

Blaming victims of rape

Studies on rape myths and beliefs about rape

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Doctoral Dissertation in Psychology
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University of Gothenburg
November 9, 2018

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Cover layout: Sofia Calderon
Printing: BrandFactory
Källered, Sweden, 2018
ISBN: 978-91-7833-193-2 (PDF)
ISBN: 978-91-7833-194-9 (Print)
ISSN: 1101-718X Avhandling/Göteborgs universitet, Psykologiska inst.
Internet link to Gupea: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/57769>

*To those of you who dare to talk,
and all of you who don't.*

ABSTRACT

Adolfsson, K. (2018). *Blaming victims of rape: Studies on rape myths and beliefs about rape*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Rape is a crime characterized by high prevalence rates but low reporting and conviction rates, leading to high attrition rates. Victims often do not report their victimization and of those who do, many drop out during the justice process. This is a problem both for the victims themselves and for the legal certainty of societies. One explanation for the low reporting rates is victims' justified fear of being badly treated, mistrusted, and blamed for their rapes. Victim-blaming attitudes have been extensively studied and reported both among the general public and among professionals in the justice and healthcare systems. Several factors have also been investigated to understand why victim blaming exists. Some of these factors are aspects of the rape situation, while others are connected to the personal beliefs of study participants. However, previous studies have also predominantly investigated only a few variables at a time. The aim of this thesis was partly to experimentally investigate whether situation-specific variables or participants' personal beliefs are more important in seeking to understand blame attribution. Possible effects of age, gender, force, and number of perpetrators were investigated, because these aspects were previously understudied. In addition, the aim was to include the perspective of professionals who meet, treat, and interact with victims of rape. All three studies were conducted using a multi-analytical approach incorporating both analyses of variance (ANOVAs) as well as more elaborated and exploratory analyses.

In **Study I**, the effects of victim and participant age, participant gender, sympathy for the victim, trust in the justice system, belief in a just world, and rape myth acceptance (RMA) were investigated in three experiments, employing a vignette methodology. In total, 877 Swedish adolescents and adults read scenarios describing common acquaintance rape situations. Victim age (18 or 31 years) was manipulated, but did not affect attributed blame. Effects of participant age and gender varied markedly across scenarios. Sympathy for the victim and RMA were the best individual predictors of attributed blame. This study supports the notion that blame attributions are more affected by personal beliefs than by situation-specific variables. **Study II** investigated the effects of multiple perpetrators and their use of force on blame attributions. A total of 2928 Swedes from a general public sample participated in the two experiments conducted using vignette methodology and an online questionnaire. Participants read scenarios in

which either the number of perpetrators or the perpetrators' use of force was the manipulated variable, and subsequently completed items rating blame, RMA, just-world beliefs, sympathy for the victim, perception of consent, and trust in the legal system. Results indicated no effect of force but that a victim of multiple-perpetrator rape was attributed more blame than was a victim of lone-perpetrator rape. The best individual predictors of attributed blame were participants' perception of consent, sympathy for the victim, and RMA. In line with Study I, the results indicated that participants' beliefs about rape were more important than situational factors. In **Study III**, the thesis was broadened further by including the perspective of professionals encountering victims of rape. A survey was sent to professionals in the justice and healthcare systems, comprising questions about barriers and problematic practices they encounter, as well as about rape myths, belief in a just world, and their trust in the justice system. A total of 237 police employees, prosecutors, and healthcare personnel responded. Profession, age, and RMA affected their estimates of false rape reports, while age and profession affected trust in the justice system. Lack of resources was the most prominent barrier they experienced, and detailed and repeated questioning of the victims was the most highlighted problematic practice. The results further identified professionals' need for more education in order to improve treatment of rape victims.

In conclusion, this thesis indicates that personal beliefs are more predictive of blame attributions than are situational factors related to the rape itself. RMA, sympathy for the victim, and perception of consent were the most predictive factors of both victim and perpetrator blame. Furthermore, this implies that victims of multiple-perpetrator rape were attributed higher levels of blame than were victims of lone-perpetrator rape. Finally, this thesis also highlights the requirement for more resources and knowledge among professionals in both the justice and healthcare systems. This thesis has implications for future projects to prevent victim blame with the long-term goal of reducing attrition rates. It identifies what to focus on: reducing RMA, increasing sympathy for rape victims, and increasing awareness of the concept of sexual consent. In addition, across all three studies, principal component analyses identified factors that, when included in hierarchical multiple regression analyses, explained a substantial part of the variance in levels of victim and perpetrator blame. These factors were not present in the ANOVAs. Future research could productively use more elaborated analyses when investigating the complex phenomenon of victim blame.

Keywords: rape; blame attributions; just world belief; rape myths; victim treatment

Sammanfattning (Swedish summary)

Våldtäkt är ett brott som få utsatta anmäler. Dessutom är det få fall som leder till åtal och till en fällande dom. Tidigare forskning har kommit fram till att en av de vanligaste anledningarna till att så få anmäler är en rädsla för att bli skuldbelagd. Skuldbeläggande av våldtäktsutsatta är en av de negativa konsekvenser av brottsutsatthet som kallas för sekundär viktimisering. Primär viktimisering är negativa konsekvenser av själva brottet, både fysiska skador som uppstår i samband med övergreppet (ex. rivskador, blåmärken, könssjukdomar) samt psykologiska konsekvenser efteråt (ex. depression, posttraumatiskt stress, och skuldkänslor över att man inte tog sig ur situationen). Sekundär viktimisering är de negativa psykologiska konsekvenserna av att berätta om övergreppet för någon. Det kan hända att den utsatta blir dåligt bemött av någon som ifrågasätter det hen varit utsatt för, som misstror berättelsen, förminskar förövarens ansvar eller lägger ansvar och skuld för brottet på den utsatta. Dessa negativa konsekvenser kan uppstå i en utredningsprocess när den utsatta utfrågas upprepade gånger av polis och uppfattar detta som ifrågasättande. Det kan också uppstå i en rättsal när försvarsadvokaten ifrågasätter den utsattas trovärdighet, men även i kontakt med personer i den utsattas omgivning som kanske inte vill tro den utsatta och säger att hen får skylla sig själv. Förutom att sekundär viktimisering kan stå i vägen för en anmälan så kan det även leda till att en utsatt som har polisanmält inte längre vill medverka i en påbörjad utredning. Detta gör det svårare för utredaren och åklagaren att leda ett fall till åtal. Det är därför viktigt både för den utsatta men också för rättssäkerheten att ta reda på hur man kan förebygga sekundär viktimisering och skuldbeläggande.

Skuldbeläggande av våldtäktsutsatta har visat sig vara ett komplext fenomen och den psykologiska forskningen har undersökt många olika faktors påverkan på skuldbeläggande. Bland annat har man undersökt faktorer som har att göra med själva våldtäktssituationen och sett effekter av den utsattas alkoholintag, vad hen haft på sig, hur hen har agerat innan, under och efter våldtäkten, och om det har funnits en relation mellan förövare och utsatt. Dessutom har man undersökt faktorer som har att göra med de personer som skuldbelägger och funnit att personer med hög tro på en rättvis värld har större tendens att skuldbelägga utsatta. Teorin bakom denna förklaring hävdar att om man har en hög tro på att världen är rättvis, det vill säga att man får det man förtjänar och förtjänar det man får, och möter eller får höra om en oskyldig som blivit utsatt för ett brott så utgör detta ett hot mot ens världsbild. För att återupprätta sin syn på världen som rättvis så

tenderar man att leta efter orsaker till varför den utsatta inte alls är oskyldig. Detta kan då leda till skuldbeläggande. En annan faktor som visat sig hänga ihop med skuldbeläggande är acceptans av våldtäktsmyter, förutfattade meningar och fördomar om vad som är en våldtäkt, vem som är förövare och vem som blir utsatt. Det kan till exempel vara föreställningar om att en våldtäkt måste innehålla våld, att den utsatta alltid gör fysiskt motstånd och att det mest är främmande män som överfaller kvinnor utomhus. Trots att skuldbeläggande av våldtäktsutsatta är ett väl studerat fenomen inom den psykologiska forskningen finns ännu många luckor att fylla och faktorer att undersöka. Till exempel har tidigare forskning övervägande fokuserat på att bara undersöka ett fåtal faktorer i varje studie, trots att det är ett mycket komplext fenomen man studerar.

Syftet med den här avhandlingen var dels att undersöka vilken typ av faktorer som är viktigast för att förstå skuldbeläggande: de situationsspecifika, eller de som har att göra med den som skuldbeläggs. Ett antal faktorer som tidigare inte undersökts i större utsträckning inkluderades: ålder, antal förövare och förekomst av våld. Syftet var även att inkludera yrkesverksammas perspektiv på sekundär viktimisering. Två experimentella och en enkätstudie genomfördes och i alla analyserades data i två steg. Först utfördes så kallade variansanalyser där eventuella effekter av ett fåtal variabler undersöktes (hypotesprövande steg i Studie I och II). För att få en större förståelse och kunna undersöka ett större antal variabler och deras inbördes relationer, så bestod steg två av mer utvecklade och explorativa analyser (faktoranalys och hierarkisk regressionsanalys).

De två experimentella studierna undersökte skuldbeläggande av våldtäktsutsatta i situationer som är vanligt förekommande i verkligheten men inte i forskningen: hemmafestsituationer där förövare och utsatt känner varandra. I båda studier användes vinjetter, det vill säga deltagarna fick först läsa en text som beskrev en påhittad våldtäktsituation och sedan svara på frågor om hur de uppfattade den beskrivna situationen och de inblandades ansvar och skuld. I **Studie I** undersöktes effekter av ålder och könstillhörighet för att få svar på frågorna *Blir en 18-årig skuldbelagd mer eller mindre än en 31-åring? Skuldbelägger vuxna och unga lika mycket?* och *Skuldbelägger kvinnor och män lika mycket?* Dessutom mättes deltagarnas tro på en rättvis värld, acceptans av våldtäktsmyter, sympati för den utsatta och förtroende för rättsväsendet. Totalt 877 svenska ungdomar och vuxna deltog i de tre experimenten. Den utsattas ålder (18 eller 31) manipulerades men påverkade inte skuldbeläggande. Effekten av deltagarnas ålder och könstillhörighet varierade över de tre experimenten så inga klara slutsatser kunde dras. Deltagarnas sympati för den utsatta och acceptans av våldtäktsmyter var däremot de viktigaste faktorerna för att förklara

skuldbeläggande, vilket antyder att faktorer som har att göra med deltagarna är viktigare än situationsfaktorerna. **Studie II** bestod av två experiment som genomfördes via en webbenkät på liknande sätt som Studie I. Effekter av antalet förövare och förekomst av våld undersöktes, liksom deltagarnas tro på en rättvis värld, accepterande av våldtäktsmyter, sympati för den utsatta, förtroende för rättsväsendet samt uppfattning av samtycke i den beskrivna situationen. Totalt deltog 2928 personer som rekryterats genom Medborgarpanelen vid Göteborgs universitet (i samarbete med LORE, Laboratory of Opinion Research). Ingen signifikant effekt av våld hittades, men däremot en effekt av antal förövare: Mer skuld tillskrevs den som utsattes av två förövare, jämfört med den som utsattes av en förövare. De viktigaste faktorerna för att förklara skuldbeläggande var sympati för den utsatta (ju mer sympati desto mindre skuld), uppfattning av samtycke (mer skuld till den utsatte om man hade uppfattat det som att hon samtyckte) och accepterande av våldtäktsmyter (högre tro på myter hängde ihop med mer skuldbeläggande). I linje med Studie I antyder dessa resultat att deltagarnas personliga synsätt är viktigare än situationsfaktorer för att förstå skuldbeläggande.

Avhandlingen breddades med **Studie III** genom att inkludera ett tillämpat perspektiv från de yrkesverksamma som arbetar med att bemöta våldtäktsutsatta. En enkät skickades ut till personal inom rättsväsendet och hälso- och sjukvården med syfte att fånga upp deras funderingar kring sitt jobb, vilka hinder de stöter på, rutiner som kan uppfattas som problematiska ur ett utsattperspektiv, men också våldtäktsmyter, tro på en rättvis värld, förtroende för rättsväsendet och uppskattning av förekomsten av falska anmälningar. Totalt svarade 237 polisanställda, åklagare och sjukvårdspersonal på enkäten. Yrke, ålder och acceptans av våldtäktsmyter visade sig hänga ihop med hur vanligt deltagarna trodde att det var med falska anmälningar (polisanställda, yngre deltagare och deltagare med högre acceptans av myter uppskattade att det var vanligare än andra). Förtroendet för rättsväsendet påverkades av ålder och yrke (åklagare och äldre deltagare hade högre förtroende än andra). Resursbrist var det mest förekommande hindret för deras yrkesutövande. Den detaljerade och ofta upprepade utfrågningen av utsatta var det som oftast lyftes upp som problematiskt ur ett utsattperspektiv. Dessutom uppmärksammades de yrkesverksammans behov av och önskan om mer och bättre utbildning i bemötande av våldtäktsutsatta, för att kunna minska risken för sekundär viktimering.

Sammanfattningsvis tyder denna avhandling på att faktorer som har att göra med den som skuldbeläggs är viktigare än situationsspecifika faktorer när det handlar om att förutspå och förklara skuldbeläggande. Acceptans av våldtäktsmyter, sympati för den utsatta, samt hur man uppfattar samtycke i en

våldtäktssituation var de tre viktigaste faktorerna. Avhandlingen visar även att utsatta för gruppvåldtäkt riskerar att bli mer skuldbelagda än utsatta för våldtäkt av en förövare. Dessutom framhålls behovet av mer resurser och utbildning bland yrkesverksamma inom både rättsväsendet och hälso- och sjukvården för att förbättra bemötandet av våldtäktsutsatta. Avhandlingens resultat har relevans för framtida projekt som syftar till att förebygga skuldbeläggande, med målet att få fler utsatta att våga anmäla, fler fall till åtal och fler fällande domar. Den visar vilka faktorer man ska inrikta sig på: minska acceptansen av våldtäktsmyter, öka sympatin för utsatta och öka kunskapen kring konceptet sexuellt samtycke. Dessa faktorer borde stå i fokus när man vill förebygga och förändra skuldbeläggande attityder gentemot våldtäktsutsatta. Till exempel kan detta ske genom utbildning av yrkesverksamma som möter utsatta, men även som ett moment i sexualundervisning i skolan och därmed även för lärare. Avhandlingen har även betydelse för hur fortsatt experimentell forskning borde bedrivas inom området genom att visa på vikten av att använda utvecklade analysmetoder som kan fånga upp komplexiteten hos skuldbeläggande attityder. Analyserna måste kunna ta hänsyn till ett större antal variabler och deras inbördes relationer för att lyckas komma närmare en förklaring till fenomenet.

Acknowledgements

The time has come for me to finally thank the people without whom this thesis would not have been what it is today. First of all, these studies wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the financial support from the Swedish Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority and for each and every one of the participants who gave of their time. From the bottom of my researcher's heart, thank you!

Leif Strömwall and Sara Landström – thank you for being the best supervisors ever. Thank you for believing in me and for supporting me with a ton of patience, precision, and endless laughs. Pär Anders Granhag, Cris von Borgstede, and Torun Lindholm – thank you for contributing with valuable comments on the words I have written. All members of the Research unit for Criminal, Legal, and Investigative Psychology, CLIP – thank you for forming a creative and accepting space for new thoughts and research ideas, as well as great company during conference trips all over Europe. I am really proud to call you my coworkers. Colleagues at the department of Psychology – thank you for endless discussions, fika, and invaluable knowledge and insights. Emelie Ernberg, Fanny Gyberg, Malin Joleby, and Jonas Burén – thank you for always being there for me and feeding me with tea, cake, and never-ending support. These four years would have been so dull if it weren't for your existence. A special thank you also goes out to the one man who advised me not to apply to the PhD program. Your words made me do it and for that I am forever thankful.

I know it can be hard to realize, but there is a whole world outside of academia (who would have guessed?), and it contains people who mean the world to me. I know I have always had an air of not caring or worrying overwhelmingly much about my work, but I couldn't have done this without you. Mum, dad and my beloved little brother, dearest friends and the love of my life a.k.a. soon-to-be husband – thank you for colouring my life outside of the department and making it easy to forget about work in the evening when I'm standing on the paving by the office building.

Finally, thank YOU for reading this. Please, do continue. It's pretty interesting, actually.

Kerstin Adolfsson
Gothenburg, September 28, 2018

Preface

This thesis is based on the following three studies, referred to in the text by their roman numerals:

- I. Adolfsson, K., & Strömwall, L. A. (2017). Situational variables or beliefs? A multifaceted approach to understanding blame attributions. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 23, 527–552. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2017.1290236>
- II. Adolfsson, K., Strömwall, L. A., & Landström, S. (2017). Blame attributions in multiple-perpetrator rape cases: The impact of sympathy, consent, force, and beliefs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517721171>
- III. Adolfsson, K., Strömwall, L. A., & Landström, S. (Submitted for publication). “There is no time”: Swedish professionals’ perspective on meeting, treating and interacting with rape victims.

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Introduction

Anna, a 20-year old Swedish woman, is lying down on her couch. Her friends from work Jens, Erik, and Adam have just left her apartment following an after-party. Jens and Erik have also just had sex with Anna. Did she want to have sex with them? No. Did she do anything to physically resist them? No. Is she going to report the rape to the police? No, because Anna is typical of rape victims. Most rape victims do not make a police report. She is afraid that what she just experienced is not what is typically labelled as rape, so she fears being disbelieved and blamed by people she would tell. Her fear is not unfounded. People do blame victims of rape, but why? Before attempting to answer that question, I need to start at the beginning.

What is rape? Rape is defined in a wide range of ways. According to the United Nations' relatively narrow definition, rape is "the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object" (WHO, 2016). In India and the UK, for example, a broader definition is applied: rape is defined as any non-consensual sexual act (The Indian Penal Code, 1860; The Sexual Offences Act, 2003). Moreover, in some countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, an unmarried rape victim herself risks being punished for having "illegitimate" sex (Fock, 2016). In Sweden, where this thesis has been written, rape was until recently defined as sexual intercourse (or comparable acts) carried out through the use of threat or violence unless the victim was considered to be in a particularly vulnerable situation, in which case evidence of threat or violence was not required (The Swedish Penal Code, 1962:700). Undoubtedly, the legal definition of rape differs widely across countries, and although attempts have been made, it is difficult to compare rape prevalence statistics across countries. Hence, attempting to find a figure capturing the magnitude of the worldwide problem of rape is futile. The closest to worldwide statistics are estimates of much broader concepts such as sexual violence and domestic violence made by the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO has estimated that 7% of the world's female population will, at some point during their lives, be victims of

non-partner sexual violence.¹ Including violence in domestic settings (both sexual and non-sexual) and using the same definition, the number rises to every third woman (WHO, 2013). Different definitions aside, rape is doubtless a worldwide problem, whether in domestic settings, at parties, or as a weapon of war.

