fiske,

2001). “Benevolent sexism” is defined as “a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial or intimacy seeking” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Both types of sexism serve to undermine equal access to power and promote and condone rape myths and attitudes towards rape (Chapleau et al., 2007; Masser et al., 2010). Page (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010) found that police officers’ and prosecutors’ belief in sexism influenced acceptance of rape myths.

Victim Credibility

“Victim credibility” is defined as the perception of a victim’s truthfulness (Jordan, 2004). Law enforcement’s view of victim credibility is often based on the way a victim looks and behaves during and after an assault (Ask, 2010; Clarke & Stermac, 2010; Larsen & Long, 1988). Research indicates that when the following victim characteristics are present, police view victim credibility as low: using alcohol and/or drugs prior to an assault, delaying reporting of a rape, having a previous sexual relationship with the perpetrator, reporting a history of rape or sexual abuse, having a criminal background, being intellectually impaired or disabled, and concealing information about their personal lives (Jordan, 2004).

Victim Empathy

“Victim empathy” is defined as “positive feeling toward and greater identification with” a rape victim (Deitz et al., 1984, p. 265). According to Osman (2011), victim empathy influences attribution of blame in rape cases; therefore, if law enforcement officers have the capacity to empathize with a rape victim, this may affect officers’ perception of victim credibility.

Law Enforcement Officer Characteristics

“Law enforcement officer characteristics” include demographic data and work-related information about experiences and background of law enforcement officers (Wentz & Archbold, 2012). Specific law enforcement characteristics that will be examined in the proposed study include amount of training in conducting sexual assault investigations, level of educational attainment, amount of time in law enforcement, and officers’ rank.

Relationships between Variables

This study hypothesized that as attitudes consistent with rape myth acceptance increased, belief in sexist attitudes would also increase. In addition, it was expected that as attitudes consistent with rape myth acceptance decreased, amount of training and previous experience with rape cases would increase.

Empirical Indicators

This proposed study used four existing scales to measure rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility, and victim empathy. First, the study used 20 items from the short form of the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* to measure rates of rape myth acceptance (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). The *Old Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scale*, comprised of 13 items, measured participants’ belief in traditional and contemporary sexist ideas (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997). A 7-item subscale of the *Rape-Victim Empathy Scale* was used to understand law enforcement officers’ ability to empathize with victims (Smith & Frieze, 2003). A revised 8-item *Victim Credibility Scale* was used to understand how law enforcement perceives the credibility of different victims (Page, 2008b). In addition to these scales, questions about officer characteristics and demographic information were included. Other empirical

indicators were assessed with self-report survey items. The survey was administered as an anonymous online survey.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this cross-sectional, exploratory-descriptive study was to examine the interrelationships among police officers' acceptance of rape myths, belief in sexism, victim credibility, ability to empathize with rape victims, and personal history of sexual assault and family violence. Officers' education level, formal training, rank, amount of time in law enforcement, and demographic characteristics was also examined. Because law enforcement provides a crucial link between victims and the criminal justice system, it is important to understand the factors that may influence the way police officers identify and respond to victims of sex crimes.

Method and Procedures

Sample

The data for this study was collected from a convenience sample of 300 police officers working in the Parish of East Baton Rouge in Louisiana. Two law enforcement divisions were utilized for this study, the Baton Rouge City Police and East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office, which has a total population of 1,500 police officers and sheriff's deputies. The study sought to solicit participation from East Baton Rouge Parish law enforcement officers using a self-report survey instrument. The study participants were not randomly selected; therefore, this study obtained a non-probability sample (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Among the population of 1,500 police officers, the researcher sought to distribute surveys to 300 officers and deputies working in East Baton Rouge Parish. Similar research shows that among this population a 40-50% response rate was achieved, which is considered by Rubin and Babbie (2010) to be an adequate response rate in terms of representativeness (Page, 2007). Due to the limited population sample from a local community in South Louisiana, the results of this study can only be

generalizable to law enforcement officers with similar characteristics within the southeast region of the United States.

