

Media's Impact on Campus Rape Culture

By: Ritika Nanda

Submitted as Partial Requirement for the Bachelor of Arts – Criminal Justice Honours

Department of Economics, Justice, and Policy Studies

Mount Royal University

Principal Supervisor: Dr. D. Scharie Tavcer

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### Abstract

The term 'rape culture' was coined in the 1970s by American feminists, to describe a culture of intimidation whereby male aggression toward women is both normalized and encouraged (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993). This honours project explores rape culture transmitted via an online medium at a Canadian university campus. Despite over 40 years of addressing sexual assault in Canada, research continues to show that approximately 20%-28.5% of Canadian undergraduate females are sexually assaulted during their four-year degree (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher & Martin, 2009, p.643; Newton-Taylor, DeWit, & Gliksman, 1998, p. 156; Suran, 2014, p. 274). This is especially concerning since, in comparison, police reporting of sexual assault was at 5% in 2014 (Perreault, 2015, p. 25) and on-campus reporting consisted of only 700 documented cases from 87 Canadian universities and major colleges, between 2009 and 2013 (CBC News, 2015). Only since 2014 have universities and colleges begun to openly acknowledge the need for such policies and protocols (Mathieu, 2014, para. 6). The focus of this Honours project is to examine the student-led Facebook page "MRU Confessions" that is directed towards Mount Royal University students in Calgary, Alberta. Using a content analysis approach, the aim is to examine how, and to what extent media facilitates or challenges campus rape culture. Although this project is exploratory in nature and focuses on only one Canadian campus, it provides a basis from which other studies exploring rape culture on university campuses can emerge. Ultimately, this project aims to invoke discussion and increase awareness concerning rape culture while providing commentary to the development of a national framework that universities can use in shaping policy, programs, and education.

### **Introduction**

The term “rape culture” emerged in the 1970s after being coined by American feminists as a part of an anti-rape campaign during the women’s movement (Suran, 2014, p. 277). The origin of the term is unclear, however it appeared simultaneously in multiple sources during the 1970s (p. 277). The term is used to describe a culture where violent and aggressive behaviour against females is expected and normalized (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993). According to Suran (2014), it is a systematic and collective problem due to “the prevailing heterosexual power hierarchy to which we have all been inured” (p. 278). In addition, it encourages rape by teaching individuals that aggression from males, in a sexual relationship is common (Zaleski, Gundersen, Baes, Estupinian & Vergara, 2016, p. 923).

While rape culture has been prevalent for over 40 years, people are just starting to understand the implications it can cause against society. One of which is the risk it places females in. A high percentage of females are assaulted during their four-year degree, yet very few report the assault and even fewer have the support of the college or university when the assault is reported (Krebs et al., 2009, p.643; Newton-Taylor et al., 1998, p. 156; Suran, 2014, p. 274). Few assaults are reported because individuals could be afraid of being blamed for the assault. Lack of support from colleges or universities has been seen through their failure in helping the victim and providing them with a way to report the sexual offence. This was further demonstrated by the fact that only 34 of 122 universities and colleges in Canada have a policy specifically made for sexual assaults, there is a serious lack of assistance provided to victims (CBC News, 2015).

The aim of this research was to determine whether rape culture on the Mount Royal University campus can be impacted by media. Rape culture has been a prevalent topic in the

media, recently, through various cases of sexual assault. In 2012, a 16-year-old female was gang raped, on a bus in India; the documentary for which was released in 2015. Also in 2015, Bill Cosby was accused of sexually aggressive behaviour by 35 females (Zaleski et al., 2016, p. 924). Students at Dalhousie Dentistry school were found to be posting misogynist posts about fellow, female classmates and females in general (Tryon & Logan, 2015, para. 2). A more recent event was the Stanford rapist case of Brock Turner in 2016. This was a high-profile case because Turner had sexually assaulted an unconscious female after a fraternity party, and was given a six-month jail sentence – a lenient sentence considering the charge (Kozicka, 2016, para. 1).