Another difficulty when estimating the extent of the problem is the hidden numbers, as the reporting rates seem to capture only a minority of all cases. According to estimates in Sweden, Denmark (Boesen Pedersen, Kyvsgaard, & Balvig, 2015), Norway (Thoresen & Hjelmdal, 2014), and England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, Home Office, & the Office for National Statistics, 2013), rape reporting rates reach only 4–10%. Studies investigating these low reporting rates have found several underlying reasons for them, reasons connected to the victims' fear or concerns related to reporting; for example, victims do not want their families and others to find out about the rape, are worried about how the police will treat them, are afraid of not being taken seriously, feel shame and guilt, and fear being blamed by others (Föreningen Tillsammans, 2016; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Notably, these studies were conducted in countries where rape victims are not held legally responsible for the offence, indicating that even in countries where there is less of a taboo on talking about rape, feelings of shame and guilt are still a problem that hinders victims from reporting.

People's awareness of the problem of gender-based violence² in general and sexual violence in particular was investigated in a report by the European Commission (2016). Women were found to be more aware of the problem of gender-based violence than were men. People's attitudes toward victims and sexual consent were also measured. In sum, gender-based violence was seen as wrong and unacceptable, though great variation in attitudes across countries was reported. For example, respondents from Cyprus, Malta, and the Baltic countries were the most likely to agree that women often exaggerate claims of rape and often provoke the violence, whereas respondents from Sweden, Finland, Italy, France, Portugal, and the

¹ "Sexual violence is defined as: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work" (WHO, 2002, p. 149).

² Gender-based violence is defined as physical, psychological, or sexual violence in which one gender is over-represented among the victims, as well as violence in which victim gender is the basis of the violence.

Netherlands were the least likely to agree. Almost a third of the respondents in general also justified non-consensual sex in some situations, respondents from Eastern Europe being the most likely to justify such sex, while respondents from Sweden and Spain were the least likely. Not only does the definition of rape differ between countries, but people's perceptions of rape also differ.

Rape in Sweden

Although rape is a problem worldwide, the studies in this thesis were conducted in a Swedish setting, so the legislation and situation in Sweden need to be outlined. The current definition of rape according to Swedish legislation is based on consent. However, that was not the case during the data collection for the constituent studies of this thesis. Then, rape was defined as someone, through the use of or threat of violence, forcing somebody else to engage in sexual intercourse or a comparable act involving the violation of integrity. Violence was, however, not a prerequisite in cases in which the perpetrator took undue advantage of the fact that the victim was unconscious, asleep, sick, intoxicated by alcohol or drugs, or severely afraid of the perpetrator, referred to as being in a particularly vulnerable situation (The Swedish Penal Code, 1962:700). In April 2018, a Swedish appeal court also concluded that sexual assault that took place via the Internet, for example, when perpetrators force victims to penetrate themselves with objects in front of a webcam, should be considered rape. The reasoning was that the violation of integrity is as serious as rape and that the physical contact between the perpetrator and the victim was not required (B 11734-17). Taken together, the Swedish definition was and still is wide, which is one reason why Sweden's rape statistics are high relative to those of other countries. This, in turn, has led to accounts of Sweden as the "rape capital of the West" (Matharu, 2016), a matter to which I will return later. However, Swedish legislation has not always been this inclusive.

Over the years, the part of the Swedish law concerning sexual crimes has undergone extensive changes. In the Middle Ages, rape was considered a property crime against the woman's husband or father. The focus was on the perpetrator's use of violence and not on whether the victim tried to resist. However, for the crime to reach court, injuries had to be proven. Rape was seen as an enormous indignity toward the man's whole family, and the rapist was often sentenced to death (Hassan Jansson, 2002; Sutorius, 2014). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the focus was still on the perpetrator and the female victim still had the position of an object. A shift in focus occurred in 1734 when the courts started to regard the victim as a subject with moral and

juridical responsibilities. Now, both perpetrator violence and victim unwillingness came into consideration. Women's sexuality was problematized as was their behavior surrounding the crime. Rape was still punished with death, but now, once the woman was considered more of a subject than an object, her behavior could be questioned. After 1864, rape was no longer seen as a property crime but as a crime against the victim's freedom. Attention still concentrated on the perpetrator's violence, which had to be of a magnitude that it could overcome a woman fighting for her life. Then, when only the woman was the victim, the punishment was greatly lowered to two years of imprisonment. Since 1937, the age of sexual consent for both boys and girls has been 15 years in Sweden, lower than in the USA, where the age of consent varies between 16 and 18 across states (Barnett, 2016), or in England and Wales, where the age is 16 (The Sexual Offences Act, 2003). The current Swedish legislation is based on changes in 1962 when the requirement for violence was lowered and the focus on the woman's willingness was removed. Then, rape also became a crime even within the frame of marriage, and was punished by between two and six years of imprisonment. Since 1984 the legislation has been gender neutral, which means that there is no prerequisite for penetration and that anyone, irrespective of gender, can be regarded as a victim and a perpetrator, unlike in many other countries (e.g., the UK).

As previously mentioned, and in contrast to, for example, the UK, Swedish legislation regarding rape had not previously included the concept of consent, or rather lack of consent, as a prerequisite for rape. However, in 2017 the government presented a proposal for new legislation based on the concept of consent, which came into force on 1 July 2018 (Prop. 2017/18:177; SOU 2016:60). The new law includes a few major changes. First, the definition of rape now includes lack of consent as an expressed prerequisite. *Rape* is now defined as when someone engages in a sexual act with a person who is not participating voluntarily. A person cannot be seen as participating voluntarily if: 1) the participation is due to use or threat of violence or threat of being accused of a crime; 2) if the perpetrator takes undue advantage of the victim being in a particularly vulnerable situation; or 3) if the perpetrator takes undue advantage of the victim's dependence on the perpetrator (The Swedish Penal Code, 1962:700). Second, rape can only be committed with intent, which is often hard to prove. That is why the new legislation includes a new crime called *negligent rape*. This includes situations in which the perpetrator lacks intent but has been very careless concerning the fact that the other person is not participating voluntarily. Third, *sexual abuse* and *negligent sexual abuse* include sexual acts not encompassed by the definition of rape. The penalty scale for rape remains the

same, i.e., 2–6 years. Regarding multiple perpetrator rape (MPR), Swedish legislation states that when more than one perpetrator abuses a victim, or in any other way participates in a rape, it is to be viewed as an aggravated crime (The Swedish Penal Code, 1962:700). Regarding the term “participation,” precedents and court decisions have found it to include helping move the victim to enable the assault and holding the victim while another person rapes (NJA 2016 s. 819; RH 2004:58).

A final aspect related to this thesis is that since 1988, all crime victims have had the right to a counsel, a lawyer, whose task is to support the victim throughout the legal process. This lawyer is appointed by the court, which is why the Swedish system of counsels for victims cannot be directly equated to, for example, the US system of victim advocates who often work in rape crisis centers. Research into victim advocates shows that their support is crucial for successful trials and for preventing victims from feeling disbelieved or blamed (Brooks & Burman, 2016; Campbell, 2006; Wasco et al., 2004). In Sweden, the police are obliged to inform the victims of their right to a counsel “as soon as possible” (The Decree on Preliminary Investigations, 1947:948), preferably at the time of reporting. Nevertheless, in a survey by Föreningen Tillsammans (2016), 38% of surveyed rape victims reported not receiving this information. Why information about their right to a counsel is not always given to victims by Swedish police is unclear, and is an important issue meriting attention.

Sweden, the capital of rape?

As mentioned above, Sweden has been called “the capital of rape” due to the high numbers of reported rapes in the country relative to the size of its population as well as to the populations of other European countries (Lovett & Kelly, 2009). In 2016, 6720 rapes, against victims of all ages, were reported to Swedish police (BRÅ, 2017a). However, the national council for crime prevention estimated, by means of phone surveys, that the number of rapes, attempted rapes, and sexual coercion incidents totaled 190,000, including only victims between the ages of 16 and 79 years (Söderström, Ahlin, Westerberg, & Irlander Strid, 2018). Sweden’s broad definition of rape is one, but not the only, explanation for these high numbers. In a European comparison, in which Sweden had the highest number of reported rapes in Europe per 100,000 of the population³ (Lovett & Kelly, 2009), other

³ Countries included in the comparison were Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, and Scotland.

cited explanations were differences in the legal handling of rapes and in how statistics were gathered, but more interestingly, attention was also drawn to Swedish youth culture. Against the background of a liberal sexual culture, girls and boys often get together at house parties without parental supervision and drink a lot of alcohol. This was reflected in their finding that rape victims in Sweden are generally younger than in the other European countries, the typical rape victim in Sweden being 16–24 years old (Söderström et al., 2018). According to another report, one in five 18-year-olds has experienced some kind of sexual offence (Landberg et al., 2015).

The aforementioned report on perceptions of gender-based violence in Europe (European Commission, 2016) found that negative attitudes toward rape victims are less prevalent in the Swedish population than in other EU countries. For example, 27% of the overall sample claimed that non-consensual sex is justified in some situations, while 55% of Romanian but only 6% of Swedish respondents agreed. Furthermore, 22% of the EU population in general thought that women often exaggerate claims of rape, while only 8% of Swedish but 47% of Maltese respondents held the same belief (European Commission, 2016). Although awareness of the problem of sexual and domestic violence is high in Sweden and negative attitudes toward victims are low, regarding the high estimated rape occurrence, the rape reporting rate in Sweden is low and the prosecution rate is even lower. In 2016, 286 individuals were charged with rape, a number corresponding to 4.3% of the original 6720 rape reports (BRÅ, 2017b). In the aforementioned report, this “attrition rate” was also found to be high in comparison with those of other European countries (Lovett & Kelly, 2009). To conclude, Sweden not only has a problem with high rape occurrence, but also a problem with the poor progression of rape cases through the justice process. The following section will explain in more detail what attrition is, why it is a problem, and what factors affect it.

Attrition

Attrition can be described as “the process by which cases are discontinued, and thus fail to reach trial and/or result in a conviction” (Lovett & Kelly, 2009, p. 17). Due to the low reporting rates relative to the high prevalence and low conviction rates connected to rape, it is a crime associated with high attrition rates (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2013; Grubb & Turner, 2012). The attrition of cases occurs in different stages both before and during the justice process: 1) when a crime is not reported; 2) when a report is withdrawn; 3) when the police decide to discontinue an investigation; 4) when a prosecutor decides not to take the case to court; and

5) when a court decides not to declare the accused perpetrator guilty (see Figure 1 for an illustration; Lea, Lanvers, & Shaw, 2003). The investigative phase, which consists of the first three stages, seems to be the most critical, as it is when 74% of the attrition occurs (Brown, Hamilton, & O’Neill, 2007; Kelly, Lovett, & Regan, 2005).

Figure 1 Non-proportional illustration of the different stages between which attrition can occur



Regarding the different stages, various factors may influence attrition, such as the victim’s perception and attitudes, lack of resources, and factors relating to observers and professionals in the justice system (Grubb & Turner, 2012). For example, victims’ trust in the system and the perceived probability that the case will lead to a conviction may influence their decision on whether or not to report (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008). Confronting blaming attitudes in the justice system may lead victims to drop their charges (Campbell & Raja, 2005), professionals’ stereotypes concerning rape may lead them to doubt particular accusations (see Parratt & Pina, 2017, for a review), and lack of police resources may lead to rape cases being deprioritized in favor of murder cases, leading to insufficient rape investigations and dropped charges (see, e.g., Sveriges Radio, 2017).

Furthermore, attrition has a range of both short- and long-term consequences. Victims who do report to the police may be dissatisfied when cases are discontinued, and future victims might be discouraged by the low conviction rate and may never enter the justice system, in turn leading to still higher attrition rates (Brown et al., 2007). Another consequence is that the cases that are reported and later proceed to prosecution are not representative. In the most common rapes, the perpetrator is often known to the victim, the rape often occurs in the victim’s or perpetrator’s home, and rape victims are

rarely physically injured (Landberg et al., 2015; Lovett & Horvath, 2013; Möller, Söndergaard, & Helström, 2017; Waterhouse, Reynolds, & Egan, 2016). The rape cases reported to the police, however, often involve an unknown perpetrator, victim injuries, the use of weapons, and less often an alcohol-intoxicated victim (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). The cases that proceed to prosecution are also often the ones covered in the media, upholding a stereotypical view that stranger rapes in which the victim is attacked outdoors, sometimes after consuming a spiked drink in a pub (Lovett & Horvath, 2013), are the most common rapes. This misrepresentation of rape cases can influence court decisions, resulting in different treatment of cases that contradict this stereotypical portrayal (Krahé & Temkin, 2013) and in research focusing on preventing only stranger rapes, ignoring the victims of partner or acquaintance rape (Grubb & Turner, 2012). In the long run, attrition can therefore affect the attention paid to the problem of sexual violence and the allocated resources required to stop people from raping.

Primary victimization

When people become victims of crime, they risk both short- and long-term negative consequences of the offence, referred to in psychological research as *primary victimization*. This term covers both physical and psychological consequences. Regarding rape, the abuse can result in physical consequences such as laceration, bruises, and genital damage, as well as in sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy (Ba & Bhopal, 2017; Koss et al., 1994). The abuse can also affect the victims' mental health (Koss et al., 1994; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005), for example, causing depression, lower self-esteem, and self-blame for not preventing the rape or being unable to resist the perpetrator. Victims also risk having problems with their own sexuality after rape, often due to a sense of lost control over their bodies and over their sexuality. For example, heterosexual victims who have been abused by a perpetrator of the same gender might start to doubt their sexual orientation (Mezey & King, 1989; Walker et al., 2005). Self-harming behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicidal thoughts are other symptoms that victims of rape risk developing after an assault, sometimes as a way of trying to repress their feelings and anxiety and to regain control over their own bodies (Koss et al., 1994; Walker et al., 2005). If victims do not receive adequate help and treatment to address these problems, they also risk future anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Koss, Bailey, Yuan, Herrera, & Lichter, 2003). It should be emphasized that these psychological symptoms are not unique to sexual victimization and that not all victims of sexual violence are affected by them. It is also important to remember that all

victims deal with victimization in their own ways (see Emilio, Guzman, Salazar, & Cala, 2016, for a positive perspective and a review on post-traumatic growth).

Secondary victimization

As well as primary victimization, the victim risks being victimized anew when disclosing the rape to someone. S/he risks being questioned and met with distrust or blame by the recipient of the disclosure. These are aspects covered in Williams' (1984) definition of *secondary victimization*: "a prolonged and compounded consequence of certain crimes: it results from negative, judgmental attitudes directed toward the victim, [which result] in a lack of support, perhaps even condemnation and/or alienation of the victim" (p. 67). To simplify, one can say that the impact of primary victimization depends on the rape situation and the victim's ability to, with or without professional help, cope with the offence. Secondary victimization is instead a consequence of society's ability to cope with the offence, involving people's reactions, actions, and comments. Secondary victimization through victim blame is more prevalent in rape cases than other types of crime (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011). It can be manifested in different ways and be based on different aspects of the victim, such as the victim's behavior and characteristics (Whatley, 1996).

In 2009, in the small community of Bjästa, Sweden, a 14-year-old girl reported being raped in the school lavatory by a 15-year-old boy. At first, the boy denied responsibility, and because he was a popular boy with a good reputation and did not fit the rapist stereotype, people in the community initially supported him and mistrusted the girl. A Facebook page supporting him was set up and attracted more followers than the population of the community itself. The girl's testimony was doubted and it was claimed that she had falsely accused him because he did not want to be her boyfriend (Johansson & Nordmark, 2010). The boy was later found guilty of rape, in that and in another case, but the girl had already seen no other recourse than to move to a different school 500 kilometers away.

An internationally known case of victim blame is the 2012 case of Jyoti Singh in India, which started a huge debate on crimes against women in India (Chamberlain, 2017). Jyoti was raped and beaten by six men during a bus ride, and was so badly hurt that she died 13 days later from her injuries (Udwin, 2015). Despite the fatal outcome, comments were made about her manners and that she should not have been out after nine o'clock in the evening. For example, one perpetrator blamed Jyoti for fighting back and claimed that if she had remained passive she might still be alive (BBC News

Magazine, 2015). He also stated that girls are more responsible for rape than boys. These two described cases represent rape in two different cultural settings, involving different levels of violence and one versus several perpetrators. Nevertheless, they both exemplify secondary victimization in the form of victim blame.

In addition, as will be outlined in more detail below, a victim might experience secondary victimization not only in the form of victim blame, but also when people downplay the consequences of rape and diminish the perpetrator's responsibility. One example of this is found in the Brock Turner case. The college student Brock Turner was sentenced to six months in prison for raping a woman at a campus party. In a letter to the judge, his father wrote that "his [i.e., Brock's] life will never be the one that he dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve. That is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years of life." He further wrote that his son could contribute to society by educating students about "the dangers of alcohol consumption and sexual promiscuity," so that society could "begin to break the cycle of binge drinking and its unfortunate results" (Hunt, 2016). Finally, victim-blaming attitudes can also be communicated by authorities in society. In Thailand, for example, before the New Year's celebration in 2018, the junta proclaimed that all female citizens should think about how they dress in order to prevent sexual assaults from happening in connection with the occasion (Charoensuthipan, 2018).

Secondary victimization in contact with professionals

Secondary victimization is not just associated with people in the victim's environment questioning the victim's statement and credibility. It also includes encountering unsupportive attitudes in contacts with professionals when reporting a rape or seeking medical help (Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001; Feild, 1978; Whitby & Pina, 2013). Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, and Sefl (2007) found that victims who sought support from formal support services risked encountering more blame and unsupportive reactions than emphatic and supportive reactions. However, victims who sought help from informal support sources, such as friends and family, encountered more positive than negative reactions. Victims risk encountering unsupportive or sceptical attitudes and treatment when seeking help. Police officers and investigators might ask the victim questions concerning the rape that the victim finds offensive, for example, regarding the victim's clothes, alcohol intake, or behavior at the time of the offence (Campbell & Raja, 2005). Furthermore, when the victim seeks medical help post rape, a doctor or nurse will examine the victim's body in search of

injuries and to gather evidence. This thorough examination might be experienced by the victim as traumatic due to a feeling of lost control over his/her own body. These examinations can also be experienced as cold and impersonal, and are often carried out after extensive waiting in the emergency room (Campbell, 2008). In a later stage, the victim's credibility might be questioned in court, as part of the defense lawyer's duty to defend the accused party. This is common in rape trials, because often no other evidence than the parties' statements is available. This leads the trial to focus on the parties' trustworthiness and credibility in rating their testimony. Finally, throughout the justice process, victims must repeatedly retell their narrative of the rape. Having to do this over and over again before different professionals, retelling and maybe also reliving the experience, is something that has been proven to be potentially traumatic (Campbell, 2008; Ehnhage-Johnsson, 2003).