Rubin and Babbie (2010) recommend a sample size of 80 to 100 to obtain an adequate level of power (.83-.86), at a level of significance of .05, to detect a medium effect size (.60). Therefore, the sample size for the current study ensured sufficient power for bivariate analysis of the data.

Protection of Human Subjects

Police officers were advised that participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous, with no repercussions for choosing not to participate. The study did not require participants to provide any identifying information. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and intent. Included in the survey was a statement describing that some of the information in the proposed study may trigger past traumas or negative experiences. The local sexual assault center's hotline number was provided to ensure that participants are aware of resources available to provide support and counseling in cases where traumatic feelings arise. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received prior to survey distribution.

Research Design

This correlational study utilized a cross-sectional design to assess associations among variables measuring rape myth acceptance, sexism, perception of victim credibility, capacity for victim empathy, personal history of sexual violence, amount of professional training, level of educational attainment, amount of time in law enforcement, officer rank, and demographic characteristics among law enforcement officers. The researcher pretested the survey instruments to a comparable subsample of criminal justice personnel from the East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office, who were not included in the participant pool. Pretesting enabled the

researcher to correct any items that were unclear and eliminated redundancy (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

Survey instruments were completed by police officers using an online survey tool. Administering the survey via online ensured that the instrument was accessible, thereby increasing the response rate (Dillman, 2007; Rubin & Babbie, 2010). The researcher first solicited prospective participants who occupy higher-level divisions within the agencies, such as the violent crime and sex crime divisions, via email. Requests to participate were distributed to sergeants and detectives by department heads using an online survey tool provided by the researcher. The online survey's URL was distributed through email and was not traceable back to the participant. The survey tool did not require participants to login using a user name, and did not collect the participants' name.

Measurement

The current study measured rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility, and empathy for rape victims using subscale items of four existing scales, including the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* (Payne et al., 1999), the *Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scales* (Swim et al., 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997), the revised *Victim Credibility Scale* (Page, 2008), and the *Rape-Victim Empathy Scale* (Smith & Frieze, 2003). In addition to these scales, researcher-developed items were used to measure personal history of sexual violence, amount of professional training, level of educational attainment, amount of time in law enforcement, and officer rank.

To assess officers' characteristics, the researcher included survey questions to measure officers' personal history with sexual violence, education level, formal trainings, officer rank, and demographic characteristics. Personal history items will include two questions: "Has anyone

ever forced you to have sex as a child?” and “Has anyone ever forced you to have sex as an adult?” These latter items enabled the researcher to examine differences among officers who have and have not reported a personal history of sexual violence. The officers’ educational attainment was measured at the ordinal level with one question that includes five response options: high school, some college, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, and graduate degree. Professional training in the area of sexual assault was also measured at the ordinal level with two questions which asked how many hours of training they received with adult and child victims in the past 5 years; six response options were provided, including did not receive training, less than 5 hours, 5-14 hours, 15-29 hours, 30 hours or more, and don't know. Officer rank was measured at the ordinal level with the following responses: officer, deputy, sergeant, detective, lieutenant, or other. Demographic information was also collected; this included the variables of gender and race/ethnicity, which were measured at the nominal level. Age and amount of time served in law enforcement were measured at the interval level.

Instrumentation

The current correlational study used a 62-item survey to collect information about respondents’ acceptance of rape myths, belief in sexism, attitudes about victim credibility, ability to empathize with rape victims, personal history of sexual violence, amount of formal training, educational attainment, and demographic characteristics.