### **Rationale and Significance**

**Rationale.** The concept of rape culture originated in the 1970s, however, despite the substantial research existing on the issue, very little is being done to address the issue. Recently, rape culture has become a prominent topic in media. One example of this was a video showing President-elect Donald Trump making lewd statements towards females like “Grab them by the p\*ssy” (Filipovic, 2016, para.2). Another example was online comments made on articles discussing the case of the Stanford Rapist. One comment said “the unidentified woman, was found unconscious and half-naked behind a dumpster...Take a LITTLE bit of responsibility here, lady! If you were passed-out with your clothes hanging off you, you should consider yourself lucky...” (Kozicka, 2016). The aim of this paper was to determine the impact of media on campus rape culture at a Canadian university, and to increase awareness and discussion on campus rape culture.

**Significance.** In the last decade, reporting of campus sexual assault has significantly decreased (CBC News, 2015, para. 21). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) conducted a research in 2014 asking 87 colleges and universities in Canada about the institution's sexual assault statistics from 2007 till 2013. They discovered that there were only 700 documented cases of sexual assault at these major universities and colleges in Canada (CBC News, 2015, para.2). This is concerning because recent statistics also show that nearly 20-28.5% of females in their undergraduate degree are victimized by campus sexual assault (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher & Martin, 2009, p.643). This statistic demonstrated an increase in the dark figure of crime for campus sexual assault. The dark figure of crime consists of criminal incidents that are not reported to, or do not come to the attention of, the police (Perrault, 2015, p.

7). Thus, there are more crimes of sexual assault that go unreported, than the ones that are reported.

Unfortunately, there were some limitations to CBC's research. One was that every institution has a different way of recording incidents of sexual assault, resulting in inconsistent data. The data was inconsistent, not only because of different recording methods, but also because, not every victim reports their assault. Another issue was that the number of reports can be influenced by how an institution responds to the report. A positive reaction could enable other victims to report the incident, but a negative reaction could result in victims being more hesitant to report the assault (CBC News, 2015b). Furthermore, these limitations could be avoided if there was the presence of a central sexual assault policy. After all, in 2014, only 12% of major Canadian universities and colleges had a policy directed towards on-campus sexual assault in 2014 (Mathieu & Poisson, 2014, para. 6).

## **Sexual Assault**

### **Definition**

Dekeserdy, Schwartz, & Tait (1993) defined sexual assault as an event wherein a female is sure on her decision to not engage in sexual activity and has either told the aggressor that and/or was forced or intimidated into participating (p. 266). Garland (2009), in addition, stated that sexual assault is a less offensive and unthreatening way of referring to rape, which stems from the Latin word *rapere* – defined as “to take by force” (p. 4). In the past, sexual assault, under the law was defined as “penetration of the vagina, where ejaculation takes place” (p. 4). Furthermore, it was seen as a crime perpetrated by males, against females, who were not their wives, against her will and without consent (Garland, 2009, p. 4). Sexual assault is now defined by the Criminal Code of Canada (1985), under s. 265 as:

A person commits an assault when

- (a) without the consent of another person, he applies force intentionally to that other person, directly or indirectly;
- (b) he attempts or threatens, by an act or a gesture, to apply force to another person, if he has, or causes that other person to believe on reasonable grounds that he has, present ability to effect his purpose; or
- (c) while openly wearing or carrying a weapon or an imitation thereof, he accosts or impedes another person or begs.

This law applies to all forms of sexual assault, including assault with a weapon and aggravated sexual assault (Criminal Code, 1985).



## Statistics

Sexual assault is one of the top five violent crimes against women in Canada (Quinlan, Clarke, & Miller, 2016, p. 41). In addition, college and university campuses are one of the most common places for sexual assault to occur (p. 41). In fact, one survey found that 60% of college-aged males said that they would commit sexual assault if they would not get caught (p. 42). In addition, Malamuth (1981) discovered, in his research of determining a male's likelihood of raping, that 55% of males stated some or increased likelihood of them carrying forward with rape, if they were not caught nor punished (p. 140).