Victims thinking about seeking help are often concerned about whether they will get appropriate help and whether they will be treated poorly by the professionals they encounter (Campbell, 2008). Victims who seek help are often dissatisfied with how they are treated, and report encountering blame and disbelief, even finding some professionals who try to discourage them from reporting (see, e.g., Campbell, 2008; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). A recent Swedish survey by a rape victims' support association (Föreningen Tillsammans, 2016) found that 18–29% of the victims reported encountering distrust and blame from ignorant professionals lacking knowledge of sexual violence among police employees and healthcare personnel. As a consequence of such negative experiences, victims might also become reluctant to seek help in the future and might even influence other victims not to do so (e.g., Campbell, & Raja, 2005; Logan, Evans, Stevenson, & Jordan, 2005). This is only one of the many consequences of secondary victimization.

Consequences of secondary victimization

The consequences of secondary victimization exist on both the individual and societal levels. Victims exposed to secondary victimization risk feeling raped all over again (Madigan & Gamble, 1991). This increases the level of self-blame and may subsequently lead to delayed recovery (Anderson, 1999; Campbell & Raja, 1999). Moreover, secondary victimization might affect victims who have reported the crime to the police, inducing them not to cooperate further in the investigation. This has detrimental effects on the work of police and prosecutors because the likelihood of prosecuting a rape case decreases with a non-cooperative victim (O'Neal, Tellis, & Spohn, 2015). Lower conviction rates in turn may lead to less trust in the justice

system and to fewer reports in the long run (Brown et al., 2007). Ultimately, this becomes a vicious circle. In the end, society suffers from secondary victimization through unreported crimes, unpunished perpetrators, and impaired crime statistics. By reporting immediately or soon after the rape, victims facilitate the investigation by permitting early forensic examinations and collection of evidence (Brown et al., 2007). It is therefore crucial that professionals gain victims' trust, so that they can carry out the preliminary investigations and proceed with cases in criminal court (Munro & Kelly, 2013).

Theories of blame attribution

The fact that people sometimes blame rape victims has been investigated from various perspectives and in various fields, such as law, sociology, cultural studies, and criminology. One well-known criminological theory is Nils Christie's (1986) ideal victim theory. It states that a victim who fits the frame of the perfect victim (e.g., an old woman attacked by a stranger on her way to visit her grandchildren) is easier to interpret as a victim and is therefore better treated and listened to than is a victim who challenges those stereotypes (e.g., a man with a criminal record assaulted by an acquaintance when dealing drugs; Christie, 1986).

In psychology, research into blame attribution belongs to the field of social psychology, the science of how people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior are affected by others. Being social animals, we seek the underlying causes of other people's behavior because we want to understand why they do the things they do. As with our own behavior, we tend to think that other people's actions are logical, and that if we know the causes and motives of their behavior, we will be able to predict it (Heider, 1958). Social psychological theories about these causal interpretations of behavior are referred to as attribution theories (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014).

However, we do not think that others' behavior is as logical as our own, as the human mind is affected by attributional biases. For example, we tend to be inconsistent in attributing behavior to dispositional (internal) versus situational (external) causes. When we fail at doing something we tend to attribute this to external causes related to the situation, for example, regarding the unevenness of the pavement as the cause of our fall. However, if someone else stumbles and falls, we tend to attribute that to internal causes, thinking of the other person as clumsy. This is called the actor–observer effect (Jones & Nisbett, 1987). We want to ascribe the causes of others' behavior to their disposition or character because that is more stable. If other people's behavior is stable, we can more easily predict it, increasing our sense of

control over the world (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). A consequence of our causal attributions is that we judge other people's responsibility, and these judgments in turn influence our affections and behavioral reactions (Weiner, 1995). Moreover, the severer the consequences of their acts, the greater the responsibility we attribute to other people (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). Just as we might attribute clumsiness, and therefore responsibility, to someone who stumbles, we might attribute responsibility or blame to the victim of a car accident or a rape. We tend to think that the accident or the crime was not just something that happened to the victim, but that the victim also had some responsibility for it in some way. Why? Because it makes us feel safer. According to Shaver's defensive attribution theory (Shaver, 1970), the attribution of responsibility has the function of defending the self from worry or distress. Such attribution is moreover affected by one's self-perceived similarity to the potential perpetrator: for example, the greater one's similarity to a person who causes a car accident, the less responsibility one attributes to him or her, to defend oneself from potential blame (Shaver, 1970). Shaver's defensive attribution theory has proven to be applicable to attributions of victim blame as well, although it has less predictive power than other theories (e.g., Gold, Landerman, & Bullock, 1977).

In 1979, Janoff-Bulman published a study distinguishing two types of self-blame associated with either the rape victim's own behavior or their character. *Behavioral blame* takes account of flirting with the perpetrator, voluntarily following him or her home, and dressing in a way that could be seen as provocative in the eyes of a rapist, aspects over which the victim has some control and that are perceived as changeable in order to prevent future victimization. *Characterological blame*, on the other hand, concerns the victim's personal attributes, such as physical appearance, sexual experience, and even occupation, which are harder for the victim to control. Janoff-Bulman (1979) found that characterological blame was more associated with depression than was behavioral blame, because it is harder for victims to control or change their character than their behavior. This distinction was later used in research finding that victims also risk being held responsible by others due to their behavior and character (for a review, see, e.g., van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). However, secondary victimization in general and victim blame in particular are not necessarily concerned with aspects of the victim, but can also entail downplaying the impact of the offence on the victim (e.g., by stating that the perpetrator was at least good looking or that it was not really a rape) and exonerating the perpetrator (e.g., stating that the rape was an impulsive act and the perpetrator simply could not control his or her urges). Accordingly, many previous studies have investigated not only victim blame but also perpetrator blame (e.g., Davies, Rogers, & Whitelegg,

2009; Krahé, 1991; see also van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Various theories have been cited to explain the attribution of both victim and perpetrator blame in rape cases. Three of the most relevant to this thesis are more fully described below: the just world theory, theories of rape myths, and Weiner's sympathy model.

Belief in a just world (BJW)

Following the Milgram experiments on obedience in the 1960s, researchers became interested in why people might devalue a person whom they harm (e.g., Lerner, 1965). One explanation had to do with self-preservation and the possibility that such devaluing helped people distance themselves from their victims. However, a subsequent study found that people might also blame someone whom they simply observe being harmed by somebody else. In explaining this behavior, Lerner and Simmons (1966) reasoned that people want to believe that they live in a world based on justice, stating that "most people cannot afford, for the sake of their own sanity, to believe in a world governed by a schedule of random reinforcements" (p. 203). If people believe that they get what they deserve and deserve what they get, they can prevent bad things from happening simply by behaving well, and hence preserve some sense of control over their own lives. This reasoning was later named the "just world hypothesis" (Lerner, 1980). Nevertheless, bad things inevitably happen to good people and when an innocent person is harmed, this view of the world as just is threatened. This threat might cause cognitive dissonance: people want to believe that the world is just, but the occurrence opposes that view. This cognitive dissonance can be reduced in various ways, for example, by stopping the harm, compensating the victim (e.g., by assigning the victim monetary compensation), or psychologically restoring the belief in justice. The belief in justice can be restored, for example, by downplaying the injustice or seeking reasons why the victim was not innocent. If the victim was not innocent, and did something to deserve the harm, then the world is still a just place (Dalbert, 2009; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). This response is called the assimilation of injustice, and belief in a just world is seen as an individual disposition or a basic motive to strive for justice (Dalbert, 2009).

Levels of belief in a just world have been measured in various ways (see Hafer & Bègue, 2005, for a review), and many studies have found it to correlate positively with levels of attributed victim blame and negatively with perpetrator blame (e.g., Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013b). One scale that has been widely used across countries, extensively validated, and proven to be independent of social desirability is the General Belief in a Just

World (GBJW) scale of Dalbert, Montada, and Schmitt (1987). It measures beliefs that people in general get what they deserve and consists of six items, for example: “I think people try to be fair when making important decisions” and “I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice.” Another concept is the *personal belief in a just world*, which in contrast measures people’s beliefs that they themselves are usually treated well. Research comparing these two constructs has demonstrated that personal belief in a just world is a better predictor of adaptive outcomes such as subjective wellbeing, whereas GBJW is a better predictor of harsh social attitudes such as victim-blaming (Dalbert, 2009; Furnham, 2003). Though considerable research has investigated the just world theory, there is still a lack of results and reasoning concerning the level of injustice at which the threat becomes too great to be compensated for, and whether the theory is applicable in, for example, MPR cases.

Rape myth acceptance (RMA)

People’s stereotypes, prejudices, and false beliefs about rape, referred to by Burt (1980) as *rape myths*, also merit investigation in relation to attributed blame (see Grubb & Turner, 2012, for a review). Rape myths are strongly associated with stereotypes of gender roles in society, especially concerning sexuality, and are held by people at all levels of society (Bohner et al., 2013; Sleath & Woodhams, 2014). For example, rape myths portray men as having sexual needs that they cannot always control, and women as not being interested in having sex at all, or as having too much sex and therefore having less to say about their own sexual integrity (Burt, 1980). There are various myths and stereotypes related to rape around the world, and they can be said to reflect different aspects of rape (Bohner et al., 2013; Burt, 1980). For example, some myths blame the victim by claiming provocation, discount claims of rape by claiming that they are unfounded or exaggerated, exonerate the perpetrator by blaming sexual urges, and claim that only certain people can be raped, such as women in short skirts hanging out in bars alone (Burt, 1980; 1991; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007; Jordan, 2004; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Cognitively, RMA functions as a schema for interpreting information about rape cases (Gerger et al., 2007) in a way that fits one’s assumptions of what rape is. Because rape myths generalize and create a narrow understanding of what constitutes rape and of who the victim and perpetrator are, people with high acceptance of these myths will consider few allegations as truly constituting rape (Bohner et al., 2013; Temkin, Gray, & Barrett, 2016). This can also result in the addition of imagined information that is not provided in rape reports but that typically fits one’s assumptions as

to what should be included in rape reporting. For example, one might assume that the victim was drunk based on the fact that he or she was drinking beer at a bar at the time of the offence (Bohner et al., 2013). Hence, rape myths can distort one's perception of rape. People who believe in rape myths might not only attribute more blame and responsibility to rape victims but also exonerate perpetrators, for example, by suggesting that the victim provoked the rape by flirting with the perpetrator. Stereotypical portrayals of rape and rape myth acceptance (RMA) can also lead to overestimation of the numbers of false police reports, through the false belief that rape is often claimed in order to take revenge on ex-partners or to avoid responsibility for infidelity (Jordan, 2004; Temkin, 1997).

Rape myths have been investigated and quantified using different measures over the years. Among the first measures used was Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS), comprising 19 items, and Feild's (1978) Attitudes Toward Rape (ATR) scale, comprising 32 items. The later Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA) scale, formulated by Payne et al. (1999), includes several more items and more in-depth questions than does RMAS. It also divides RMA into seven types: 1) she asked for it; 2) it wasn't really a rape; 3) he didn't mean to; 4) she wanted it; 5) she lied; 6) rape is a trivial event; and 7) rape is a deviant event. The scale developers reasoned that different types of rape myths might have different functions for different individuals (Sleath & Bull, 2015). Similarly, Bohner et al. (2013) later suggested that RMA have different functions for men and women. For women, it might function as an anxiety buffer. Women with high RMA tend to believe that only certain types of women are raped; as this excludes themselves as potential rape victims, they perceive rape as less of a threat. These women use RMA as a strategy for sidestepping their fear of being raped. For men, on the other hand, RMA might serve to rationalize their own sexual aggression tendencies and to facilitate their actualization: men with high RMA might rationalize their own thoughts of engaging in sexual violence, seeing them as less bad (Bohner et al., 2013). Lately, however, both RMAS and IRMA have been criticized for the low levels of RMA they actually capture, threatening the normal distribution of their results (Gerger et al., 2007) and hence the reliability of the scales. This criticism has spurred the creation and development of new and better scales.

Because rape myths are strongly associated with stereotypes in society, they will change over time. This also has led to the development of more modern scales in recent years, for example, the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression (AMMSA) scale (Gerger et al., 2007), as well as updated versions of older scales containing more modern use of words, with the aim of capturing even more subtle myths (e.g., McMahon & Farmer,

2011). For example, changing an item from “A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex” to “If a girl initiates kissing and hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.” Less attention has been paid to society-specific changes over time, meaning that few studies investigate what rape myths are relevant and plausible in different cultures and what countries can benefit from using what scales. This could be because the adaptation of scales to specific contexts will always entail difficulties in comparing RMA across countries. However, it is of course important that items used when measuring RMA be plausible in a given context. Although cross-cultural studies are rare, there might be a change in the near future. Barn and Powers (2018) recently conducted a study comparing a British sample and an Indian sample using the IRMA scale. They found that Indian students endorsed rape myths more than British students did, and their article might encourage and help researchers with future cross-cultural studies.

Despite the variety of scales used, research has demonstrated that RMA correlates positively with belief in a just world (e.g., Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2015). People with high levels of RMA also tend to attribute higher levels of blame to rape victims and lower levels of blame to perpetrators (Bohner et al., 2013; Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011; Paul, Kehn, Gray, & Salapska-Gelleri, 2014) and are more likely to render verdicts of innocence (Gray, 2006). Furthermore, RMA has been found to predict victim blame in interaction with situational factors, by influencing how stereotypical the rape situation is perceived to be (Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2004) and by affecting how people perceive sexual consent (Gray, 2015). High levels of RMA have also been found to reduce people’s willingness to intervene if observing an attempted sexual assault (Kimberly & Hardman, 2018).

Weiner’s attribution, affect, and action model

Finally, another widely recognized construct, though under-investigated in relation to attributed blame, is sympathy. One relevant model is Weiner’s model of attribution, affect, and action (Weiner, 1980). It attempts to explain the impact of causal attributions on attitudes, behavioral intentions, and behavior, and includes sympathy as a mediator. When we encounter someone in need of help, we are guided by our feelings (affect) when deciding whether or not we should offer our assistance (action). According to this theory, the feelings we experience depend on our perception of the reason why help is needed (attribution). If we perceive that the person could have done something to avoid the problem or even caused the problem (i.e., internal

attribution), this will evoke a feeling of anger and we will probably not help the person. If we instead perceive the reason for the problem as beyond the person's control (i.e., external attribution), this will evoke a feeling of sympathy and increase the chance that we will offer our assistance. In other words, a feeling of sympathy or anger will guide our decision on whether or not to help, i.e., it will mediate the relationship between attribution and action.

This model was applied to a legal setting by Sperry and Siegel (2013) to investigate the mediating role of sympathy. They found that victims perceived as highly credible and as having little responsibility for the incidents (i.e., external attribution) evoked more sympathy and, consequently, more willingness to help and to promote guilty verdicts for the perpetrators. Furthermore, Ellis, O'Sullivan, and Sowards (1992) investigated the preventative aspect of sympathy, finding that sympathy reduced negative attitudes toward rape victims. Few existing studies have investigated sympathy in relation to victim blame, and those that have all used different measures. Sperry and Siegel (2013) conceptualized and measured sympathy using five items, i.e., sympathy, pity, kindness, understanding, and compassion, while Clarke and Lawson (2009), also testing Weiner's model, used only one item, "I feel sorry for X."

Previous research into blame attribution

The field of blame attribution in rape cases is large and numerous studies have been conducted over the years. Regarding prevalence, victim blame has been found not only in the general public (though often represented in student samples) but also among professionals in the justice, mental health, and healthcare systems (e.g., Campbell & Raja, 1999; Smith & Skinner, 2012). However, the phenomenon is complex and we do not yet fully understand who indulges in victim blame or, most importantly, why. Other studies have investigated attributed perpetrator blame, which almost always seems to be more prevalent than victim blame when investigated simultaneously (e.g., Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Sleath & Bull, 2010; Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013a). Previous studies have also used a wide range of methods. Some studies have experimentally used vignettes and rating scales or mock juries, while others have used more qualitative approaches, for example, focus groups discussing the issue (e.g., Anderson, 1999). Yet other studies have used real-life examples, such as trial observations and interviews with rape victims about how they have perceived treatment from others (e.g., Ahrens et al., 2007; Campbell, 2006). Moreover, different operationalizations have been used: some studies investigated behavioral blame and

characterological blame separately (Anderson, 1999), while others separated blame from responsibility (Krulowitz & Payne, 1978). To determine by whom, when, and why victims are blamed, researchers have studied several variables concerning situational factors, the victim, the perpetrator, and the person observing and attributing blame to the parties involved. Some factors have been examined for quite a long time (e.g., the gender of participants taking part in studies of blame attribution), while other important variables are still understudied. Below, previous findings regarding certain aspects of the victim, perpetrator, and observer are outlined.

Aspects of the victim

Regarding aspects of the rape victim and their effects on attributed blame, previous researchers have investigated a variety of factors. Earlier research found, for example, that a victim wearing skimpy clothes is attributed more blame than is a victim dressed in a more sophisticated way (Furnham & Boston, 1996), that an attractive victim is blamed more than is a less attractive victim (Calhoun, Selby, Cann, & Keller, 1978), and that a victim's profession affects levels of victim blame. However, the study considering profession was old, compared a stripper with a social worker and a nun, and has been criticized for lack of ecological validity (Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976). Victim sexuality has also been regarded as affecting levels of blame. For example, heterosexual women and homosexual men are blamed more than are homosexual women and heterosexual men if they are attacked by a male stranger perpetrator (Davies, Austen, & Rogers, 2011; Wakelin & Long, 2003). Research into variables relevant to this thesis is described in more detail below.

Age and gender

One factor that seems to affect levels of attributed blame is the rape victim's age; accordingly, this thesis focuses on adolescent and adult victims. Disregarding research into victimized children, research into the matter of victim age is scarce (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014), though some previous studies do identify the importance of this factor. In a mock trial study, although the two victims were perceived as equally responsible, the monetary compensation awarded a 27-year-old victim was lower than that awarded a 60-year-old victim (Foley & Pigott, 2000). Similarly, a Swedish study found that more blame was attributed to a 20-year-old victim than to a 46-year-old victim (Strömwall et al., 2013a). These findings have been explained in terms of differences in perceived respectability: Older victims tend to be viewed as more respectable and therefore less responsible, and hence less to blame for

the rape (e.g., Foley & Pigott, 2000). However, more research is needed to investigate the significance of victim age, specifically studies comparing different age ranges.