Rape Myth Acceptance

Rape myth acceptance is beliefs in stereotypical attitudes about rape and rape victims, and will be measured with 20 items from the short form of the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* (IRMA) developed by Payne et al. (1999). Scale items included common rape myths, such as “a lot of women lead a man on and then they cry rape,” “many women secretly desire to be

raped,” and “women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them” (Payne et al., 1999, pp. 49-50). Each item included five response options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Responses were coded using a Likert-type 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The possible range of total scale scores was 20-100, with higher scores indicating lower levels of rape myth acceptance. According to Payne et al. (1999), the overall scale reliability was 0.93 with subscale alphas ranging from 0.74 to 0.84.

Sexism

Sexism was measured using the revised *Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scales* by Swim and Cohen (1997). This 13-item scale presented statements regarding traditional gender roles, such as “women are generally not as smart as men,” “it is rare to see a woman treated in a sexist manner on television,” and “it is more important to encourage boys than to encourage girls to participate in athletics” (Swim & Cohen, 1997, p. 118). Each item included five response options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Responses were coded using a Likert-type 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The possible range of scores was 13-65. High scores on the scale indicated the presence of sexist attitudes. The *Old-Fashioned Sexism Scale* had a Cronbach’s coefficient of 0.73 and the *Modern Sexism Scale* had a Cronbach’s coefficient of 0.77 (Page, 2008a).

Victim Credibility

Victim credibility is the believability of a crime victim based on the victims’ characteristics, and was measured using a revised 8-item *Victim Credibility Scale* by Page (2008a). The scale presented a scenario that asked participants to rate the likelihood that they

would believe a victim based on his or her social status, such as “a virgin,” “a prostitute,” or a “teenager” (Page, 2008a, p. 27). Participant responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from very likely to not very likely. According to Page (2008a), the *Victim Credibility Scale* yielded a Cronbach’s coefficient of 0.81.

Victim Empathy

Victim empathy is the ability to understand what a victim is going through, and was measured using a 8-item subscale of the *Rape-Victim Empathy Scale* developed by Smith and Frieze (2003). This scale presented statements meant to measure how likely a participant was to empathize with a rape victim, such as “I find it easy to take the perspective of a rape victim,” “I can imagine how a victim feels during an actual rape,” and “I can understand how helpless a rape victim might feel” (Smith & Frieze, 2003, p. 497). Each item included five response options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Responses were coded using a Likert-type 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The possible range of scores was 8-40, with higher scores indicating a higher ability to empathize with rape victims. The *Rape-Victim Empathy Scale* had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89 (Smith & Frieze, 2003).

Personal History of Sexual Violence

Personal history of sexual violence was assessed using four survey questions. The first two questions, “Has anyone ever forced you to have sex as a child (under age 18)?” and “Has anyone ever forced you to have sex as an adult (18 and older)?” was measured using three possible responses: yes, no, and don’t know. Responses of *yes* were coded with a “1” and no responses were coded with a “2.” Don’t know responses were not counted. Two additional questions were included to measure the officers’ relation to sexual violence victims and

perpetrators. These questions include: “Do you know someone among your family or friends who are a victim of sexual assault?” and “Do you know someone among your family or friends who have perpetrated sexual assault?” Participants were given three possible responses: yes, no, and don’t know. Responses of yes were coded with a “1” and no responses were coded with a “2.” Don’t know responses were not counted.

Educational Attainment and Experience in Law Enforcement

Officers’ educational attainment, formal training, amount of time in law enforcement and rank were measured using five researcher-developed questions. The first two questions determined if the respondent completed any formal training regarding sexual assault. These include: “As a police officer have you received formal training in conducting sexual assault investigation with child victims?” and “As a police officer have you received formal training in conducting sexual assault investigation with adult victims?” Participants were given six possible responses options: did not receive training, less than 5 hours, 5-14 hours, 15-29 hours, 30 hours or more, and don’t know.

Educational attainment, amount of time in law enforcement, and officer rank provided information about the officers’ level of education and experience in law enforcement. The question, “What is your highest level of education attained?” had five response options, including: high school, some college, Associate’s Degree, Bachelor’s Degree, and Graduate Degree. Amount of time in law enforcement was measured in years and months, and officer rank was selected from the following options: officer, deputy, sergeant, detective, lieutenant, or other.