Unfortunately, statistics on sexual assault are skewed because it is a crime which is least likely to be reported to the authorities. For example, according to the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) – a victimization survey consisting of police reported incidents – 78% of sexual assault victims did not report the assault (Kong, Johnson, Beattie, & Cardillo, 2003, p. 6). The GSS also discovered that 82% of sexual assaults were against females, half of which were between the ages of 15-24 (Kong et al., 2003, p. 6). Of these females, it appears that most were “single, separated or divorced, ... students, those who participated in at least 30 evening activities outside the home per month, and those who had a household income of less than \$15,000 or who lived in urban areas” (Kong et al., 2003, p. 7). The statistics stated above show that female students, at a college or university age, are at an extremely high risk of being sexually victimized.

Dekeserdy et al. (1993), conducted research of a major university in Ontario, regarding sexual assault on a university campus. They discovered that 32.8% of the females had been victimized in the past 12 months. In addition, they found that 8.7% of the participants felt pressured into having intercourse. Furthermore, 22.4% of the participants felt that it was useless to

stop having intercourse with the man, because he was too sexually aroused, even though she did not want to have sexual intercourse (p. 267). Newton-Taylor et al. (1998) conducted a similar research but on a larger scale. They chose to survey 5,926 individuals, of which 3,642 were females. The participants were chosen from six different universities in Ontario, Canada (p. 156). They discovered that 15% of females had been victims of sexual assault. In addition, the assaulted females were more likely to be younger than the non-assaulted females. They were also likely to be single, living in a residence and in their first year of university (p. 158). A more recent research by Senn, Eliasziw, Barata, Thurston, Newby-Clark, Radtke, Hobden and the SARE Study Team (2014) tried to determine the frequency, context and types of assaults that impacted the participants (p. 1). They had 899 first-year, female participants from 3 universities in Canada, take the survey, and, found that approximately 35% of females were victims of completed or attempted sexual assault and 23.5% had been raped, before the age of 14 (p. 4).

### **Consent**

Consent is defined in the Criminal Code of Canada, under s. 273.1 as “the voluntary agreement of the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question.” In essence, it is when an individual agrees to partake in sexual intercourse or a specific sexual activity. The Criminal Code of Canada goes further to define what does not constitute as consent. That is:

No consent is obtained ... where

- (a) the agreement is expressed by the words or conduct of a person other than the complainant;
- (b) the complainant is incapable of consenting to the activity;

(c) the accused induces the complainant to engage in the activity by abusing a position of trust, power or authority;

(d) the complainant expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to engage in the activity; or

(e) the complainant, having consented to engage in sexual activity, expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to continue to engage in the activity.

While the above conditions are not exhaustive, they are thorough – most common cases of sexual assault take place when one of the conditions has been met.

Unfortunately, while the law is comprehensive in its definition of what is and is not seen as consent, society has a different view. For instance, according to the law, consent is not obtained when the victim is unable to provide consent, like when they are intoxicated. However, victims who tend to be intoxicated before an assault are more likely to be blamed for the assault than victims who were sober (Zaleski et al., 2016, 923; Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 445; Wegner, Abbey, Pierce, Pegram, & Woerner, 2015, p. 1022). This is unfortunate since alcohol is a known risk factor for sexual assault (Talbot, Neill, & Rankin, 2015, p. 171). In fact, data has shown that 82% of students have been victims of sexual assault while they were intoxicated (Krebs et al., 2009, p. 639). This goes to show that many people in society do not pay heed to research, but rather place more belief in rape culture.

## **Rape Culture**

### **Definition**

The term “rape culture” as defined in the popular book *Transforming a Rape Culture* by Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth (1993), states that the phenomenon of rape culture is defined as a culture of intimidation with a complex set of beliefs which encourages male aggression and supports violence against women; it condones physical and emotional terrorism against women (p. ix). Suran (2014), stated that rape culture is seen as a structured problem ingrained in society through the impact of the “heterosexual power hierarchy” to which society has been conditioned (p.278). The article discussed the shift from a micro to a macro level when articulating the causal explanation for rape (p. 278). This means that there is a shift in the belief that rape only impacts the individual, to rape impacting society. This is because it is seen as a “systematic and collective problem” (p. 278). The “systematic” problem alludes to the presence of misogyny and patriarchy in society. Misogyny is defined as a hostility towards females, where in, violence towards females is accepted (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995, p. 709; Burgess, 2007, p. 976). Patriarchy, on the other hand, is where females are given a status which is inferior to males (Franiuk, Seefelt, & Vandello, 2008, p. 798). The “collective” problem, on the other hand, is self explanatory, in the sense that it is a problem for all of society.