Regarding victim gender, the vast majority of previous studies have considered female victims only (Davies & Rogers, 2006), though some studies compare perceptions of female and male victims (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Most of them have found that a male victim is attributed more blame than is a female victim concerning behavioral blame, suggesting that men tend to blame other men for not fighting back (see Davies & Rogers, 2006, for an overview). Yet in contrast, Anderson (1999) found that female victims were attributed more behavioral blame than were male victims according to the same rationale, i.e., that they should be more prepared to protect themselves from being raped because women are the ones more often targeted. Idisis, Ben-David, and Ben-Nachum (2007) also found that female victims were blamed more than were male victims. Overall, no clear-cut results pertaining to victim gender have been found, suggesting that other variables, over and above gender, are more influential (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014).

Resistance

Victim resistance has also been proven to affect levels of victim blame. Studies have found that more blame is attributed to a victim who does not offer any resistance (e.g., Cohn, Dupuis, & Brown, 2009; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010), particularly in the case of male rape victims (e.g., Davies et al., 2009; Sims, Noel, & Maisto, 2007). The victim's resistance at an early stage has, in one study, been found to have a negative effect on levels of attributed victim blame (Kopper, 1996), as have the perpetrator's violent intentions (Mitchell, Angelone, Kohlberger, & Hirschman, 2009). This is in line with the stereotypical conception of rape as involving some level of resistance from the victim (e.g., screaming, scratching, and trying to escape). However, several studies have found that most rape victims react to the assault with frozen fear, or what in medical terms is referred to as *tonic immobility*, offering no resistance at all (Marx, Forsyth, Gallup, Fusé, & Lexington, 2008). This is an unwilling state of motor inhibition in reaction to a situation evoking intense fear (Möller et al., 2017). The reaction was first described in relation to animal behavior, but was later also found in humans experiencing trauma. For example, Möller et al. (2017) found that 70% of a sample of female rape victims had experienced tonic immobility, and in a study of male rape victims (Walker et al., 2005), the proportion of victims who responded with frozen fear, submission, and helplessness reached 87%.

Experiencing tonic immobility is also related to a higher risk of severe depression and PTSD (Möller et al., 2017).

Alcohol

Alcohol has an interesting contradictory effect on the attribution of victim and perpetrator blame, respectively. Alcohol-affected victims are seen as more responsible for their own victimization and are blamed more than are sober victims (Gray, 2006; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Stepanova & Brown, 2017). Alcohol becomes a reason to behaviorally blame the victim for what happened to him or her, indicating that the victim could have refrained from consuming alcohol in order not to end up in a risky situation. Romero-Sánchez, Megías, and Krahe (2012) also found that an alcohol-affected victim is blamed more if the perpetrator offered alcohol in an attempt to lessen the victim's resistance, instead of using force. Alcohol-affected perpetrators, on the other hand, are seen as less aware of their wrongdoings and are attributed less blame for their offences (Starfelt & White, 2015). Alcohol, in this case, becomes a reason to palliate the severity of the perpetrators' actions. This incongruous effect of alcohol is crucial and relevant given that the common rape scenario often involves alcohol-affected victims (Lovett & Horvath, 2013).

Aspects of the perpetrator

Although not to the same extent as certain aspects of the victim, previous studies have also investigated several aspects of the perpetrator, for example, effects of the perpetrator's previous criminal record (Strömwall, Landström, & Alfredsson, 2014), violent or sexual motivation (Mitchell et al., 2009), and ethnicity (Covan, 2000). Below, aspects of the perpetrator relevant to this thesis are outlined in more detail.

Perpetrator blame

Rape cases seldom result in people blaming only the victim, but also in people attributing blame and responsibility to the perpetrator, and studies investigating victim and perpetrator blame simultaneously have found considerably higher levels of perpetrator blame than victim blame (see van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014, for a review). However, there are opposing views of whether victim and perpetrator blame are to be understood as contrasting constructs, i.e., whether an increase in victim blame always corresponds to a decrease in perpetrator blame. Some studies support that view (e.g., Krahe, 1991; Pollard, 1992). Research relating attributed blame to RMA, for example, has shown that RMA correlates positively with victim

blame and negatively with perpetrator blame (e.g., Gerger et al., 2007), indicating a contradistinction. Others have found no direct correspondence between the two types of attributed blame (e.g., Davies et al., 2009), suggesting that levels of victim blame can increase in parallel with an increase in perpetrator blame.

Gender

Regarding perpetrator gender, research into its effect on victim blame is too limited for any conclusions to be drawn. Nevertheless, one study of professionals (Gakhal & Brown, 2011) found more positive attitudes toward female sex offenders than other studies of professionals had found toward male sex offenders. More blame is also attributed to a male victim of a female perpetrator than to a male victim of a male perpetrator (Davies & Rogers, 2006). This is explained by stereotypical views that a man should always be prepared to have sex with a willing woman (Davies et al., 2009). Results like these might also have to do with the effect of homophobia. Research has shown that people perceive gay male rape victims as less likable than heterosexual male rape victims (Davies & Rogers, 2006).

Relationship to the victim

The relationship between victims and perpetrators of sex crimes differs depending on the severity of the crime. Concerning less severe crimes, such as forced kissing, the perpetrator is often a stranger or an acquaintance, while in more severe sex crimes, such as rape, most perpetrators are former or current partners of the victims (Andersson, Heimer, & Lucas, 2014; Stanko & Williams, 2013). Although most previous research has focused on stranger rape situations in which the perpetrator and victim had never previously met, more recent research has concentrated on rape situations in which the perpetrator is known to the victim in some way, in what is often referred to as an acquaintance relationship (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Whatley, 2005). Studies comparing different rape situations and victim–perpetrator relationships have found that the closer the relationship, the higher the level of victim blame (Bendixen, Henriksen, & Kvitvik Nøstdahl, 2014; Droogendyk & Wright, 2014; Pedersen & Strömwall, 2013). Correspondingly, less perpetrator blame is associated with cases in which there is a prior relationship (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011). One possible explanation is that it is more probable that a victim of acquaintance rape might have said or done something that could be interpreted as blameworthy; in contrast, victims of stranger rape seldom engage in conversations with the perpetrator, making for a more ambiguous situation (Bendixen et al., 2014; Frese et al., 2004).

Multiple-perpetrator rape (MPR)

Research into rape involving more than one perpetrator is limited, but growing, especially in the last few years. In 2009, Horvath and Kelly provided the field with a definition of multiple-perpetrator rape as “any sexual assault that involves two or more perpetrators” (p. 94), and in 2013, Horvath and Woodhams compiled the knowledge from previous studies into a handbook on the study of multiple-perpetrator rape. Some research has compared the characteristics of lone-perpetrator rape (LPR) with those of multiple-perpetrator rape (MPR). Both victim and perpetrator ages seem to be lower in MPR than LPR cases (e.g., da Silva, Woodhams, & Harkins, 2013; Hauffe & Porter, 2009; Tärnhuvud, Weigl, Kerpner, & Staaf, 2018; Wright & West, 1981). MPR involving three or more perpetrators also tends to take place outdoors more often than do lone- or two-perpetrator offences (Lambine, 2013); in general, however, MPR perpetrators often approach their victims outdoors but rape them indoors (da Silva et al., 2013; Quarshie et al., 2018). In MPR there are also more obstacles hindering the victim from escaping the situation (da Silva et al., 2013), linked to more extreme levels of force used by the perpetrators (Woodhams, 2013). However, these higher levels of force do not correspond to higher levels of victim resistance, indicating that perpetrator force does not only serve the purpose of overcoming victim resistance. Another study found that alcohol was a commonly used weapon in MPR cases (Edinburgh, Pape-Blabolila, Harpinb, & Saewycca, 2014), with the consequence that MPR victims often have difficulties giving detailed reports to the police.

Regarding the effect of multiple perpetrators on victim blame, research is limited, but in interview studies with victims, Ullman (2007) found that victims of MPR seem to trigger more negative social reactions than do victims of LPR. MPRs often also result in more complex trials in which perpetrators can cover up for—or blame—each other; in turn, more attention is directed toward the victim’s ability to accurately remember and report who did what (Ullman, 2013). So far, however, no experimental studies have investigating blame attributions in MPR cases.

Force

Concerning the perpetrator’s use of force in rape and its effect on victim blame, research is limited. The studies that do exist suggest that the general public’s perceptions of rape and of the rape victim’s responsibility are affected by the levels of force used. Krulewitz and Payne (1978) found that people’s willingness to view a situation as rape increased with the level of force used by the perpetrator. The victim was also held less responsible when subjected to increasing levels of force, although they were not blamed less.

The opposite pattern was found for the perpetrator: an increase in force correlated with more perpetrator blame, although not more attributed responsibility. In summary, the use of force affects the responsibility attributed to the victim but the blame attributed to the perpetrator. Furthermore, less blame is attributed to a victim if the perpetrator uses force instead of alcohol to overcome the victim's resistance (Romero-Sánchez et al., 2012). In general, regarding the severity of the crime, victim blame has been found to be more prevalent in rape cases than other types of crime, as mentioned earlier (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011). It has not yet been established, however, whether there is some kind of limit on how severe a crime can be but still evoke victim blame.

Aspects of the participant

Gender

There is no clear-cut answer to the question as to which gender is more victim-blaming. Many previous studies have found that men attribute more blame to rape victims than do women, and this has previously been seen as an unambiguous finding (Hockett, Smith, Klausning, & Saucier, 2015; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). However, a significant number of studies find the opposite, namely, that women attribute more blame than do men (see Grubb & Harrower, 2009), or find no significant gender effect at all (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Newcombe, van den Eynde, Hafner, & Jolly, 2008). The latter has particularly been the case in previous Swedish research (Strömwall et al., 2013a,b). These mixed findings have been explained both by differences in the methodology used (Grubb & Harrower, 2008) and by cultural differences between countries in terms of gender equality. In relation to the latter, claims have also been made that gender differences in attributed blame are in fact functions of gender differences in attitudes and RMA (Hammond et al., 2011; Hockett et al., 2015; Krahe, Temkin, & Bieneck, 2007). For example, a meta-analysis from 2010 concluded that men generally endorse rape myths more than women do, and that gender inequality preserves rape myths (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). The previously mentioned European comparison also indicated an effect of gender and age on RMA, with men justifying non-consensual sex to a higher extent (27%) than do women (20%) in the age range of 25–39 years (European Commission, 2016). In addition, some studies find gender differences when measuring attributed blame divided into behavioral and characterological blame (Anderson, 1999). Anderson found that male participants generally blamed female victims more than male victims, while female participants attributed characterological blame to the same extent to victims of both genders, but more behavioral blame to female

victims. In addition, participant gender has been shown to interact with a variety of other variables and to act as a moderating factor when investigating, for example, victim resistance (Davies, Smith, & Rogers, 2009) and victim sexuality (Davies & Hudson, 2011), with male participants generally found to hold more negative attitudes toward victims than do female participants.

Age

Despite the proven relationship between attributed victim blame and rape myths, and despite the fact that rape myths change over time, only two previous studies have examined and compared blame attributions between young and old individuals. Tavrow, Withers, Obbuyi, Omollo, and Wu (2013) found that victim blame decreased with age among male participants. Boys in primary school (aged 12–16 years) were more victim-blaming than were boys in secondary school (aged 15–20 years). A different pattern, however, was found in female participants: the youngest, aged 12–16 years, were the least victim-blaming, followed by the adult women (age >20 years), while female secondary school students (aged 15–20 years) were the most victim-blaming. The authors reasoned that as boys grow older they come to understand men's power and that some might abuse that power in sexual aggression. As a result, older males blame the victim less than do younger males. With female participants, however, the older they are, the more aware they become of their ability to tease men by acting provocatively, so older girls and women blame victims more than do younger ones. Yarmey (1985) found that younger adults (average age 19 years) were overall more victim-blaming than were older adults (average age 58 years), though they at the same time held the perpetrator more responsible. He argued that younger people are more likely to become victims themselves, so they need to feel a sense of control over the situation and therefore distance themselves from the victims.

Profession

Most research in the field of attributed blame has investigated members of the general public or used student samples (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Less is known about practitioners who meet, treat, and interact with rape victims, and their attitudes and beliefs. There are, however, some previous research and below previous studies relevant to this thesis is presented, focusing on police employees, prosecutors, and healthcare personnel.

Police

Because police employees have a gate-keeping role in the justice system and are often the first contact point for rape victims (Spohn & Tellis, 2012; Wentz & Archbold, 2012), their treatment of these victims can have a decisive impact on the victims' decision on whether or not to make a police report and participate in a subsequent investigation. Although police officers must rely on legal definitions and frameworks, their assessments of victim credibility as well as their perceptions of rape victims have been shown to be greatly affected by extra-legal factors (Campbell, Menaker, & King, 2015; Mennicke, Anderson, Oehme & Kennedy, 2014; Venema, 2016). Some of these are situational factors, for example: alcohol-intoxicated victims are seen as less credible than sober victims (Campbell et al., 2015); emotional victims are seen as more credible than victims showing no emotions (e.g., Ask & Landström, 2010); and victims with bad reputations and who offered resistance only at a late stage of the incident are seen as more responsible for the rape than are their opposite counterparts (Hine & Murphy, 2017). Other factors concern personal beliefs. For example, high RMA is correlated with perceptions of low victim credibility and high victim responsibility among police employees (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2012; Page, 2008). This could also influence decision making in rape investigations, and whether or not police employees believe rape reports (Edward & MacLeod, 1999; Parratt & Pina, 2017). It should be noted that, compared with the general public, police employees are less accepting of rape myths (Whitby & Pina, 2013), though with one exception. They tend to score high on acceptance of myths regarding false reports (Page, 2008; Sleath & Bull, 2012, 2015), and police officers who think that false reports are frequent have also been shown to often have victim-blaming attitudes (Wentz & Archbold, 2012).

Prosecutors

The next gate keepers in the justice system are the prosecutors. They sometimes affect the rape victim's experience of the justice system through their personal treatment, but most often through the decisions that they make. Previous research has found that victim behavior, background, reputation, and relationship to the perpetrator affect prosecutors' assessments of victim credibility (e.g., Beichner & Spohn, 2005; Bryden & Lengnick, 1997; Spohn & Holleran, 2001). Because forensic evidence and witness evidence are rare in rape cases, prosecutors have been found to concentrate on victim credibility and legally irrelevant factors when considering cases of rape (Westera, Kebbell, & Milne, 2011). In one study, this was true both for prosecutors specializing in sexual violence and for non-specialized

prosecutors (Beichner & Spohn, 2005). It is now important to outline the differences between the prosecutor's role in different justice systems. In the USA and the UK, the prosecutor's role is to decide whether or not to prosecute, judging from a complete preliminary investigation that is handed to him or her. In Sweden, in contrast, the prosecutor has a more active role, being in charge of the preliminary investigation. He or she is the leader of the police investigation for severe crimes such as rape. Swedish prosecutors can only press charges if they have a reasonable expectation of a guilty verdict (The Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure, 1942:740), so they always have to weigh the evidence against society's interests and the cost of the trial. In court, both American and Swedish prosecutors have an objective but active role in presenting the case and the evidence, and in pleading for a guilty verdict, in contrast to the more passive role of British prosecutors (Sklansky, 2016).

Healthcare

Healthcare personnel are, like police employees, often an early contact point for rape victims, and some studies have investigated attitudes toward rape and rape victims among professionals in the healthcare, mental healthcare, and rape support systems. Idisis and Edoute (2017) found that therapists specializing in sexual violence attributed less blame to victims of rape than did the general public sample, while Persson, Dhingra, and Grogan (2018) found nurses to be more victim-blaming than a general public sample, though only concerning victims of acquaintance rape. Some researchers have also investigated how these professionals experience their work of encountering and treating victims of rape. For example, rape victim advocates have been found to carry feelings of anger, fear, and frustration as a consequence of supporting victims through the justice and healthcare systems (Wasco & Campbell, 2002). Other studies highlight the lack of and need for more knowledge of rape in these professions (Campbell, 2008). Sundborg, Saleh-Stattin, Wändell, and Törnkvist (2012) concluded that over half of the nurses in their study needed more knowledge to be able to offer good care to victims of rape. For example, the nurses did not know about specific guidelines for taking care of rape victims or about where and to whom to refer rape victims. Three factors said to obstruct professionals at rape crisis centers in their work are limited resources, staff burnout, and the fact that many of the victims they encounter have already experienced secondary victimization as a consequence of seeking help in the healthcare and justice systems (Ullman & Townsend, 2007).

Gaps and limitations of previous literature

This section reviews relevant aspects of previous research in the field of blame attribution. In summary, almost 40 years of research has covered many aspects of attributed blame, but research gaps and understudied areas in the field merit further exploration. In relation to the effect of rape myths on victim blame, and to the fact that these myths are time specific, it is obvious that more research is needed to further investigate the effect of age on attributed blame. This is important because both rape victims and rapists often belong to a particular age range, and these parties later, in the legal process, are evaluated by significantly older professionals, possibly with different values, stereotypes, and attitudes.

Regarding MPRs, in the UK, the USA, Australia, and South Africa they are estimated to represent 10–30% of all rapes (Horvath & Woodhams, 2013). In Sweden, no scientific study has yet estimated the prevalence of MPRs. However, a group of journalists recently conducted a review of Swedish MPR cases between 2012 and 2017, and they concluded that 10% of perpetrators charged with rape had taken part in a MPR (Tärnhuvud et al., 2018). Existing research into MPRs has shown these cases to be more complex than LPRs, associated with more negative social reactions for the victim, and involving more people who know the perpetrators and are therefore capable of defending them. It is not known, however, whether this also affects the levels of attributed victim blame. This question remains to be investigated, to improve our understanding of and support for MPR victims. The eventual hope is to create an empirical basis for future guidelines on how to encounter and treat these victims.

The methodologies previously used in this field have been broad, contributing to the coverage of a wide range of variables. It is known that the phenomenon of blame attribution is extremely complex and that many variables merit consideration when trying to understand the phenomenon. However, most previous studies have tested only single theoretical explanations, investigating only a few variables at a time, so it is still not known how different explanatory theories relate to one another and under what circumstances.

Moreover, although the vignette method is very commonly used, the same vignettes are seldom used across studies or by different researchers (see Grubb & Harrower, 2008, for a detailed discussion). This is a marked shortcoming, because vignettes include multiple and diverse components, over and above the manipulated ones, each of which can alter the results by their mere presence or absence, even if they are not specifically regarded as manipulated variables. If these vignettes are then not reused, the possibility of making comparisons across studies and generalizing the results decreases. So

the variety of methods used gives us broad knowledge of the phenomenon, but at the expense of generalizability and the ability to make comparisons across studies. Furthermore, apart from studies using victims or professionals as participants, many studies have used student samples only. Evidently, students also harbor victim-blaming attitudes, but a deficiency of employing student samples is their homogeneity in terms of age and socioeconomic status (Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Pollard, 1992). Hence, studies based on general public samples are needed and have been called for. Finally, little previous research considers victim blame and secondary victimization from the perspective of the involved professionals. To reduce secondary victimization in the justice and healthcare systems, we need to know more about why it happens, under what circumstances, and the preconditions for addressing it.