Demographic Factors

Demographic factors were collected using four questions. First, participants were asked to give their age at the time of completing the survey. Additionally, gender was selected using

the responses male or female. Finally, race and ethnicity were assessed using two questions, which list multiple races and ethnicities as used by the U.S. Census Bureau. Responses to the question, “Are you Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?” included the following responses: no; yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano; yes, Puerto Rican; Yes, Cuban; Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Additionally, participants were asked to select their race based on the following options: White, Black/African-American/Negro, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Indian, Japanese, Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Korean, Guamanian or Chamorro, Filipino, Vietnamese, Samoan, or Other.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

The present cross-sectional descriptive study examined rape myth acceptance, sexism, perceptions of victim credibility, capacity for victim empathy, and work-related and other characteristics among law enforcement officers. The sample for this study consisted of 24 participants, a response rate of 1.6%. In terms of statistical power for bivariate analyses, according to Rubin and Babbie (2010), a sample size of 80-100 is recommended for a medium effect size (0.60) at a level of significance of .05, with standard statistical power of .83-.86 (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). The present study, with an overall *N* of 24, is far less than the minimum recommended number of subjects. Thus, the results of bivariate analyses must be interpreted with caution.

Demographic and Other Characteristics

The sample consisted of predominately Caucasian males. The sample included 17 males (70.8%) and 5 females (20.8%). Two participants (8%) did not identify their gender. The races of the participants were Caucasian (*n*=17, 70.8%) and African-American (*n*=4, 16.6%). Three participants (12.5%) did not identify their race. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 56 years of age. The mean age was 38.7 (*SD*=7.38) and the median age was 39 years of age. The majority of participants (50.0%) reported having between 10 and 20 years of law enforcement experience (*M*=12.64; *SD*=9.19). The majority of participants reported less than 5 hours of training in the last 5 years with child victims (*n*=11; 45.8%) and with adult victims (*n*=12; 50.0%); however, some respondents reported 30 or more hours with child victims (*n*=6; 25.0%) and adult victims (*n*=4; 16.7%) in the last 5 years. In addition, only one officer (4.2%) reported being forced to have sex as a child, none reported being forced to have sex as an adult, and two did not answer the question. The majority of participants (66.7%) knew someone in their

personal life who was a victim of sexual assault, whereas a minority (16.7%) knew someone in their personal life who was a perpetrator of sexual assault.

Major Outcomes of Interest

Rape Myth Acceptance

Acceptance of rape myth attitudes were measured with a 20-item *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* (IRMA) developed by Payne et al. (1999). The IRMA includes statements that are rape myths, and participants were asked to rate their attitude toward each statement with responses that were coded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The possible range of total scale scores was 20-100, with higher scores indicating higher levels of rape myth acceptance. Table 1 shows the IRMA scale scores as reported by law enforcement officers. Over 75% of participants scored 44 or below ($M=39.27$, $SD=13.85$), indicating low levels of rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers (See Table 1). The Cronbach's alpha for the IRMA scale was .91, indicating very good internal consistency of the scale for this sample.

Sexism

Belief in sexism was measured using the *Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scales* (OFMSS) developed by Swim and Cohen (1997). This 13-item scale presented statements regarding traditional gender roles, and included five response options that were coded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Nine positively worded items on the scale were reverse coded. The possible range of scores was 13-65. High scores on the scale indicated the presence of sexist attitudes. Table 1 shows the *OFMSS* scores of law enforcement officers. The mean overall *OFMSS* score was 33 ($SD=9.85$), indicating

moderate levels of sexist attitudes among participants (see Table 1). The Cronbach's alpha for the *OFMSS* scale was .93, indicating excellent internal consistency of this scale for this sample.