### **Elements of Rape Culture and Rape Myths**

This shift in determining explanation for rape, from individual to societal, holds society accountable in determining explanations of rape and, thus, the belief in rape culture. Discussions on rape culture are aimed at articulating the manner in which society assists rapists – through a belief in rape myths. Rape myths, as defined by Burt (1980), are “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217). Examples of rape myths include the

belief that “any healthy woman can resist rape if she wants to”, that rapists are insane, or that “woman is asking for it” (Burt, 1980, p. 217; Malamuth, 1981, p. 142). Essentially, most rape myths consist of themes of victim blaming, doubt in allegations of rape, absolving the perpetrator of the assault, and claims that only certain types of females get raped (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 445; Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 791). An example of the latter is, “A woman who initiates a sexual encounter will probably have sex with anybody” (Burt, 1980, p. 222). It is said that people believe in rape myths in an effort to believe in a “just world”, to feel in control of their chances of victimization, and, to distance themselves from people who commit the assault (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 791). However, the greater the belief one has in rape myths, the higher the chances of them raping someone (Talbot et al., 2010, p. 171). This is because their belief in committing sexual assault is impacted by their belief in these myths like, rapists are insane or that she started the encounter, so she is willing to have sex with anyone. If an individual believes such rape myths, then they believe that they are not committing sexual assault. This reveals a positive correlation between belief rape myths and rape. In addition, the belief in rape myths shows an acceptance of rape culture. Thus, it is possible that those who commit sexual assault may be more accepting of rape culture.

Malamuth (1981) stated that there are a few factors which can indicate one's likelihood of sexually assaulting a victim. One major aspect is the individual's belief in rape myths. In fact, rapists are more likely to believe in rape myths than males in the general population (p. 142). Increased belief in rape myths, will in turn be used by the rapists to justify their actions (p. 142). The other factor is one's sexual arousal towards rape and violence. Rapists are usually equally aroused by events of rape as they are through events of consensual sex (p. 145). This shows that there are many elements to rape culture.

According to Burgess (2007), the major elements of rape culture include victim blaming, justifying the rape, and, belief in traditional, rigid gender roles (p. 988). He stated that people who believe in rape myths justify sexual assault and blame the victim, which can result in an acceptance of sexually aggressive behaviour (p. 974). This indicated that people may not be aware of their sexually aggressive behaviour because they may not see it in that manner (p. 974). There are many discussions confirming the belief of rape myths in society. As suggested by Franiuk et al. (2008), people believe in rape myths because they may be in denial of the fact that such an act could happen to someone they love, or that it could be caused by someone they love. Regardless of the reason for this belief, discussion of rape myths can result in a tendency to belittle the consequences of rape (p. 791).

**Victim Blaming.** Victim blaming tends to consist of criticism on the credibility of the victim's reports, the circumstances surrounding the assault and minimizing the actions of the rapist (Zaleski et al., 2016, p. 924; Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 445). An example is minimizing sexual assault or insinuating that the sexual assault did not happen (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 790). Another example of victim blaming is when females, who have consumed alcohol before being raped, are seen to be at fault (Zaleski et al., 2016, p. 923). In fact, victim blaming increases when society discovers a woman has had alcohol before the assault than when a woman is sober (Zaleski et al., 2016, 923; Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 445). Unfortunately, this can result in victims being less likely to report the assault, since they do not want to be blamed for the assault (Burnett, Mattern, Herakova, Kahl, Tobola & Bornsen, 2009, p. 467).