Aims

This thesis had three aims. The first aim was to investigate the possible effects of age, participant gender, number of perpetrators, and force on attributed blame. The second aim was to use a multi-experimental and multi-factorial approach to explore whether situation-specific variables or personal beliefs and attitudes are more important in blame attribution. The third aim was to investigate secondary victimization among, and from the perspective of, professionals encountering victims of rape in their daily work.

As mentioned above, previous research into age effects on blame attribution is scarce. Still, the prevalence of rape is fairly age specific. Lovett and Kelly (2009) also suggested that Sweden differs from other European countries with its high prevalence of rapes involving both young perpetrators and young victims in party settings. Therefore, one aim of this thesis was to investigate age effects on blame attributions (Study I). According to defensive attribution theory (Shaver, 1970), people's perceived similarity to a rape victim affects the level of responsibility they attribute to the victim. Any discovered effect of victim or participant age could therefore affect further theory development in the field of blame attribution. The first aim was also to expand the Swedish literature on the effects of participant gender. Although gender is not an understudied variable, it is still worth investigating, because the results of previous Swedish studies have been ambiguous, in contrast to studies from English-speaking countries (e.g., Strömwall et al., 2013a,b).

As previously stated, MPR is a fairly new and understudied research field, and no experimental study has previously been conducted investigating blame attribution in relation to MPR. The aim was, accordingly, to investigate whether variables previously proven to be important in victim

blame in LPR cases would explain levels of attributed blame in MPR cases as well. At a time when awareness of rape is increasing internationally, and when widely remarked real-life examples have illustrated that victims of MPR are often held responsible for being raped (BBC News Magazine, 2015), research is urgently needed into how people react to, treat, and should treat the victims of such crimes (Horvath & Woodhams, 2013). In the Jyoti Singh case, for example, the victim was not only raped by several men but with the use of extreme violence. Still, she was held responsible for the rape by some people, including politicians and lawyers (Udwin, 2015). Are there no limits to how horribly a crime victim can be treated before people stop blaming the victim? These questions are highly relevant to the just world hypothesis (Lerner, 1980), which is why this thesis also aimed at investigating that specific theoretical explanation in both LPR and MPR, manipulating the presence of violence (Study II).

Second, the aim was to conduct the studies using a multi-experimental as well as a multi-factorial approach. As previous studies have demonstrated the importance of multiple variables in explaining and understanding blame attributions, several exploratory variables were considered in order to enable investigation of their interrelationships. The aim was to determine which type of variables has the most predictive value: situation-specific variables (as examined by responses to variations in the vignettes) or participants' personal beliefs and attitudes (e.g., belief in a just world, RMA, and trust in the justice system). Determining this could require future studies of elaborated theories explaining behavior, for example, relating the just world theory (Lerner, 1980) to Weiner's (1980) theory on attribution, affect, and action. Theory development taking account of the role of emotions as well as beliefs has been called for in the field (Brown & Horvath, 2013). As most previous studies have investigated only a few variables at a time, analyses have consequently been parsimonious. However, the complexity of blame attribution calls for more elaborated analyses taking account of more variables. By conducting the present studies using ANOVAs, as well as factor analyses and hierarchical regression analyses, this thesis also aimed to build a more factor-inclusive and comprehensive understanding of blame attribution in rape cases.

Finally, to better understand attrition in the judicial proceedings after a rape, the third aim was to broaden the research into rape victim treatment and secondary victimization to include the perspective of professionals. We wanted to see whether the variables proven to be of high predictive value among the general public would also apply to a sample of professionals encountering rape victims in their daily work. We also wanted to capture the experiences of barriers and problematic practices in these professionals'

work, finding areas for the improvement of rape victim treatment in the Swedish justice system.

Although this thesis focuses predominantly on people's blaming attitudes toward rape victims, perpetrator blame was also measured to enable comparison of the two constructs and exploration of the relationship between them. To complement previous literature and ensure high ecological validity, we also wanted to avoid the problems and error sources inherent in the use of student samples. To that end, we used big samples from the community at large, as well as samples of professionals.

Summary of the studies

Considering the gaps and shortcomings in previous research, as outlined above, it is crucial to expand our knowledge of blame attributions by investigating previously understudied variables, and to do this using ecologically valid scenarios. In this thesis, the scenarios used reflect one of the most common rape situations in Sweden.

The first two studies were of an experimental nature, while the third one was a survey. A two-step analytical approach was applied in the experimental studies: first, hypotheses concerning experimentally manipulated variables were tested using ANOVAs; subsequently, principal component analysis (PCA) and hierarchical regression analysis were conducted to explore the data further and to enable consideration of multiple variables in the same experiment. In both studies, the vignette method was used to describe a rape situation in which the victim and perpetrator(s) were acquaintances and the rape took place inside someone's home, which is the most typical rape in Sweden. Participants were recruited from the community at large, to avoid student samples and to maximize the ecological validity of the results. The research questions guiding these two studies were: Do young people and adults perceive rape situations in different ways? Do people perceive a rape victim differently if s/he is portrayed as either an adult or an adolescent? (Study I). Do the number of perpetrators and use of violence affect levels of attributed blame? (Study II).

The survey method in Study 3 was used to reach professionals. We wanted to ensure that they felt that they had something to gain from participating by being clear that they could contribute their own opinions on how to improve their working situation. Mainly, we wanted to learn two things: how professionals experience working with rape cases and encountering rape victims, and whether results of studies I and II could be applied to professionals.

Please note that in the following sections treating results, only the significant results are presented.

Study I

What is the most important variable in understanding levels of attributed victim and perpetrator blame? Is it the situation in which the rape occurs, the

behavior of the victim, or the personal beliefs of the individuals attributing blame? A three-experiment study was conducted to answer this question. Written scenarios were used, varying the setting in which the rape occurred but holding constant the acquaintance relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. In all three experiments, possible effects of victim age, participant age, and participant gender on levels of attributed blame were investigated.

Experiment 1

In the first experiment, the scenario described a rape at a private party where both the victim and perpetrator were under the influence of alcohol. In line with research reviewed earlier, we hypothesized higher levels of perpetrator than victim blame (H1), that levels of General Belief in a Just World (GBJW) would correlate positively with victim blame and negatively with perpetrator blame (H2), that adolescents would be more victim-blaming and less perpetrator-blaming than adults (H3), and that adult participants would attribute different levels of victim blame depending on the victim's age (H4), because they had experienced being both adolescents and adults. A non-directed hypothesis was also tested for participant gender.

Method

Data were collected from two age categories: 145 adolescents (73 women, 70 men, two non-disclosed; mean age 18.49 years, range 18–23 years) in their last year of high school, and 125 adults (66 women, 57 men; mean age 44.29 years, range 30–81 years). Participants were randomly assigned to a scenario in which the victim was either 18 or 31 years old. The design of the experiment was a 2 (victim age: adolescent/adult) \times 2 (participant gender: female/male) \times 2 (participant age: adolescent/adult) between-subjects design, and the two main outcome measures were levels of attributed victim blame and levels of attributed perpetrator blame.

Participants read the scenario and completed a questionnaire in the presence of the experimenter, in case anyone wanted to end his or her participation or strongly reacted to the scenario content. The information given beforehand stated that the content could be perceived as upsetting, and contact information for victim support associations was included at the end of the questionnaire. The woman in the depicted scenario was raped by an acquaintance during a party. She suggested that the two of them should go to a separate room to talk and drink more wine, because she found him interesting and fun to be with. In that room, he later had sex with her despite the fact that she said no. The word rape was not used in the text.

After having read the scenario, the participants responded to items concerning their attitudes regarding the victim's and perpetrator's levels of blame, fault, responsibility, and inappropriate behavior. The items were summed to a victim blame scale and a perpetrator blame scale. Participants' levels of GBJW, RMA (e.g., *I believe that most reports of rape are false*), trust in the justice system (e.g., *I believe that the justice system is good at handling reports of rape*), and sympathy for the victim (e.g., *To what extent do you feel sympathy for Jennifer?*) were also measured, and index variables were later created.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis testing

To test the hypotheses, ANOVAs for victim and perpetrator blame were conducted separately. The results indicated that participants attributed low levels of victim blame and high levels of perpetrator blame, supporting H1, and that levels of GBJW correlated positively with victim blame and negatively with perpetrator blame, supporting H2. Support was also found for H3, adolescents being more victim-blaming than adults.

Furthermore, adolescent women blamed the victim more than did adult women and an adult victim was blamed more by adolescents than by adults. Surprisingly, adolescents blamed an adult victim more than they blamed an adolescent, contradicting H4. Concerning perpetrator blame, adults attributed more blame than did adolescents, adolescent men attributed more blame than did adolescent women, and adult women attributed more blame than did adolescent women.

Exploratory analyses

The additional variables were subjected to a PCA and three components emerged. The first component seemed to represent *sympathy for the victim*, the second *RMA*, and the third *trust in the justice system*. To investigate the explanatory power of all exploratory variables, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were separately conducted for victim and perpetrator blame. Step 1 included participant demographics (i.e., age category, gender, and experience of victimization), step 2 the measure of GBJW, step 3 the three components extracted from the PCA, and step 4 the manipulated variable, i.e., victim age. Results indicated that gender, sympathy, and RMA were significant predictors of victim blame. Victim blame increased with the level of RMA and decreased with the level of sympathy. Women were also shown to be more victim-blaming than were men. The opposite pattern was found for perpetrator blame: it decreased with RMA, increased with

sympathy, and men attributed more blame to the perpetrator than did women, in contrast to some previous studies on perpetrator blame and gender.

Discussion

Interestingly, when including more variables in the exploratory analyses, we did not find GBJW to be a significant predictor of either victim or perpetrator blaming. The age effects obtained when testing the hypotheses also disappeared, being explained by additional variables in the regression analysis. Instead, levels of sympathy for the victim and RMA were found to be more important in explaining why people blame a rape victim. Still, the gender effect remained throughout the analyses, showing women to be more victim-blaming than men. This contradicts many previous studies in the field, which often found men to be more victim-blaming and less perpetrator-blaming than women (see Grubb & Harrower, 2009).

Experiment 2

To investigate whether the results and patterns from Experiment 1 would hold true, an almost identical scenario with more emphasis on the victim's behavior was used. It included a slight change: now, the victim voluntarily kissed the perpetrator, in the private room, before she was raped. H1, H2, and H3 from the first experiment were tested, as was an undirected hypothesis on gender effects.

Method

This experiment included 200 adolescents (117 women, 83 men; mean age 18.28 years, range 16–20 years) and 149 adults (87 women, 60 men; mean age 53.10 years, range 30–84 years) from a community sample. The design mirrored that of Experiment 1 to enable comparisons. The same procedure and same questionnaire were also used, except for the change in the written scenario.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis testing

As in Experiment 1, support was found for both H1 and H2: there were higher levels of perpetrator blame than victim blame, and GBJW correlated positively with victim blame and negatively with perpetrator blame. However, we did not find any support for H3. The age effects found were that adult women blamed the victim more than did adolescent women, and

that adolescent men blamed the victim more than did adolescent women. No effects were found for levels of perpetrator blame.

Exploratory analyses

The results of the exploratory analyses gave a solution similar to that in Experiment 1: three components representing *sympathy for the victim*, *trust in the justice system*, and *RMA* were found. Moreover, as in Experiment 1, sympathy and RMA were found to be important in predicting levels of both victim and perpetrator blame. Victim blame decreased with increasing sympathy, but increased with greater RMA, while perpetrator blame increased with increasing sympathy, but decreased with greater RMA.

Discussion

Differing from the results of the first experiment, both the age and gender effects disappeared when more variables were considered. Neither the manipulated variable, i.e., victim age, nor participant age predicted attributions of blame. As in Experiment 1, GBJW did not significantly predict victim or perpetrator blame, calling into question its value when other variables are included. Concerning this experiment's stronger emphasis on victim behavior, differences in results between experiments 1 and 2 appear to be effects of the voluntary kissing. In Experiment 1, a gender difference was found, showing women to be more victim-blaming than men. In Experiment 2, when the victim voluntarily kissed the perpetrator, men blamed her to the same extent as did women.

Experiment 3

In the third experiment, which is to be viewed as a conceptual replication of Experiment 1, the setting described in the scenario was changed in order to investigate the effects of alcohol and the party setting. The scenario described the same two individuals as in previous scenarios, but this time they were situated in the victim's home, working on a school project together. The research question was thus whether participants attribute blame to victim and perpetrator differently in different settings, all else being equal. As this experiment was a replication of Experiment 1, not 2, the victim did not kiss the perpetrator before the rape. H1 and H2 from Experiment 1 were tested, as was an undirected hypothesis on gender effects.

Method

A total of 132 adolescents (64 women, 65 men, three non-disclosed; mean age 18.34 years, range 17–20 years) and 125 adults (64 women, 60 men; mean age 51.87 years, range 30–85 years) participated in the study. The design mirrored that of the two previous experiments. The same procedure and the same questionnaire as in Experiment 1 were used, apart from changes in the written vignette. The party setting and alcohol were replaced by a situation in which the victim and the perpetrator were situated in the victim's home, working together on a school project when the perpetrator started to touch her, leading up to the rape.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis testing

Support was found for H1, i.e., there were lower levels of victim blame than perpetrator blame, as well as for H2, i.e., GBJW correlated positively with victim blame and negatively with perpetrator blame. A gender effect was also found, but surprisingly in the opposite direction from what was found in Experiment 1: men were more victim-blaming than women overall, and adolescent men were more victim-blaming than were adolescent women in particular. Unexpectedly, no effects were found for perpetrator blame.

Exploratory analyses

In contrast to the two previous experiments, an exploratory analysis of the additional variables found only two components representing *sympathy for the victim* as well as a joint component representing both *trust in the justice system* and *RMA*. It was also those two variables that were found to predict levels of both victim blame and perpetrator blame, victim blame decreasing with sympathy and increasing with trust in the justice system and with RMA. Perpetrator blame increased with sympathy and decreased with trust in the justice system and with RMA.

Discussion

No effect was found for the manipulated variable (i.e., age of victim), and both the gender and age effects vanished when including additional variables. As in Experiment 1, GBJW did not significantly predict levels of victim or perpetrator blame. As in Experiment 2, we found no perpetrator blame effects in the ANOVAs, but found the same patterns explaining levels of victim and perpetrator blame using the exploratory analyses. Across all three experiments, sympathy and RMA were two significant predictors of levels of

victim as well as perpetrator blame, which is the most important finding of this study. By using three scenarios representing three common rape situations, we could obtain an overall picture of the effect of victim behavior. The first scenario was the only one that yielded a gender effect. Speculatively, this scenario was the only one in which men and women differed in their perception of the situation. This effect might have been subsumed by other factors present in the subsequent experiments (i.e., the voluntary kissing and the school project setting).

Study II

Are levels of attributed blame affected by the number of perpetrators involved in a rape? Is a victim of violent MPR attributed the same level of blame as is a victim of non-violent MPR? One previous, though not experimental, study showed that victims of MPR evoke more negative social reactions than do victims of LPR (Ullman, 2007). This current study was conducted to test that finding experimentally. Furthermore, the study also aimed to investigate whether the variables proven important in LPR cases in Study I (i.e., sympathy and RMA) also explain levels of attributed blame in MPR cases. Both experiments also investigated the effects of participant gender. The same methodological approach as in Study I was used by following up the hypothesis tests with exploratory analyses.

In collaboration with the Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE), members of the Citizen Panel at the University of Gothenburg were invited to participate in the study, using a web questionnaire. This allowed large community samples to be acquired. As in Study I, written scenarios were used, and it was stated that the content could be perceived as upsetting. Contact information for victim support authorities was provided, as was information about a help line for people with worries about their own sexual behavior.

Experiment 1

The first experiment investigated whether levels of victim and perpetrator blame were affected by the number of perpetrators. Three hypotheses were specified, of which the first two were derived from Study I: there would be higher levels of perpetrator than victim blame (H1), as well as a positive correlation between GBJW and victim blame and a negative correlation between GBJW and perpetrator blame (H2). Higher levels of victim blame in the MPR condition were also hypothesized (H3), as the greater the threat to belief in a just world, the greater the need to restore the status quo and

therefore blame the victim. Due to the mixed results of previous Swedish studies, an undirected hypothesis on gender effects was formulated.

The written scenario described a woman who invited three male colleagues to her home for a small party after dinner out with their friends from work. They had all consumed some alcohol. In the apartment, they continued drinking and the woman and one of the men kissed. He wanted to have sex but she said no, not because she did not want to but because they were not alone. Despite that, he later had sex with her in the bedroom in the presence of the other two men, or when the other two men were in the adjacent living room. In the MPR condition, one of the other men also had sex with the woman just after the first man was finished. The third man only watched. The word rape was never used in the text.

Method

Data from 1673 Swedish community members (628 women, 1038 men, seven non-disclosed; mean age 48.63 years, range 16–89 years) were collected through a web questionnaire. The participants were randomly assigned to read about either the LPR or the MPR scenario. The design of the experiment was a 2 (participant gender: female/male) \times 2 (number of perpetrators: one/two) between-subjects design. As in Study I, the levels of attributed victim and perpetrator blame were the two main outcome measures.

The procedure and materials mirrored those used in Study I but with some changes. As sympathy had proven to be a very important variable, more items were included concerning victim sympathy and perceptions of consent (e.g., *To what extent do you think that her participation was voluntary?* and *To what extent do you think that she gave her consent?*). The measure of trust in the justice system was also expanded to ask about trust in the police as well as trust in the court handling of rape cases (e.g., *To what extent do you have confidence in Swedish police handling of rape reports?* and *To what extent to you have confidence in Swedish court handling of rape cases?*). In this experiment, the perpetrator blame scale considered only the perpetrator who was present in both conditions, to enable comparisons.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis testing

Support was found for H1 and partial support for H2: higher levels of victim blame than perpetrator blame were found, and GBJW correlated positively with victim blame. However, concerning perpetrator blame, the correlation with GBJW was not significant. A gender effect was also found,

men being more victim-blaming and less perpetrator-blaming than were women. The manipulated variable had no significant effect, although there was a tendency toward higher levels of victim blame in the MPR condition. In addition, according to the just world theory, a greater threat should correspond to a greater need for restoration of belief in justice. Regarding the level of blame attributed to the different men in the scenario, the first perpetrator was blamed the most, the second perpetrator was blamed to almost the same extent, and the third man was also blamed, although not to the same extent as were the other two.