Victim Credibility

Victim credibility was measured with the 8-item *Victim Credibility Scale (VCS)* revised by Page (2008). The scale asked participants to rate the likelihood that they would believe a victim based on his or her social status, and responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from very unlikely (1) to very likely (5). The possible range of scores was 8-40, with higher scores indicating a higher belief in victim credibility. Table 1 shows the total *VCS* scores. Total scale scores ranged from 22 to 40, indicating that the majority of participants showed a high belief in victim credibility ($M=28.64$, $SD=5.14$; See Table 1). The Cronbach's alpha for the *VCS* scale was .91, indicating very good internal consistency.

Victim Empathy

Victim empathy was measured using an 8-item subscale of the *Rape-Victim Empathy Scale (RVES)* developed by Smith and Frieze (2003). This scale measured how likely participants were to empathize with a rape victim. Each item included five response options that were coded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The possible range of scores is 8-40, with higher scores indicating a higher ability to empathize with rape victims. Table 1 shows the total *RVES* scores as reported by law enforcement officers. Scores ranged from 18-35, with a mean of 26.43 ($SD=4.84$). These scores indicate that participants are moderately likely to empathize with rape victims. The Cronbach's alpha was adequate ($\alpha=.75$), indicating good internal consistency of the *RVES* for this sample.

Table 1: Total Score Scales for Rape Myth Acceptance, Sexism, Victim Credibility, and Victim Empathy

Scale	Mean	SD	Range
1) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	39.27	13.85	20-82
2) Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scales	33.00	9.85	14-52
3) Victim Credibility Scale	28.64	5.14	22-40
4) Rape-Victim Empathy Scale	26.43	4.84	18-35

A correlation matrix was computed to examine interrelationships among rape myth acceptance, sexism, belief in victim credibility, and victim empathy. Due to the small sample size ($N=24$), results must be interpreted with caution. Among correlates, a significant negative and moderately strong association emerged between rape myth acceptance and victim credibility ($r=-.606$), indicating that as rape myth acceptance increases, belief in victim credibility decreases.

Demographic Differences and Summary

Independent sample T -tests were performed to explore whether there were differences on the major outcomes of interest between Caucasian and African-American participants, and between male and female participants. As seen in Table 2, Caucasian officers scored higher than African-American officers on measures of rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility, and victim empathy. Caucasians showed significantly higher levels of sexism than African-Americans, at $t(19)=3.43$, $p < .01$ (See Table 2). Due to the small sample size, these latter results must be interpreted with caution. As seen in Table 3, male officers scored higher than female officers on measures of rape myth acceptance, sexism and victim credibility. Female officers

scored higher than male officers on the measure of victim credibility. None of the gender differences were significant.

Table 2: Total Scale Scores Among Caucasian and African-American Participants

Scale	Race	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	Caucasian	16	40.00	15.17
	African-American	4	36.00	6.68
2) Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scales	Caucasian	17	35.94*	8.33
	African-American	4	18.00	13.78
3) Victim Credibility Scale	Caucasian	17	28.41	5.61
	African-American	4	30.75	1.89
4) Rape-Victim Empathy Scale	Caucasian	16	27.56	4.67
	African-American	4	24.00	2.94

* $p < .01$

Table 3: Total Scale Scores Among Male and Female Participants

Scales	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	Male	16	41.69	15.10
	Female	5	34.20	7.26
2) Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scales	Male	17	34.41	11.12
	Female	5	26.80	11.52
3) Victim Credibility Scale	Male	17	27.76	4.80
	Female	5	31.60	5.68
4) Rape-Victim Empathy Scale	Male	16	26.88	4.60
	Female	5	25.00	5.87

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The current cross-sectional, exploratory study examined demographic and work-related characteristics of rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility and victim empathy among 24 law enforcement officers in a Southern city. The present study attempted to expand the current knowledge on rape myth acceptance from the perspective of law enforcement, as well as identify variables that are associated with traditional beliefs about rape. This study builds upon previous research on rape myth acceptance among law enforcement (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011; Page, 2007; Sleath & Bull, 2012; Wentz & Archbold, 2012)