According to Grubb & Turner (2012), there are three sub-categories to the belief of victim blaming – victim masochism, victim precipitation, and victim fabrication. Victim

masochism is when people say the victim asked for the sexual assault. For example, people may say she enjoyed being sexually assaulted. Victim precipitation is the belief that the victim is responsible for the rape. An instance of this is when people believe she is responsible, therefore, she deserved it. Lastly, victim fabrication is when the victim lies about being assaulted (p. 445). This one is the most concerning, because it is when people say that the victim is lying and unnecessarily blaming the aggressor that causes victims to decrease reporting. This is because it shows that the aggressor may have more support from society than the victim. These categories aim to demonstrate that belief in rape myths can alter one's perception and treatment of sexual assault victims (p. 446).

This is concerning since most police officers and members of the general population tend to believe in rape myths more than the victim (Malamuth, 1981, p. 143). In fact, according to Talbot et al. (2010), people with increased acceptance of rape myths had a more narrow definition of what constitutes as sexual assault. These people were less likely to view sexually aggressive behaviour as sexual violence (p. 171). In addition, males were more accepting of rape myths, and less likely to see sexually aggressive behaviour as sexual assault (Grubb & Turner, 2012, 446). This is troubling because according to the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey, in 2002, males represented 97% of people accused of sexual assault (Kong et al., 2003, p. 7). The UCR2 is a survey wherein policing agencies provide Statistics Canada with information on incidents of various crimes in the area (Kong et al., 2003, p. 5). Evidence shows that males are more likely to partake in victim blaming, along with the probability that males are also more likely to commit the assault.

Victim blaming is also a reason why many sexual assault victims do not report the crime or seek assistance for dealing with the event (Talbot et al., 2010, p. 173; Flood & Pease, 2009, p.

127). In fact, police officers and prosecutors are more likely to blame the victim in a violent situation are less likely to charge the aggressor – especially if the victim was with the aggressor or was intoxicated before the assault (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 127; Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 445). Instances like this explain why the dark figure of crime for rape and sexual assault are extremely high (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 443). According to Kong et al. (2003), sexual offences were the least likely to be reported to the police (p. 1). Statistics have shown that reporting of sexual offences, in Canada, has decreased by 36% from 1993 to 2002 (p. 3). It is possible that this was because it is usually highly unlikely for a suspect to be charged of the crime (Kong et al., 2003, p. 9), however it is also possible that the presence of rape culture in the community prevented a victim from reporting the crime (Talbot et al., 2010, p. 171). Thus as stated by Franiuk et al. (2008), the lower the reporting of sexual offences, the lower the chances of identifying behaviours of the assailant. This in turn means that society will not truly understand the extent to which sexual offences impact the community, which will result in a continued belief in rape myths and victim blaming (p. 798).

**Justifying the Assault.** Justifying a sexual assault is a way for society to lessen the acts of the perpetrator, and for victims to have a false sense of safety (Talbot et al., 2010, p. 172; Burt, 1980, p. 218). Burgess (2007) conducted an experiment to determine a correlation between rape myths and sexual aggression. He discovered that there are five factors of rape myths – justification of sexually aggressive behaviour, females should have more responsibility for sexual assault, pressure to attain sexual status and misreading women's intent, allowing use of alcohol to gain sexual compliance, and, acceptance of traditional gender roles. Of these five factors of rape myths, justification of assault, had the highest correlation to a likelihood of committing rape (p. 985) and, to self reported sexual aggression (p. 988). In addition, those who



justified assault also had a strong history of partaking in sexually aggressive behaviour (p. 990). People who justify assault do it based on the view that females either enjoy it or most likely deserve it (Burgess, 2007, p. 988; Wegner et al., 2015, p. 1020). Essentially, they justify the assault by placing the blame on the victim in an attempt to excuse their behaviour (Wegner et al., 2015, p. 1019). Some examples of this include the belief that a husband cannot rape his wife, or when a female says “no”, she actually means “yes” (Wegner et al., 2015, p. 1019).