Exploratory analyses

As in Study I, the relationships between the exploratory variables were investigated using PCA, and a similar solution was found with components representing *sympathy for the victim*, *trust in the justice system*, and *RMA*. In addition, all questions about consent loaded on one component, named *perception of consent*. These components were subsequently used in multiple hierarchical regression analyses in which step 1 included participant demographics (i.e., age category, gender, and experience of victimization), step 2 the measure of GBJW, step 3 the four components extracted from the PCA, and step 4 the manipulated variable, i.e., number of perpetrators. Participants who were older, knew a victim of a sex crime, had higher GBJW and RMA levels, thought the victim had consented, and had read about an MPR were found to attribute more victim blame than did their counterparts. Men as well as participants with more sympathy for the victim and more trust in the justice system blamed the victim less than did their counterparts. Compared with the ANOVA results, the direction of the effect of gender was reversed, women being more victim-blaming than were men. The manipulated variable also had an effect, with higher levels of victim blame being found in the MPR condition. The level of perpetrator blame increased with increasing sympathy for the victim, as well as when participants did not perceive the victim to have consented and when participants had read about LPR.

Discussion

The effect of gender reversed when including more variables in the analyses. The effect of the manipulated variable appeared only then. GBJW was also a predictor of victim blame, and could explain the higher levels of victim blame in the MPR case, which posed a greater threat to the view of the world as just and therefore was compensated for with more victim blame. However, GBJW did not correlate with levels of perpetrator blame, calling into question the explanatory power of the theory in cases of MPR. Finally,

sympathy and RMA were predictors of victim blame, as in Study I, and sympathy also predicted perpetrator blame. Finally, perception of consent was a predictor of both victim and perpetrator blame.

Experiment 2

MPR often involves higher levels of perpetrator violence or force than does rape by one perpetrator (Woodhams, 2013). To investigate whether people's attributions of blame to MPR victims are affected by the use of force, the second experiment manipulated the presence of force in the described rape scenario. The same hypotheses, i.e., H1 and H2 from Experiment 1 in Study II, were tested. Higher levels of perpetrator blame were predicted when force was used (H3). As in all previous experiments, an undirected hypothesis on gender effects was also formulated. The scenarios described an MPR, mirroring the one in Experiment 1 but incorporating violence, i.e., the victim's face was slapped and her arms were forcibly held down by the first and second perpetrators, respectively.

Method

The 1255 participants (607 women, 647 men, one non-disclosed; mean age 53.83 years, range 17–94 years) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in the 2 (physical force: absent/present) \times 2 (participant gender: female/male) between-subjects design, to read about an MPR that did or did not include force. Levels of attributed victim and perpetrator blame were the main dependent variables. Except for the differences in the written scenario, the procedure and materials were the same as in Experiment 1. In this experiment, however, the measure of perpetrator blame was a joint measure. As the third man in the scenario is not, legally, viewed as a perpetrator, the measure included only ratings of the two first perpetrators.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis testing

Testing the hypotheses revealed support for H1: higher levels of blame were attributed to every man participating in or observing the rape than to the victim. However, it was found that GBJW only correlated significantly and positively with levels of overall perpetrator blame, which contradicted H2.

The results also indicated the effects of gender, i.e., the victim was blamed more by men and the perpetrator more by women, and of force, i.e., the victim of a violent rape was blamed less than was the victim of a non-violent

rape. Support was also found for H3: perpetrators of a violent rape were blamed more than were perpetrators of a non-violent rape.

Replicating the results of Experiment 1, the most blame was attributed to the first perpetrator and less blame was attributed to the second perpetrator; the least, but still substantial, blame was also attributed to the third man.

Exploratory analyses

The exploratory PCA analyses gave a similar picture as found in Experiment 1: four components, representing *perception of consent*, *sympathy for the victim*, *trust in the justice system*, and *RMA*. Not as many variables were found to predict victim and perpetrator blame, however. Victim blame increased with increasing age, RMA, and perception of consent, and decreased with increasing sympathy and trust in the justice system. Perpetrator blame increased with sympathy for the victim, but decreased with increasing RMA and perception of consent. Men were less perpetrator-blaming than were women.

Discussion

The effect of the manipulated variable was not found when more variables were included in the analyses. A different result could perhaps have been obtained using a stronger manipulation with more violence in the force condition, although this could have led to a risk of floor effects concerning victim blame. Another probable explanation as to why no effect of force was observed could be a ceiling effect regarding perpetrator blame, as the mean values were very high. The effects of gender, disappeared for victim blame but remained for perpetrator blame when added to the regression analysis. Concerning perpetrator blame, the positive correlation with GBJW is also of interest and is a result that contradicts previous research. Like in Experiment 1 sympathy, RMA, and perception of consent were predictors of victim blame. Interestingly, participant age predicted victim blame in this and the first experiment, in contradiction to Study I. This could be because of the wider, and more continuous, age range included in this study.

Study III

In conducting the third study, we wanted to broaden the research into rape victim treatment and secondary victimization to include the perspective of professionals. The aim was two-fold. First, we wanted to test some of the variables from the previous two studies (RMA, trust in the justice system, GBJW, age, and gender) on a different sample. Second, we wanted to capture

the professionals' own opinions about their work encountering and treating victims of rape, using the research question *Are there any barriers in these professionals' work environment, and if so, what are they?* We decided to do this using a survey, so the participants are here referred to as respondents.

Method

Procedure and respondents

The online survey was distributed via various avenues: the chief of information at the Swedish prosecution authority, police employees in three police districts, a Facebook group comprising approximately 10,000 police officers, and e-mails and phone calls to women's clinics, gynecological clinics, emergency departments, health centers, and youth guidance centers. The inclusion criteria were encountering victims of rape in one's work in the police, prosecution service, or healthcare system. In total, 237 respondents completed the survey.

The final sample consisted of 107 police employees, 70 prosecutors, and 60 healthcare personnel. Regarding victimization experience, one in six respondents had been victims of sexual violence themselves, and most stated that the crime had never been reported to the police.

The questionnaire and analyses

The questionnaire started by obtaining informed consent, next presented the then current legal definition of rape and a clarification that the questionnaire concerned adult rape victims only (i.e., above 17 years old), and asked demographic questions. Respondents then completed a Swedish translation of the General Belief in a Just World (GBJW) scale (Dalbert et al., 1987; Strömwall et al., 2013a), rating their attitudes from 6 – *strongly agree* to 1 – *strongly disagree*. RMA was measured using 18 statements such as *It's less bad to be raped by someone you voluntarily kissed*, *Being drunk is a mitigating circumstance concerning the perpetrator's responsibility*, and *If both parties were drunk, it's hard to consider it a rape*. Respondents rated their attitudes from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 7 – *strongly agree*. Trust in the justice system was measured using three statements concerning the handling of rape cases by the police, courts, and victim support systems, and respondents rated how much they agreed on a scale ranging from 1 – *to a very low extent* to 7 – *to a very high extent*. Respondents also answered the question *To what extent do you think false reports of rape are being made?* by rating their responses on a scale ranging from 1 – *to a very low extent* to 7 – *to a very high extent*. The questionnaire also contained yes/no questions

with open-ended followup questions regarding experience of barriers when handling cases of rape, and practices that may be perceived as victim-blaming.

An embedded mixed-methods design was used when analyzing the data to enable a better understanding of respondents' responses to some of the items. Statistical analyses (i.e., hierarchical regression analyses and unpaired multiple proportions tests) were used for the reliability testing of scales, investigating some of the variables' effects on estimates of false reports and levels of trust, and to answer the first part of the research question: *Are there any problems?* Content analysis was then used to answer the second part, i.e., *What are these problems?*, by analyzing answers to the open-ended questions. The analyses were inductive, data driven, and on a semantic level. We identified five categories regarding barriers and four regarding problematic practices, and ensured homogeneity within categories as well as heterogeneity between them. After the data were coded, and the inter-rater reliability coding indicated satisfactory kappa values, quotations that reflected the different categories were chosen.

Results

Following reliability analyses, items measuring GBJW, RMA, and trust in the justice system were summed up into different quantifying scores. Concerning further education focusing on sexual violence, prosecutors were the most educated group and police employees the least educated. It was also the prosecutors who, either with or without education, were the most confident in having sufficient knowledge to do their work. Women were significantly more likely to have completed further education than were men.

Regarding respondents' trust in the justice system, older respondents and prosecutors expressed the highest levels of trust. Younger respondents, police employees, and respondents with high levels of RMA estimated false reports to be more prevalent than did their counterparts, a result in line with previous studies (Ask, 2010; Mennicke et al., 2014).

Profession also had an effect concerning how many felt obstructed in their daily work. Every second police employee stated that they experienced barriers in their work performance, a significantly higher rate than among professionals in the healthcare system. *Lack of resources* was the most prominent barrier, followed by *lack of knowledge and education*, *legislation and evidentiary requirements*, *deprioritizing of sex crimes*, and *lack of victim participation*.

Significantly more prosecutors and police employees than healthcare personnel could identify practices that could be perceived as problematic

from the victim's perspective. *Interview practice* was the most highlighted problem, followed by *treatment*, *victims' lack of understanding of the justice process*, and *medical examinations*.

Discussion

Our results captured issues previously featured in literature on the victim perspective. The professionals were highly aware of practices that could cause secondary victimization, but still saw many of them as inevitable parts of the justice process (e.g., posing questions concerning the victim's behavior).

More and better education was requested by the professionals, but we did not find any effect of further education on estimates of false reports or trust in the justice system. This relates to previous studies finding positive effects of education on victim treatment only if the education specifically targets misconceptions about rape (Darwinkel, Powell, & Tidmarsh, 2013). The fact that we found an effect of RMA on estimates of false reports supports the notion that future education should include elements targeting preconceptions and myths of rape.

The differences we found between professions regarding trust in the justice system and estimates of false reports might be explained by a different, more tolerant understanding of the justice system among prosecutors, and by the fact that prosecutors encounter a more homogenous group of victims whose cases have a better chance of reaching trial.

The finding of barriers due to lack of resources comes as no surprise considering the constant political discussion of the need for more resources in the justice and healthcare systems (see, e.g., Sveriges Radio, 2017; SVT Nyheter, 2018). This result is also in line with previous literature (Ask, 2010). Furthermore, there is a need for more education on and clear routines for handling cases of rape in both the justice system and the healthcare sector. This is a somewhat surprising finding considering the publication of a handbook on victim treatment in healthcare by the National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women (NCK, 2008), which includes information about sexual violence as well as recommendations on routines and how to secure evidence. Evidently, those guidelines have not been sufficiently implemented.

The respondents also expressed an understanding of the victim perspective. For example, repeated questioning was seen as problematic, though it was still seen as an inevitable part of the justice process. It is hoped that the respondents can use this insight in explaining the process and in preparing victims for what is coming and why, so that they can understand

that, for example, repeated questioning or a discontinued case is not an indication of disbelief.

General discussion

This thesis' three aims were to investigate the effects of age, participant gender, number of perpetrators, and force on attributed blame, to explore whether situation-specific variables or personal beliefs are more predictive of blame attribution using a two-step analytical approach, and to investigate secondary victimization from the perspective of professionals encountering victims of rape. This section discusses the main results, focusing on what they contribute to the literature on attributed blame, presents theories of blame attribution, and suggests directions for future studies.

To initiate this chapter, I think that it is of interest to give background on how victim-blaming our participants were, in order to facilitate comparisons across studies. I created a variable capturing all participants who scored more than 4 on the victim blame scale, i.e., who attributed blame to the victim to some extent. The percentage varied across experiments, indicating a situational effect (see Table 1). This highlights the importance of replication and of reusing vignettes in research into attributed blame, or at least of attempting to capture some kind of general propensity to blame in scenarios used in research.

Table 1
Percentage of participants blaming the victim to some extent across experiments

		Scenario content	Percentage^a
Study I	Experiment 1	Party setting	75.5
	Experiment 2	Party setting with voluntary kissing	78.1
	Experiment 3	Studying in the victim's home	62.5
Study II	Experiment 1	LPR or MPR in victim's home	50.6
	Experiment 2	MPR with or without force	46.1

Note. ^a Percentage of participants who scored >4 on a scale of 4–28.

Main findings

Consistently, throughout the five experiments in this thesis, the results obtained in the first analytical step (i.e., hypothesis testing using ANOVAs) differed from those obtained in the second exploratory step (i.e., PCAs and subsequent hierarchical regression analyses). Arguably, this is because the latter step incorporated and explored additional variables, beyond the manipulated ones. The phenomenon of victim blame is too complex to be understood by investigating only a handful of variables at a time. For example, the effect of GBJW was evident in the first step but the factor had no unique predictive value in step two. The results varied considerably across experiments and studies if only the first analytical step is considered, but were more consistent and comprehensible in the second step, which is why those results are elaborated upon further. Regarding the findings of the regression analyses (see Table 2 for a list of all significant predictors in studies 1 and 2), sympathy and RMA were the two best predictors of both victim and perpetrator blame. Perception of consent (first included in the second study) was also found to be a significant predictor of both victim and perpetrator blame.

Table 2

Significant individual predictors of attributed blame across studies I and II, with the direction of correlation shown in parentheses

		Victim blame	Perpetrator blame
Study I	Experiment 1	Sympathy (-) Gender ^a (-) RMA (+)	Sympathy (+) Gender ^a (+) RMA (-)
	Experiment 2	Sympathy (-) RMA (+)	Sympathy (+) RMA (-)
	Experiment 3	Sympathy (-) RMA + Trust (+)	Sympathy (+) RMA + Trust (-)
Study II	Experiment 1	Sympathy (-) Number of perp. (+) Consent (+) RMA (+) Gender ^a (-) Trust (-) GBJW (+) Know a victim (+) Age (+)	Sympathy (+) Number of perp. (-) Consent (-)
	Experiment 2	Sympathy (-) RMA (+) Consent (+) Trust (-) Age (-)	Sympathy (+) RMA (-) Consent (-) Gender ^a (-)

Note. ^a1 = female, 2 = male.

The relationship between victim and perpetrator blame

Testing the hypotheses, H1 was supported in all experiments, as we consistently found higher levels of perpetrator blame than victim blame. However, support for H2 (i.e., GBJW correlates positively with levels of victim blame and negatively with perpetrator blame) was mixed. This relationship was found in Study I but not in Study II, in which GBJW only correlated significantly and positively with levels of perpetrator blame. The latter result calls into question the explanatory power of the just world theory in cases of MPR. Speculatively, there is a limit to how horrific a rape can be while still evoking the compensatory effects of belief in a just world. The table of significant individual predictors shows that something happens when

rape is committed by more than one perpetrator. Then, perpetrator blame and victim blame are no longer predicted by the same variables. In Study I, the significant predictors are the same for victim and perpetrator blame, but not in Study II. Taken together, these results build on those of previous studies questioning the simplified view of victim and perpetrator blame as two contrasting constructs (e.g., Davies et al., 2009). A possible explanation for this is that in scenarios with multiple perpetrators, the available share of perpetrator blame is insufficient to divide between more than one perpetrator. Our results also showed that all three perpetrators in the scenario were blamed to a high extent. Future research could explore a more refined measure of the overlapping shares of blame attributed to multiple perpetrators.

Age of participants and victims

Age effects were anticipated across the three studies, mainly because rape myths and attitudes can be presumed to vary over time and therefore even across age categories. Hence, we did not expect younger and older participants to share the same attitudes. In Study II, age was an important predictor of attributed victim blame, and levels of victim blame increased with increasing participant age. In Study III, younger professionals had higher levels of RMA while older professionals had higher levels of trust in the justice system. In Study I, it was hypothesized that adolescents would be less perpetrator-blaming and would attribute more blame to the victim than would adults, because the scenario described a situation more likely to happen to adolescents. The likelihood of experiencing a situation like the one depicted was also one factor thought to evoke age differences in blame attribution. However, when investigating adolescent and adult participants in Study I, age was not found to be a predictor of attributed blame. One possible explanation for this is the discontinuous age range used in Study I, which might have made it hard to detect a possibly existing age effect. Moreover, the effects of age found in this thesis are not unambiguous, but on the contrary have pointed in different directions. That is why we can only conclude that participant age does seem to be an important and interesting variable, and as few previous studies have examined it (e.g., Tavrow et al., 2013), it merits further attention in future research.

It was also hypothesized, in Study I, that victim age would affect levels of attributed victim blame. However, no clear effects were found. This indicates that victim age is not as important when comparing 18- and 31-year-old victims. In a legal context, this result is highly relevant to one fundamental consideration: that an adult victim should be perceived and treated the same

whether 18 or 31 years old. Nevertheless, as these findings stand in contrast to those of some previous studies (Foley & Pigott, 2000; Strömwall et al., 2013a), this variable could be worth investigating further using a stronger manipulation to see whether a wider age gap results in victim age effects and, if so, perhaps how wide the gap must be to yield any such effects.

Participant gender

Across the studies, gender effects on levels of attributed blame were found, although the effects displayed no clear-cut directions. In the first experiment in Study I, female participants were more victim-blaming and less perpetrator-blaming than were male participants. No effect of gender was found in the two following experiments. However, in the first experiment of Study II, females were again more victim-blaming than were males, though in the second experiment, males were less perpetrator-blaming than were females. Gender was not seen as a factor of particular interest in the professional sample, apart from the fact that more female than male professionals reported having education on sexual offences and in treating rape victims. These ambiguous results were unsurprising, considering that they are in line with those of previous Swedish studies (Strömwall et al., 2013a,b), though they contradict the findings of many other previous studies in which men have generally been found to be more victim-blaming than women (Hockett et al., 2015; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Speculatively, the fact that Swedish results more often indicate the opposite or no gender difference could be an effect of the level of gender equality in the country. However, to establish that conclusion, more cross-cultural studies are needed.

Interestingly, across studies, when investigating the gender variable using both ANOVAs and subsequent regression analyses, the effect of gender changed when several more variables were included. That result supports the idea that gender effects are in fact the effects of other variables, for example, gender differences in levels of RMA (Hockett et al., 2015; Krahe et al., 2007). It also highlights the importance of using more elaborated analytical strategies, to increase the possibility of discovering the effects of other variables and to rule out what really does not have to do with gender. This result supports the idea that the results of Swedish studies could be effects of the level of gender equality in the country. Gender equality should presumably affect norms concerning gender and sexual violence, such as stereotypes of what constitutes rape and who can be considered a victim, and previous research has found that gender inequality helps maintain rape myths (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; see, e.g., Rozee & Koss, 2001, for a more in-depth

explanation of the role of gender equality from the perspective of feminist theory). In conclusion, our results concerning participant gender indicate that gender in itself does not fully explain differences in levels of attributed blame, but that it can be of importance in combination with other variables.