The low sample size ($N=24$) is a major limitation of this study. It should be noted that approximately 2 weeks after the instrument was administered, the Police Chief was fired by the Mayor of the city in which the study was conducted. This completely unexpected event negatively impacted the study in several ways. As a result of the firing, numerous administrative barriers and obstacles ensued, and the researcher was no longer able to disseminate the written survey directly to law enforcement due to the lack of administrative support. The need to administer the survey online, coupled with the tense political climate, likely contributed to the low response rate. The current study should therefore be considered a pilot, and replication is warranted.

Sample Characteristics

The sample for the current study is similar to that of previous studies in several ways. First, it was composed primarily of males (70.8%), which is consistent with research conducted by Page (2007), Ask (2009), and Wentz and Archbold (2012) with law enforcement officers. This research also demonstrates lack of diversity in race as demonstrated in previous research (Ask, 2009; Page, 2007; Wentz & Archbold, 2012), with 70.8% Caucasian and 16.7% African-

American participants represented in this study. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 56 ($M=38.7$), which is similar to Page's (2007) study, which reported participants' ages ranging from 22 to 67 years. The current study also collected officers' level of educational attainment and years in law enforcement. Similar to Page (2007), this current study found that respondents had between 10 and 20 years in law enforcement experience, and also found that the majority of respondents had at least some college education.

The current study also differs from previous research in several ways. First, this study is the first of its kind to ask law enforcement officers about whether they know sexual assault victims or perpetrators. The intent was to examine whether their personal relationships affected their levels of rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility and victim empathy; however, these latter analyses were not undertaken due to the low sample size. This survey is also unique in that the majority of the participants worked in specialized sex crime units, which are tasked with specifically investigating rapes and other sex crimes, as opposed to lower-ranking uniform officers, who investigate an array of crimes. The participants' primary focus on working with rape victims in the current study also differs from Page's research (2007), which sampled 891 police officers and found that the majority (49%) had worked five or fewer rape investigations in their career.

The current study sought to describe rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility, victim empathy and demographic and other work-related characteristics among law enforcement officers. Over 75% of participants surveyed scored less than the midway point on the *IRMA* scale. Results showed moderately low rates of rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers, which is consistent with Page's (2010) study. According to Page (2010), moderate levels of rape myth acceptance among law enforcement can be attributed to social desirability.

Officers may want to ensure that their department is represented positively, or they may feel obligated to align with a more feminist viewpoint if a female was collecting data (Page, 2010). It is possible that social desirability may have contributed to the low rates of rape myth acceptance in the current study because participants included higher-ranking officials who were more invested in their work (Ask, 2009). On the other hand, it is possible that officers who primarily focus on sex crimes would show lower rates of rape myth acceptance than those who do not. The current study should be replicated using a social desirability scale and with a much larger sample that represents different ranks and units.

Correlates between rape acceptance and sexism have been widely explored in studies among college students, which have yielded results indicating that individuals who align with sexist belief systems are more likely to endorse rape myths (Aosved & Long, 2006; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1996). Among law enforcement, Page (2008b) measured sexism with 891 police officers using the *OFMSS*. Page's (2008b) research found that while participants were less likely to agree with blatant sexist beliefs (items aligned with *old-fashioned* sexist beliefs on the *OFMSS*), participants showed higher levels of agreement with more covert forms of sexism (items aligned with *modern* sexist beliefs on the *OFMSS*). In the current study, only 37.5% of participants scored below the midpoint of 32 on the *OFMSS*, which indicates that participants showed moderate levels of sexism, also consistent with Page's (2008b) findings. Further, the current study found that Caucasians showed significantly higher levels of sexism than African-Americans. Page's (2008b) study with law enforcement officers using the *OFMSS* found no differences in sexist beliefs between different racial groups, though the study did find that participants with higher levels of education were less likely to have sexist beliefs. Differences in total *OFMSS* scores in the current study could reflect the fact that African-Americans may be

more sensitive to other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism, and they are therefore less likely to endorse sexist beliefs as well (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). This study should be replicated with a larger and more diverse sample to understand ways that race influences sexism and rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers.