Furthermore, justification of assault had the highest correlation with an individual's tendency to commit sexual assault and to an individual's history of sexual aggression (Burgess, 2007, p. 985). Despite such a high correlation, there has been little literature focusing on justifications used by sexual offenders (Wegner et al., 2015, p. 1019). According to Wegner et al. (2015), there were six common instances where perpetrators are more likely to justify their actions. One was where males expect sex from the female after taking her on an expensive date. This expectation was positively correlated to belief in rape culture and sexually coercive behaviour from their pasts (p. 1022). Another was when males misinterpret a female's sexual advances; seen as a direct predictor of sexual assault (p. 1022). The presence of alcohol covers two instances of justification – the victim is intoxicated versus the perpetrator being intoxicated. When a female is intoxicated her behaviour was interpreted as sexual interest, however, when the male was intoxicated he could use his intoxication as a justification for his actions (p. 1022). In addition, some justified their actions by saying that if a victim can be alone with the perpetrator, then the victim was willing to have sex (p. 1023). The last justification presented was the belief that a male's sexual drive is uncontrollable, so their actions must be understandable (p. 1023). Wegner et al. (2015) conducted a survey and interviews of 183, perpetrators of sexual aggression. The results of the research showed that more than half of the participants felt they were justified

in their actions because the female had gotten them aroused. In addition, 40% or more of the individuals felt that the female was also responsible, to a degree, because she either led them on or because they felt that she would enjoy the experience once they started (p. 1028).

Many victims, on the other hand, chose to believe in rape myths and justify the behaviour in an attempt to provide themselves with a sense of security (Talbot et al., 2010, p. 172). Weiss (2009) conducted a study in the States to determine how victims of sexual assault interpreted the incident in a society that believes in rape culture (p. 811). She discovered that 20% of 944 victims either excused (9%) or justified (15%) the incident. However, 5% of the sample did not acknowledge themselves as victims of a crime (p. 819). These numbers show that the victims would rather provide themselves with a false sense of security than to truly face their victimization (p. 284). It is possible that they choose to do this in an attempt to feel in control and in charge of themselves (p. 829). Furthermore, victims may choose to justify the assault in an attempt to avoid confrontations with the aggressor, or to avoid having to file a complaint against someone they knew (p. 289). While this helps the victim in the short term, it can lead to major consequences in the long term, if the situation is not dealt with. This is because the aggressor may place the blame on the victim, which could result in the victim placing blame on themselves. Once the victim blames themselves for the event, they are more likely to refrain from reporting the crime (p. 829). This chain illustrates another reason for a huge dark figure of crime for sexual offences.

**Gender Stereotyping.** Learned through a socialization, gender roles can impact an individual's beliefs about themselves, others, and their behaviour (Grubb & Turner, 2012, 446). Since roles are learned through society, there are certain stereotypes each society has regarding the manner in which certain genders should behave. For example, with regards to sexual

behaviour, men are taught to be more dominant and initiate the interaction, whereas females are taught to remain passive and accept blame when victimized (Bridges, 1991, 292; Talbot et al., 2010, p. 173; Grubb & Turner, 2012, 446). Various forms of media, like men's magazines and pornography, portray females in traditional gender roles, satisfying the heteronormative males' sexual desires. This impacts males, from an early age, to have certain attitudes and beliefs towards females (Horvath, Hegarty, Tyler, & Mansfield, 2011, p. 455).

An individual's belief in rape culture and traditional gender roles impacts their actions towards sexual violence. Increased belief in rape culture and gender stereotyping, has resulted in a higher tendency to blame the victim and absolve the perpetrator of the assault (Talbot et al., 2010, p. 173; Grubb & Turner, 2012, 446). Females, along with males, can have this attitude. Regardless of one's gender, if they believe in gender stereotypes, they are more likely to blame the victim. Grubb & Turner (2012), used the Attitudes Toward Women Scale to show a consistent correlation between belief in rape myths, male sexism and "negative attitude towards women" (p. 447). As a matter of fact, there are two forms of sexism – hostile and benevolent. Hostile sexism follows the belief that a woman must be punished for breaking out of her gender role. Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, protects females because they are seen as innocent and "pure". However, this protection is provided only if the female does not break any gender norms. Males who follow these beliefs see women as either "good" or "bad", and if she is perceived as "bad", then she is seen to be deserving of rape (Grubb & Turner, 2012, pp. 446-447).