Multiple-perpetrator rape (MPR)

One of the aims with this thesis was to investigate whether variables proven to be of importance in LRP cases also would explain blame attributions in MPR cases. That seems to be the case considering both RMA and sympathy being significant individual predictors of victim blame in all five experiments. MPR did however evoke higher levels of attributed victim blame and lower levels of perpetrator blame than did LRP. Although this result might contradict common sense, it was in line with our hypothesis based on Ullman's (2007) study showing that victims of MPR evoke more negative social reactions from those to whom they disclose their victimization than do victims of LRP. As this is the first—to my knowledge—experimental study investigating the effect of number of perpetrators on blame attribution, little is known of the explanations for this phenomenon. Speculatively, though, people may think that the victim should have known better than to invite three men into her apartment. Although she also invited three men in the LRP condition, perhaps this is simply not considered when the victim was raped by only one of them. Another plausible explanation is that an MPR victim is seen as having had more than one opportunity to resist and fight back, but failed more than once. It could also have been perceived as consent when the victim did not get off the sofa after the first rape, but simply remained lying on it. Seeking explanations in the just world belief theory, an MPR should correspond to a greater threat to the belief in a just world, which in turn should lead to a greater need for compensation, resulting in higher levels of victim blame. In that sense, these results support GBJW theory. However, more research, both experimental and exploratory, is needed to find out why MPR results in more victim blame than does LRP.

Further research is also needed to investigate levels of blame attributed to each individual perpetrator in MPR cases. In this thesis, all three perpetrators in the depicted scenarios were attributed blame in the MPR conditions. This includes even the passive perpetrator. Further research might focus on determining whether it was his inability or unwillingness to stop the rape that was deemed blameworthy, or whether the participants perceived him as enjoying watching the rape. The second perpetrator was also blamed less than the first one. Was this because the participants perceived the first perpetrator

as, in some way, tempting the second perpetrator to do something he would not otherwise have done? These interesting questions also merit further attention.

The research field of MPR is new and growing (Horvath & Woodhams, 2013). There is a great need for more explorative and descriptive research further investigating the occurrence and characteristics of MPR, why some potential perpetrators chose not to participate, and attrition in MPR cases. Finally, the higher levels of attributed victim blame also merit investigation in relation to the previous results indicating higher levels of self-blame among victims of MPR than among victims of LPR (Ullman, 2013).

Personal beliefs and situational factors

One aim of this thesis was to investigate what factors are most predictive of attributed blame. Is it situational factors related to the rape, such as the victim's age, number of perpetrators, and use of violence, or personal beliefs and attitudes, such as RMA and GBJW. Generally, across all five experiments, personal beliefs and attitudes were found to be more predictive than were the situation-specific variables. In the third study, no such comparison was possible, although RMA was shown to be of importance when predicting estimates of false reports. As previously mentioned, sympathy for the victim, RMA, and perception of consent were the factors with the most predictive value for levels of both victim and perpetrator blame. This is a key result because, in contrast to the situational factors, these factors might be changed. Levels of RMA, sympathy for the victim, and perception of consent might be affected by education and discussion. Therefore, future research should focus more on investigating and evaluating preventative actions aiming at reducing victim-blaming attitudes and beliefs. When this result was applied to professionals' beliefs and attitudes in Study III, the results were in line with the aforementioned study by Darwinkel et al. (2013), namely: to improve the treatment of rape victims, attention should focus not only on practical matters when educating the professionals, but also on their own stereotypes and beliefs about rape, victims, and perpetrators. Moreover, these results are crucial for theory development. If people's attitudes and beliefs are the best explanation of their attribution of blame to rape victims, then research should focus on further investigating these factors. It is also important to investigate these factors in relation to one another, to understand how they are related and coincide. The next step should therefore be to experimentally test any mediating and moderating effects with the aim of concluding whether any theories could be expanded to

incorporate these factors, or whether a whole new theory is needed entirely based on them.

Finally, this result calls for discussion of the percentages displayed in Table 1, which indicate an important effect of the rape situation. Even though we found that personal beliefs are more important than situational factors, it is clear that the inclination to blame a rape victim varies depending on the kind of rape. I believe that this is because different situations relate to different preconceptions and myths. For example, blame might not be attributed to a rape victim unless s/he voluntarily kissed the perpetrator. In this thesis, that is arguably considered a situational factor, but it also has to do with our beliefs about what constitutes a “real rape” and what kinds of situations people would not consider rapes. As this rationale also concerns our myths concerning rape, I find it logical that our results indicate that personal beliefs are more important than situational factors.

Theoretical implications

In this thesis, sympathy for the victim, RMA, and perception of consent were shown to be the three most important variables when describing, understanding, and predicting levels of attributed blame. However, surprisingly little support was found for the belief in a just world theory when not considering that variable alone. Suggestions as to how theory development should evolve in this field, as a consequence of these results, are made below.

GBJW

In short, this thesis finds support for GBJW theory, and for its relationship with levels of attributed blame. However, a more elaborate answer would be that the effect of GBJW was reduced or even disappeared when including other factors, such as RMA, sympathy, and multiple perpetrators. The hypothesis that levels of GBJW would correlate positively with levels of victim blame and negatively with perpetrator blame was only supported in Study I, which solely concerned LPR. There, the results were unambiguous in supporting the belief in a just world theory (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Conversely, in Study II, which included more than one perpetrator, levels of GBJW were only significantly correlated with victim blame. When including perpetrator force as well, no significant relationship was detected, a result in line with some previous studies (e.g., Davies et al., 2009). These results are of interest for future theory development concerning the explanatory power of the belief in a just world theory with regard to blame attributions in

aggravated rape cases. Speculatively, it could be that the threat to the just world view is too great in cases of violent MPR and thus cannot be compensated for to an equivalent extent by blaming the victim. This possible explanation warrants further investigation, as has also previously been called for (Dalbert, 2009).

Moreover, in Study I, in which significant relationships were found between GBJW and attributed blame, GBJW was not a significant predictor in the subsequent hierarchical regression analyses. The effect of GBJW was somehow subsumed by the effects of other more important predictive variables: sympathy for the victim and RMA. In Study III, GBJW was not found to be a significant predictor of either trust in the justice system or estimates of false reports. This suggests that GBJW theory is a more comprehensive theory that, in itself, could be viewed as more of an explanation than a factor. For example, it has previously been proposed by Bohner et al. (2013) that RMA should be viewed as a specific aspect, or part of, the belief in a just world theory. Bohner et al. (2013) argued that “rape myths offer the necessary ‘explanations’ as to why rape victims ‘got what they deserved’” (p. 27). The results of this thesis might well be interpreted as supporting that view, and a draft model including both GBJW and RMA is presented further below.

Acceptance of rape myths

Throughout this thesis research, RMA and sympathy were consistently shown to be the two most important variables in predicting attributed blame. RMA was a significant predictor of victim blame in all five experiments and of perpetrator blame in four out of five. These results support the notion that RMA is an important factor, even more so than GBJW. In Study III, in which victim blame was not measured, RMA significantly predicted estimates of false reports, which is unsurprising because such estimates are an aspect of rape myths. Knowledge of RMA and of the factors correlated with it is crucial, and it should be a focal point in the further education of professionals encountering victims of rape, supporting previous research (Darwinkel et al., 2013). In general, police officers have been shown to be less accepting of rape myths than is the general public (Whitby & Pina, 2013). Even so, some research has found that police officers’ ability to collaborate with victim advocates is affected by their levels of RMA (Rich & Seffrin, 2013). This is very relevant to the fact that many rape victims are never informed of their right to counsel in Sweden (Föreningen Tillsammans, 2016).

That RMA was more important in explaining levels of blame than was GBJW is an important and interesting finding to consider in further theory

development. It might be of interest to investigate whether there is further support for Bohner et al.'s (2013) reasoning that RMA serves as an explicit explanation of why victims may be blamed and therefore deserve what they get, or contrariwise, whether GBJW should be viewed as a facilitator that helps people act on their RMA. People with high levels of RMA and of just world beliefs might be more likely to attribute blame to victims because they feel a greater need to restore their world view. In contrast, people with high RMA but with low levels of just world beliefs may have a reduced need for such restoration. This matter is discussed further below.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, an aspect of RMA that has been criticized (see, e.g., Gerger et al., 2007) is the applicability of certain RMA items in different cultural settings. On that note, our RMA scale was developed at the time this thesis project was being conducted. Considering rape myths to be closely associated with specific times and cultures, we chose to include some items from previously used scales, add some of our own, and remove some that we did not think would make sense in Sweden in the 2010s. Doing this, our RMA scale was subject to minor ongoing adjustment before every study. We found that some items did not measure exactly what we wanted them to, and that others had no predictive value in regression analyses. Table 3 presents a summary of the RMA items used in this thesis, along with proposed categories. I would like to stress that these categories are only attempts to create a clear structure when displaying the items used, facilitating possible future reviews and replication studies, not the statistical results of any PCAs. The proposed categories are rape myths related to: the situation, the victim, the perpetrator, and false reports.

Finally, certain measures of RMA have been developed for specific targets, such as subtle rape myths (McMahon & Farmer, 2011), modern rape myths (Gerger et al., 2007), and male rape myths (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). This thesis may provide an incentive for future studies investigating whether there is also a need for a special measure of rape myths in MPR cases.

Table 3

Formulation of RMA items used in the thesis, the study in which they were used, and proposed categories

Category	Formulation of item	In study
The situation	Rapes often occur when both parties initially wanted to have sex but someone changed their mind.	3
	If both parties were equally drunk, it is hard to consider it rape.	3
The victim	I believe that only certain types of people are raped.	1, 2, 3
	I believe that most rapes are due to the victim misunderstanding the situation.	1, 2, 3
	It is easier to cope with being raped by someone you willingly made out with before, compared with if you hadn't.	3
	In cases in which a drunk victim is raped, s/he could have prevented the rape by not having been so drunk.	3
	It is easier to cope with being raped if you were too drunk to remember it, in contrast to if you remember everything.	3
The perpetrator	I believe that only certain types of people rape others.	3
	I believe that most rapes are due to the perpetrator misunderstanding the situation.	1, 2, 3
	Rapists are often sexually frustrated individuals.	3
	When you are sexually aroused, it can be hard to understand that someone is saying "no."	3
	Often, people don't rape others with an intention to do so, but because they lose control of their sexual urges.	3
	If you are drunk you can rape someone without having the intention to do so.	3
	If you are so drunk that you don't know what you are doing, it should not be counted as rape.	3
False reports	Alcohol is a mitigating circumstance regarding the perpetrator's responsibility in a rape.	1, 2, 3
	I believe that most accusations of rape are false. ^a	1, 2, 3
	People who are caught cheating often claim they were raped.	3
	To falsely accuse someone of rape is often an attempt at revenge.	3
	People who falsely claim to have been raped often have problems with their own feelings.	3

Note. ^a In Study 3 this item was extracted from the RMA measure and used as a dependent variable with the wording, "To what extent do you think there are false reports of rape?"

Sympathy

Participants' sympathy for rape victims was consistently found to be a unique predictor of both victim and perpetrator blame in all five of this thesis' experiments. By demonstrating the importance of victim sympathy, these results support the findings of the few previous studies investigating sympathy and rape: Ellis et al. (1992), who found that sympathy reduced negative attitudes toward rape victims, and Sperry and Siegel (2013), who found that sympathy affected the promotion of guilty verdicts for perpetrators. The results are also in line with common sense. Rationally, sympathy for a rape victim should be associated with lower levels of victim blame. However, there is so far no theory explaining blame attribution that takes sympathy and its relationship to GBJW and RMA into account. Nonetheless, GBJW and RMA are relevant to Weiner's model of attribution, affect, and action (Weiner, 1980). Regarding the other theories mentioned in this thesis, one can speculate that sympathy could act as an obstacle, hindering people's RMA and belief in a just world from resulting in victim-blaming. According to the just world theory (Lerner, 1980), victim blame functions as a way of restoring the view of the world as just, though this is only the case if the alternative, i.e., compensating the victim, is impossible. Theoretically, feeling sympathy for the victim could serve as a way of compensating. This would also be consistent with sympathy's role as a motive for action in Weiner's theory (1980). Another possibility would be to merge GBJW theory and Weiner's model into a more comprehensive theory, suggesting that GBJW would affect the model's phase of attribution, higher levels of GBJW perhaps leading to more attributions to internal causes. These thoughts and possibilities are elaborated on further below.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, sympathy is an understudied variable relative to victim blame, and no standard measure has been developed. In this thesis, sympathy was operationalized using the same four items: *To what extent do you feel sympathy for J?*, *To what extent do you think that this should be classified as rape?*, *To what extent do you think that J thinks that it was a rape?*, and *Do you think that J should report to the police?* The last item should be discussed. Two people could give the same answer, "No, definitely not," but due to opposing reasons. One person might say that she should not report the rape to the police because it was not a crime, while the other might argue that it was a crime but that she should not report it in any case because the small chances of getting the perpetrator convicted will not be worth the pain of going through the judicial process. Moreover, in Study II, the PCA suggested an additional item to measure sympathy, i.e., *To what extent did J resist?*, an item originally thought of as measuring the perception of consent. However, our analyses of the sympathy

measure, now including all five items, showed high internal consistency, so we argue that the resistance offered by the victim is related to the perceived external cause and hence feelings of sympathy, in line with Weiner's model of attribution, affection, and action (Weiner, 1995).

This relates to a further discussion of whether the phenomenon measured should be labelled sympathy. One could argue that instead of sympathy we are measuring participants' understanding or interpretation of the event as a crime or their compassion for the victim. Still, we choose to label it sympathy because it resembles our understanding of the concept of sympathy included in Weiner's theory of attribution, affect, and action (Weiner, 1995). Taken together, this thesis indicates that sympathy, although operationalized in very different ways, is a variable worthy of more attention. In particular, future research should focus on clarifying possible operationalizations of sympathy as well as theory development in the field of blame attribution.

Consent

Perception of consent was first thought of as an exploratory attempt to extend the sympathy measure. However, after PCAs, the items turned out to form a separate component that, when included in the regression analyses, was shown to be a unique and powerful predictor of both victim and perpetrator blame. The items used were *To what extent did you perceive the event as reciprocal?*, *To what extent do you think that J perceived the event as reciprocal?*, *To what extent did you perceive the event as voluntary from J's perspective?*, and *To what extent do you think that J consented to the event?* Surprisingly, the item previously mentioned as relating to the perceived resistance offered by the victim did not correlate with these four items. Speculatively, that was due to possibly opposing interpretations. One could argue that low levels of perceived resistance should relate to high perceived consent, or that no matter how low the level of resistance offered by the victim, the event should still be considered non-consensual sex. Hypothetically, this is why the consent index ultimately included only four items. We also measured participants' perceptions of the different perpetrators' voluntariness. However, these perceptions were not included in the consent index or in any further analyses. It would, however, be interesting to investigate these data further in trying to understand the different levels of blame attributed to each perpetrator, by examining the possible effects of perceived perpetrator consent on levels of perpetrator blame.

The results of this thesis indicating the importance of consent perception are in line with previous research investigating the concept of consent *mis*perception. For example, alcohol intake has been shown to increase the

likelihood of misinterpreting sexual contact as consensual (Flowe, Stewart, Sleath, & Palmer, 2011). McGovern and Murray (2016) investigated consent perception among American student athletes and found that they were more likely to misinterpret sexual consent than were non-athlete students. They also found that male students misinterpreted consent more often than did female students. Men have also been shown to rely more on nonverbal cues of consent than do women (Jozkowski, Peterson, Sanders, Dennis, & Reece, 2014). This thesis highlights the importance of also considering perception of consent in blame attribution research. Together, the results of these studies stress the significance of including perception of consent in future research into the conceptual basis of consent, to further detail its importance in people's perception and attribution of blame and responsibility.

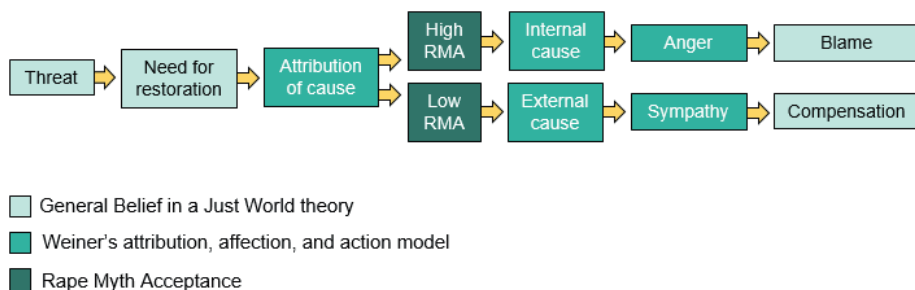
Even though the victim in the depicted scenario undoubtedly said no to having sex, some of the participants still perceived the scenario as somewhat consensual. In general, these participants also attributed more victim blame than did those who did not see it as consensual sex to the same extent. Speculatively, participants interpreted the victim's behavior (i.e., flirting, kissing, and inviting the perpetrators to her home) as giving consent to subsequent actions as well. This could have been perceived as an indication that her "no" did not mean no, making her partly to blame for the rape. Regarding the new legislation in Sweden, according to which non-consent is now the prerequisite in the definition of rape, it would be very interesting to conduct a followup study in five or ten years to see whether the general public's attitudes toward and perception of consent have been affected by the law, in what is called the general prevention effect of legislation. However, it became evident that many participants already thought that having sex against someone's will was enough for it to be considered rape.⁴ It could be that the legal definition is lagging behind public opinion in this matter and that the change in legislation will not have a very big effect in terms of general prevention. The long-running debate, since 1998 (Leijonhufvud, 2015), about including the concept of consent might explain the finding that consent was already seen as the factor distinguishing consensual sex from rape, disregarding the actual legal definition.

⁴ This became evident, for example, when reviewing answers to open-ended questions that were posed to the participants but not included in any analyses.

Possibilities of a comprehensive model

As has repeatedly been pointed out, victim blame is known to be a complex phenomenon. Still, most previous studies have conducted analyses that are too elementary to thoroughly investigate the relationships between all variables found to be individually important. Previous studies have also focused mainly on investigating and exploring one theory at a time, and more theory development research is called for (e.g., Brown & Horvath, 2013). The results of this thesis support different aspects of more than one theory of blame attribution, namely, the just world belief theory and Weiner’s attribution, affect, and action model, as well as highlighting the importance of RMA. As belief in a just world, RMA, and sympathy are arguably different approaches to explaining victim-blaming behavior, there are incentives to consider merging them into one comprehensive theory. Bohner et al. (2013) proposed that RMA should be viewed as a more specific part of the belief in a just world theory, that RMA might serve to explain why a victim was raped and hence deserved their victimization. On finding that GBJW, RMA, and sympathy are all important in predicting levels of victim blame, I have come to think about, and begin sketching out, a possible comprehensive model. It should be emphasized that this is only a first version of my thoughts on the model, and that the work is in a preliminary stage, but the idea is to view belief in a just world as the frame within which both rape myths and sympathy affect the outcome at different stages (see Figure 2 for a schematic of the proposed model). For example, it could be suggested that, to decide how to restore the view of the world as just (i.e., by compensating the victim or looking for reasons to blame the victim), attribution of cause (internal or external) comes into play and is affected by levels of RMA. Low levels of RMA reasonably lead to external attribution and high levels of RMA lead to internal attribution. Then, as Weiner’s model suggests, feelings of sympathy or anger are evoked, moderating the actions to be taken to restore the world view.