Officers' beliefs in victim credibility were also assessed in the current study. Results showed high levels of belief in victim credibility. All participants scored above the midpoint of 16 for the *VCS*. These results may have to do with the specialized work assignment of the law enforcement officers. Although the mean total *VCS* score indicated high belief in victim credibility, there was considerable variability when examining certain scale items. For example, participants were, overall, unlikely or very unlikely to believe a non-traditional victim, such as a prostitute (29.1%), a man (20.8%) and a married woman accusing her husband (12.5%). On the other hand, participants were likely or very likely to believe a victim that they knew (50.0%), a virgin (54.2%) or a professional woman (58.3%). Results from this current study are consistent with Page's (2008a) research ($N=891$) that also utilized the *VCS*, which showed that 44% of officers were unlikely or very unlikely to believe a prostitute, and that 19% of officers were unlikely or very unlikely to believe a married woman accusing her husband. Similarly, Page (2008a) also found that only 5% of officers were unlikely to believe a virgin and 2% were unlikely or very unlikely to believe a professional woman. Despite the low sample size of the current study, it is a concern that sex crimes detectives and investigators show low belief in victim credibility among non-traditional victims. This study should be replicated with a larger and more diverse sample in order to better understand victim credibility. In addition, the researcher should attempt to identify the factors that are associated with low levels of belief in victim credibility, such as the victim and perpetrator relationship (Grubb & Harrower, 2009) and

victim's presentation styles immediately following an assault (Osman, 2011). Such analyses cannot be undertaken in the current study because of the low sample size, and findings cannot be generalized to law enforcement officers, in general.

Law enforcement officers were also asked about their ability to empathize with victims with the *RVES*. Results showed that, overall, officers were moderately likely to empathize with victims, and all participants scored over the midpoint of 16 on the *RVES*. This study is unique in that no other study has collected data from law enforcement officers about current levels of victim empathy. The officers in the current study experienced frequent contact with sexual assault victims, in contrast with previous research conducted with law enforcement (Ask, 2009; Page, 2010). Thus, there may be a self-selection issue with the officers in the current study, who may have elected to serve in the sex crimes division because they are more empathetic individuals among those who choose law enforcement as a career. Thus, replication of the current study is theoretically warranted with a larger and more diverse sample of law enforcement officers to better understand how victim empathy varies with relevant officer characteristics.

Interrelationships among the major variables of interest (rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim credibility and victim empathy) were assessed despite the small sample size and low statistical power. Results showed that as levels of rape myth acceptance decreased, belief in victim credibility increased ($r = -.602$). The negative and moderate association between rape myth acceptance and belief in victim credibility could be due to the low sample size (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). On the other hand, the results are consistent with those of Page (2008a), who also found that rape myth acceptance decreased as belief in victim credibility increased. The more likely an officer is to subscribe to myths about rape, the less likely he or she is to believe the rape victim

(Page, 2008a). This suggests that education about rape and exposure to rape victims may be critical to law enforcement training in order to improve outcomes in sex crime investigations. It should be noted again that the results of bivariate analyses must be interpreted with extreme caution due to low statistical power. Replication of the study with a larger sample is warranted. A multivariate approach is needed to determine the most influential predictors of rape myth acceptance among law enforcement officers. The results of such studies can point to specific areas of training that are needed by different officer types.

Limitations of the Current Study

As with all cross-sectional research, there are several limitations of the current study, the most notable being the small sample size ($N=24$). As such, representativeness is hampered, generalizability is low, and few conclusions can be drawn due to low statistical power (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Thus, the decision to proceed with tests of significance is questionable and the results of these tests must be interpreted with extreme caution. The researcher intends to replicate the current pilot study with a larger and more diverse sample. Ideally the survey will be re-administered during a more politically stable period to ensure adequate administrative support for conducting the research.

The low sample size affects the generalizability of the current study in several ways. The problem of self-selection is two-fold. Officers may have sought out opportunities with the sex crimes units because they are less sexist, less likely to believe rape myths and because they are more empathetic and have a higher belief in victim credibility. Thus, even with a larger and more representative sample, the study would be generalizable only to officers in sex crimes units or to those with comparable duties. The other issue around self-selection has to do with the voluntary nature of the study. Officers who completed the online survey may be substantially different

from those who did not, and this may have to do with the tense administrative climate, discomfort with participating in an online survey, not seeing value in the project, and any number and combination of factors that makes the non-respondents different from the respondents. Thus, even with a larger sample, the study would be generalizable only to officers who voluntarily completed the survey in an online format.

Social desirability is a potential problem that may have been a measurement issue, in addition to self-selection. In the current study, officers may have answered in a way that made them look more favorable to the researcher, rather than reporting their attitudes and beliefs in a completely truthful way. In addition, because the majority of participants came from high-ranking positions, it is possible these participants felt they had to positively represent their department or agency instead of providing answers that reflect their personal beliefs. In addition to the above noted measurement issues (small sample, self-selection and social desirability), there may also be a problem with reliability of the measures used. The current study used established measures, such as the *IRMA*, *OFMSS* and *VCS* that have been used in previous studies with law enforcement officers (Page, 2008a), and the alphas obtained for the scales ranged from .91 to .93. Nevertheless, replication with a larger sample is warranted to determine whether alphas of similar magnitude would be obtained.

The current study was cross-sectional in design, which is another limitation of this study. As such, it does not capture changes in officers' beliefs and attitudes over time. Longitudinal research is needed to determine whether officers' beliefs and attitudes are influenced by training, experience, and increased exposure to sexual assault cases. Finally, in addition to these aforementioned limitations, it should be noted that the true nature of the officers' actual behaviors with victims is not known. Examining actual behaviors of law enforcement officers in

addition to their beliefs and attitudes using methodologies such as content analysis to examine records of sex crime cases or to review tapes of officers' interviews with victims.

Strengths of the Current Study

Despite the numerous limitations of the current study, most of which are concerned with the small sample size, there are a number of merits worth mentioning. The current study sampled primarily sex crimes detectives and investigators, who presumably have more training and interaction with rape victims than other law enforcement officers. The current pilot study was the first known study to specifically target officers who primarily respond to sexual assault cases.

Another strength of this study is inclusion of numerous relevant variables. Previous research examined rape myth acceptance and sexism (Page, 2008b), rape myth acceptance and victim credibility (Page, 2008a), rape myth acceptance and officer training (Sleath & Bull, 2012) and rape myth acceptance and officer educational attainment (Page, 2008a). In addition, established scales were used to measure the major variables of interest (rape myth acceptance, sexism, victim empathy and belief in victim credibility), and although the sample size was small, the obtained alphas indicated that the scales were reliable for use with law enforcement officers in sex crimes divisions.

Conclusions

The current study, which should be viewed as a pilot study, should be replicated with a larger and more diverse sample when the target population (law enforcement officers) is not in the midst of administrative upheaval. Replication would allow the researcher to determine whether an adequate response rate can be obtained with an online survey. Thus researchers should explore the use of both paper and online surveys in the future to increase response rate.

Despite its limitations, the current study was theoretically grounded and it incorporated established and reliable measures. It yielded descriptive information from an under-examined subsample of law enforcement officers, and it provides a solid foundation for future replications.

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