Figure 2 A first draft of a suggested model explaining blame attribution, including GBJW, RMA, and sympathy



Such a model would explain our finding that GBJW predicts blame attribution but not when incorporating additional variables, such as RMA and sympathy for the victim. The fact that RMA had a higher predictive value compared to GBJW could be explained by RMA’s role as more of a core variable. Portrayed in this way, it makes sense that people high in GBJW do not necessarily blame victims of rape. This can also be illustrated through a table presenting the possible moderating effect of RMA on the relationship between GBJW and levels of victim blame. Speculatively, high levels of GBJW only correlate with high levels of victim blame if one has a high RMA (see Table 4). In addition, high levels of RMA might not result in high levels of victim blame among people with low levels of GBJW because the incentive to restore the world view is weak. Again, I would like to emphasize that these are preliminary thoughts, but nevertheless thoughts that I believe are worth investigating and elaborating on.

Table 4
A suggested way of portraying a possible moderating effect of RMA on the relationship between levels of GBJW and levels of victim blame (VB)

	Low RMA	High RMA
High GBJW	Low VB	High VB
Low GBJW	Low VB	Low VB

Methodological considerations

Throughout the experimental studies in this thesis we conducted both hypothesis-testing analyses and exploratory analyses. We chose to do so for different reasons. First, we wanted to test the hypotheses that we could form based on previous literature on specific variables concerning age, gender, violence, and MRP. We wanted to answer more basic questions concerning a smaller number of variables with the intention both of replicating previous studies and of considering understudied variables. Having done that, we realized that we had collected much more data than we had planned to analyze or about which we could form hypotheses, but we did not want to waste the data. On the other hand, we did not want to propose hypotheses unsupported in previous empirical or theoretical literature.

The first part of the exploratory analyses was the PCA. Because we did not use a scale for measuring RMA, trust in the justice system, or perception

of consent, but instead chose items that we thought would make sense in Sweden at the time of data collection, we also wanted to investigate the relationship between the items more deliberately. Due to lack of previous research taking account of these items, we did not form any hypotheses and therefore called what we were doing exploratory analyses. The same reasoning holds for the second part of the exploratory analyses, the hierarchical regression analyses.

When researching multiple unexplored variables, it is of great value to have reasons for one's analytical approach. Even though we had not formulated any hypotheses regarding the outcomes of the exploratory analyses, we did plan how to conduct them based on theory and statistical thinking. We conducted the PCAs first to discover the connections and interrelationships between the items measuring the participants' beliefs. Furthermore, when planning for the regression analyses, we included the most basic measures, i.e., demographics, in the first step, then the attitude and belief measures, and in the last step the experimental manipulation. This sequence was used to find out which of these factors best explained the variability in the dependent variables, and to determine the relative importance of these factors. After removing the variance explained by the demographic and attitudinal/beliefs items, we found that the manipulated variables had small or nonexistent effects. Hence, studies 1 and 2 provide reasons why further victim blame research should collect data on many factors, not only experimentally investigate one or two factors.

The unescapable consequence of conducting both hypothesis-testing analyses and exploratory analyses is that their results may differ and perhaps even contradict one another. It is therefore important to be clear about how the respective results should be interpreted. In the case of this thesis, the results of the exploratory analyses turned out to be the most important part of the analyses, because we could find a more comprehensive pattern among the variables and answer the broader question of which is more predictive of victim blame: demographic variables, beliefs/attitudes, or the manipulated situational factors. I would say not only that the results of the explorative analyses were more robust than those of the hypothesis-testing analyses (because we were able to control for more variables), but also that we could answer different questions using different methods. In addition, the results of the exploratory analyses were more consistent than those of the hypothesis-testing analyses. If we had not conducted the hypothesis-testing analyses, we would have been unable to compare our findings with those of other researchers in this field. Using a different approach including more variables is arguably more relevant when investigating such a complex phenomenon as victim blame. I suggest that other researchers follow this path as well.

Furthermore, the effect sizes identified in this field are overall low to moderate, reflecting both the complexity of the phenomena studied and the fairly low levels of victim blame and high levels of perpetrator blame measured. The effect sizes throughout this thesis reflect the low to moderate effect sizes previously discovered. However, in both studies 1 and 2, the factors of the PCAs (i.e., the belief and attitude dimensions) explained a substantial 37–58% of the variance. Based on these rather high proportions, our conclusion that beliefs are important to target when aiming to reduce people’s victim-blaming attitudes is a solid argument related to the future practical applications of our results.

Finally, there are multiple ways to investigate blame attributions. This thesis contained both experimental studies and a survey, using both statistical and content analyses. That mixed-methods approach provided us with opportunities both to investigate a wide range of variables and to gain a deeper understanding of our respondents’ quantitative answers to some of the questions we posed. I view our results as a solid starting point for more qualitative studies investigating victim blame, for example, interviews with professionals as well as a general public sample, analyzing preliminary investigation protocols and written verdicts, and more thorough thematic analyses of responses to survey studies.

Limitations and future research

As with all research, the studies included in this thesis are open to criticism. Below, some questions are discussed and suggestions for future studies outlined.

Did the samples represent the populations from which they were drawn? First, it is important to highlight the use of a non-student sample in this thesis. There has been recurring contention in the field that too many researchers study participants who are easy to recruit, i.e., students in psychology departments. It has been argued that psychology students are not a representative sample of the general public and that drawing research samples from them limits the generalizability of the conducted studies’ results and conclusions (see, e.g., van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). We therefore decided not to use psychology students, but to aim for a broader sample to increase the ecological validity and generalizability of our results to the general public.

Furthermore, throughout this thesis, 21.3% of the female and 4.2% of the male participants stated that they themselves had been victims of sexual offences. These percentages are comparable to the findings of the survey conducted by the Swedish National Centre for Knowledge on Men’s

Violence Against Women (Andersson et al., 2014) regarding forced, but not severe, sexual abuse (i.e., 20% and 5% for women and men, respectively). They are, however, lower than the percentage exposures to sexual violence according to the wider definition of the WHO (i.e., 47% and 15% for men and women). It is plausible that our participants have internalized a narrower definition of sexual offences than that of the then current legislation, representing violent sexual offences. Furthermore, 18.7% of the participants reporting victimization were men. This percentage is much higher than the percentage of male victims recorded in the statistics of reported sexual offences (7.6%; BRÅ, 2018). The reported prevalence was lower in the first study (10–12%) than in the following studies (14–16%). One explanation is that half of the participants in Study I were adolescents, while another is that participants in studies II and III completed the questionnaire online. People might feel more willing to disclose their experience of victimization in a web survey, which supports the notion that sensitive research may benefit from online distribution (Kreuter, Presser, & Tourangeau, 2008). It could also be that victimized people are more interested in completing a web survey on this topic. Either way, it cannot be determined whether or not male victims of sexual offences were overrepresented in the samples, because the hidden numbers of male victims in society cannot be known. In neither study, however, did experience of victimization have any effect on blame attributions. Concerning Study III, every respondent stated that they had encountered victims of rape in their work, but some more than others. Speculatively, the attitudes might differ between, for example, a police officer patrolling the streets and encountering a wide range of victims and a civilian investigator working exclusively with sexual violence cases. Regarding this thesis, we wanted to include all possible professionals in the three categories of professionals who encounter victims of rape. However, this variety reduces the generalizability of the results to a specific type of professionals.

Could we have found more clear-cut age effects? In Study I no clear-cut effects of victim age or participant age were found. One reason why no effects of victim age were found could be that the age manipulation (i.e., age 18 vs. 31 years) was not strong enough. It might be that a wider age gap between the depicted victims could have yielded another result. Future studies should therefore continue to investigate whether and how much of an age difference generates any effects. Regarding participant age, the broader and nearly continuous age range used in the experiments in Study II clearly indicated that participant age was important. Participants completing the survey in Study III also represented a broader age range, and correspondingly we found an effect of participant age. This means that future studies should

keep on including participant age as a variable when investigating victim blame. It should be noted that years of professional experience was not included as a variable in Study III. However, in a recent review, Sleath and Bull (2017) concluded that, overall, years of professional experience did not seem to affect respondents' levels of attributed victim blame. However, it could affect other variables, such as trust in the justice system, which is why years of professional experience could be included as a variable in future studies.

Should we have used established measures of RMA and sympathy? Throughout this thesis, we found strong and consistent effects of participants' levels of RMA on blame attribution, despite not using a standardized measure or scale. As previously mentioned, our items were chosen because we reasoned they would be meaningful to participants in a contemporary Swedish setting. Consequently, this selection of items leads to difficulties in comparing the present results with those of previous studies of RMA and to lower generalizability across countries. Regarding the latter, this is already a problem in the blame attribution literature because rape myths are seen as very dependent on cultural context, meaning that more research needs to be conducted outside of the Western world (e.g., Tavrow et al., 2013). Regarding the sympathy measure, our aim was to measure sympathy for the depicted victim specifically. This is why we did not include an existing but more general measure of sympathy as an individual difference variable. However, future research could investigate any possible differences between using a narrow, more target-specific scale and a more comprehensive trait scale in relation to blame attribution, so as eventually to be able to develop a standardized measure of victim sympathy. This would facilitate better replication studies in the future and stimulate further research into the role of sympathy for the victim in blame attributions. Finally, participants' perception of consent was shown to be an important predictor of attributed blame, a result that calls for more attention to this specific factor in future research. It especially calls for comparative studies between countries with and without the prerequisite of non-consent included in their legislation. It would also be of great interest to conduct a replication study of Study III in a few years to see whether the professionals' situation has changed, and whether their attitudes have changed in relation to the new consent-based legislation. In conclusion, research in this field would benefit from more cross-cultural and up-to-date studies of RMA, but also from studies of sympathy and the perception of consent.

Did the participants answer truthfully? When conducting studies based on self-reported data, there is always a risk of impression management or social desirability effects. That is, participants might underreport negative aspects of

themselves and their attitudes, as well as highlight the positive ones (de Vries, Zettler, & Hilbig, 2014). In the context of victim blame research, this might result in lower levels of reported blame compared with the participants' actual attitudes. Consequently, future studies could benefit from including a scale measuring impression management, or including items formulated in a way that enhances the likelihood of discovering this behavior (Bäckström & Björklund, 2013). The inclusion of such a scale or items in this thesis might have resulted in the detection of even higher levels of victim blame. However, it is important to emphasize that the measured levels were not too low to warrant drawing particular conclusions and that social desirability is often lower in web surveys than face-to-face surveys (Kreuter et al., 2008).

As a final but fundamental point, the results of this thesis highlight the great importance of conducting complex analyses when investigating the phenomenon of blame attribution. Blame attribution is known as a multifaceted phenomenon, and to investigate why, and under what circumstances, people tend to blame victims, the method the researchers use has to mirror and be able to encompass that complexity. It is also likely that all the variables in play have not yet been identified. Future work could productively include more explorative studies to identify additional, previously uninvestigated variables. For example, focus group interviews could yield insight into the psychological processes underlying the quantitative responses to the scales, as would using the method of letting participants think aloud when making their decisions (see, e.g., van Someren, Barnard, & Sandberg, 1994), although preferably adapted to the sensitivity of the topic. This might reveal important factors to include in succeeding experimental studies. When investigating professionals, it would also be of interest to conduct focus group interviews including representatives from different occupations, to enable useful discussions of relationships and collaborations. I also think that this kind of exchange would enhance the motivation to participate, because professionals are often hard to engage. Finally, future studies should also include judges, defense lawyers, and victims' counsels to better understand the phenomenon of attrition in later stages of the justice process.

Practical applications

First, the present results are important for actions aiming to prevent people from blaming victims of rape. The conclusion that rape myths, perception of consent, and, in particular, sympathy for the victim are important predictors of attributed blame is hopeful, because they are all factors that can be

changed. For example, Bohner, Siebler, and Schmelcher (2006) have shown that levels of RMA and rape proclivity can be reduced by means of exposure to other people's denunciations of rape myths. Krahe et al. (2007) reduced the impact of RMA on judgments about a rape case through increasing students' responsibility for their judgments. Darwinkel et al. (2013) found that police officers' negative attitudes toward rape victims could be changed through training focused on broadening the officers' understanding of rape. That is why I believe that this knowledge needs to be applied in future education programs for professionals—not only for police, healthcare personnel, and prosecutors, but also other professionals encountering and treating victims of rape. One concrete example of a possible application would be a national education program for police students. Sweden today lacks such a coordinated program. There are three (five by the start of 2019) different police schools across the country, all of which are connected to different universities. It is therefore up to the universities to formulate the education, although following general guidelines and goals for what a police officer should know when fully trained. At the time of writing, there is a minor, ongoing debate as well as a call for nationally coordinated and compulsory education concerning sexual offences for every professional in the justice system. In such a proposal, I think it is particularly important that knowledge of the factors affecting victim blame should be acknowledged and incorporated. The results of this thesis identify the factors that should be emphasized in future interventions when considering how to prevent people from blaming rape victims. Such education should include discussion of the professionals' own beliefs, rape myths, the concept of consent, and sympathy for victims. I also believe that such education would be of utmost importance for judges who, while learning to be objective in their decision making, must also understand how a lack of sympathy for the victim might affect their treatment of victims in the courtroom. Professionals encountering and treating rape victims must be educated about the phenomenon of victim-blaming, and if this is done successfully, secondary victimization that negatively influences victims' wellbeing may well be minimized.

Education on how to treat rape victims should also reach younger citizens. The findings of these studies could usefully be implemented in school education about sex and relationships. Schools must not be reluctant to talk about what happens *when* someone rapes a student, not only *if* a rape occurs. This could give educators in junior and senior high schools the opportunity to prevent the development of victim-blaming attitudes by focusing on increasing victim sympathy, and by discussing the concept of consent as well as rape myths. The results of this thesis would thus be valuable in educating teachers as well. For teachers and principals, it is also important to review

and update guidelines and routines for what to do if the perpetrator and victim are both students at the same school. In some cases, such a situation has led to the victim having to move to another school while the perpetrator remains (Johansson & Nordmark, 2010; Kniivilä, 2017). School-management decisions in these cases could easily be interpreted as communicating perpetrator-supporting attitudes to all students and their families. In addition, this thesis confirms the notion that MPR victims encounter more negative attitudes than do LPR victims (Ullman, 2007), and as these results contradict common sense thinking, they are particularly important to consider and discuss. Otherwise, there is a risk that MPR victims will suffer even more. Victims as well as perpetrators have been shown to be even younger in MPR than LPR cases, so they are highly likely to be of school age. This also means that there is a reasonable chance that by discussing such issues in schools, the existence of these rapes can be detected and their perpetrators intercepted from committing similar crimes again.

Second, the results indicate a need to review and revise routines for handling rape victims in both the justice and healthcare sectors. For example, though a national action plan for care of rape victims in the Swedish healthcare system has existed for ten years (NCK, 2008), this thesis has shown that those guidelines have not yet been sufficiently implemented to ensure that professionals feel secure in their practice.

Moreover, we saw that victims' lack of knowledge of the justice system was seen as a source of secondary victimization. Still, rape victims have the right to a counsel whose role is to explain the judicial process to them. Regarding reports that many victims never receive information about their right to a counsel (Föreningen Tillsammans, 2016), the police procedure for informing rape victims merits investigation to ensure that it is working properly and that victims get the support they are entitled to. Ensuring the implementation of guidelines and action plans such as these is an obvious way to reduce the risk of secondary victimization and, in the long run, attrition rates as well. Having functional routines for treating rape victims would increase the likelihood of victim cooperation in criminal investigations and, in turn, the likelihood of fair trials and convictions. Moreover, if the police and healthcare systems communicate their efforts to improve rape victim treatment and to raise awareness among professionals, rape victims might feel more confident in disclosing their victimization, and the propensity to seek help and to report rapes might increase (Greeson, Campbell, & Fehler-Cabral, 2016).

Third, the results of this thesis can be used in political reasoning and decision making concerning the allocation of resources to the police and healthcare systems. In particular, the third study shows that more resources

are desperately needed by all three professions. For police employees and prosecutors to conduct thorough criminal investigations, and for healthcare personnel to examine rape victims in a correct and dignified way, more resources in terms of money and time are essential. I believe that our results can be used to support calls not only to allocate more resources to the Swedish police, but also to earmark resources for investigations of sexual violence. Our respondents clearly highlighted lack of resources and deprioritizing of sex crimes as great barriers obstructing them from carrying out their work satisfactorily.

Conclusions

During my PhD studies, more than 500,000 rapes occurred in Sweden alone; however, only approximately 26,700 of these rapes were reported to the police and only about 1100 perpetrators were convicted.⁵ These high attrition rates clearly need to change. As the research in this thesis has demonstrated, professionals in the justice and healthcare systems need more resources to be able to fulfill their responsibilities and improve the treatment of rape victims. In particular, the participating professionals requested more and better education on how to encounter and handle victims of rape, in order to reduce the risk of secondary victimization.

After conducting three studies of attitudes toward rape and rape victims among both the general public and relevant professionals, we have reached several key conclusions concerning victim blame in common but understudied rape situations. We have found support for the notion that people attribute more blame to victims of MPR than of LPR. This result supports previous studies but contradicts common sense, which is why it is important to further investigate the matter and discuss it in society. Participant age was proven to be a variable worth studying further, because it was shown to affect both RMA and levels of attributed blame. Professionals encountering rape victims are highly aware of practices that can lead to secondary victimization but view many of them as inevitable parts of the justice system. For them to do a better job and improve the treatment of victims, they need more resources and better education. Finally, sympathy for the victim, RMA, and perception of consent were the three most important

⁵ These figures represent average estimates based on statistics from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) regarding estimated rapes, reported rapes, and people convicted of rape between September 2014 and November 2018.

variables in predicting levels of blame attributed to both victims and perpetrators. The importance of individual beliefs and RMA was also evident in the sampled professionals. This is encouraging, because these factors can be addressed by preventative actions and should therefore be emphasized both when educating professionals on how to meet, treat, and interact with victims of rape, and in comprehensive sex education in schools.

The present results also have theoretical implications, offering support for the just world belief theory, Weiner's theory of attribution, affect, and action, and the importance of RMA. More importantly, this thesis calls for more complex analyses when investigating blame attributions in rape cases. It also highlights the need for future studies to further develop the theoretical underpinnings of these factors, in the interest of developing more comprehensive theories.

Taken together, this thesis offers society and its leaders better knowledge of the variables most predictive of blame attribution. Based on that knowledge, the treatment of rape victims can be improved and the prevention of secondary victimization can become more effective, with the long-term goal of reducing the level of attrition in the justice system. Ultimately, the aim of this research is to reduce the actual number of rapes committed, an aim that can be achieved if more rapes are detected, more perpetrators are convicted, and societal norms continue to change. Then Anna, from the example presented at the beginning of this thesis, will no longer have reasons to fear reporting the rape.

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Appendix

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