According to Bridges (1991) and Flood & Pease (2009), people tend to apply traditional gender roles more during instances of acquaintance rape than stranger rape (p. 293; p. 129). This can have serious consequences in a legal setting since a jury may choose to blame the victim

when acquaintance rape takes place – making it harder for the victim to achieve justice (Bridges, 1991, p. 292). The chances of this happening is another reason why victims may choose against reporting the assault or seeking support (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 127). In addition, people who follow benevolent sexism are more likely to blame the victim if the rape was classified as acquaintance rape than stranger rape. However, there is no correlation of victim blaming and beliefs of benevolent sexism in stranger rape. In fact, the relationship between rape culture acceptance, belief in gender roles and victim blaming is still unclear (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 447).

### **Factors Influencing Attitudes Towards Rape Culture**

There are many people who believe in rape culture, but there are also people who do not. Then there are also people who believe in some aspects of rape culture but not all. So what impacts an individual's belief towards rape culture?

According to Burt (1980), one's attitude towards rape culture varies based on the individual's attitude towards females, their personality, experiences, and background. With regards to an individual's attitude towards females, Burt came up with three attitudinal variables – sexual conservatism, adversarial sexual beliefs and acceptance of interpersonal violence. The first referred to the “appropriateness” of sexual partners, acts, location and circumstances. Rather than look at gender roles, it only looked at sexual behaviour. Adversarial sexual beliefs were when individuals find relationships to be exploitive and thus do not regard rape to be of major concern. The last, acceptance of interpersonal violence, found force and coercion to be acceptable methods of gaining compliance in a sexual relationship (p. 218). Burt (1980) looked at personality from three different standpoints. The individual's contentment in fulfilling their gender role, satisfaction with their sexual history and overall self esteem. She hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between self-confidence and belief in gender stereotypes (p. 219). One's personal experiences with sexual assault can also impact their attitudes toward rape culture (p. 219; Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 131). Lastly, when discussing one's background, Burt (1980) combined various demographics, like age, race, education, socioeconomic status and religion to determine influencing factors (p. 219).

Flood and Pease (2009), in contrast, chose to separate the demographics and decided to go with a different classification system. Their factors of violence included gender, cultural factors, individual factors, organizational factors, community factors, and societal factors.

Instead of focusing on an individual's personality, Flood and Pease (2009) chose to focus on the impact of gender and sexual norms towards belief in rape culture. They included race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status under cultural factors (pp. 129-131); experience with violence and age under individual factors (pp. 131-132); informal social relations and religion under community factors (p. 134); pornography, news coverage, education, reform in the justice system, social movement, and, television and other pop culture under societal factors (pp. 134-136). For organizational factors, they choose to focus on the impact of being a formal member of an organization, like sports, university, military and religious institutions (p. 132). This category is one Burt did not look at in 1980. Possibly because the discussion on rape culture was fairly new during the time and discussion of sexual violence in prestigious organizations was only just beginning (Kenig & Ryan, 1986, p. 535). Regardless of the reason, it is important to note that organizations can impact an individual's view on society in the same manner that a family member can. Sometimes even more so because an individual chooses to join and stay with the organization despite any flaws the organization may have.

### **Personality**

As stated earlier, Burt (1980) focused on an individual's view of sexual behaviour and the impact it had on how they viewed females (218). Through Burt's research, she discovered that other factors – personality, experiences, and background – also influenced one's attitude towards females (p. 223). Her research concluded that an individual's acceptance of interpersonal violence had the strongest correlation with one's acceptance and beliefs of rape culture (p. 225). In addition, one's attitudes were also impacted by the individual's age and gender. Females' view of rape culture changed more than that of males, as their age changed (p. 228). In contrast, Flood & Pease (2009), found that males tend to have more liberal views of

sexual behaviour and are less accepting of violence against females as they grow older (p. 132). They suggest this happened because gender segregation and homophobia impacted males the most when they are in their adolescence, impacted by their peers. Yet, as they grew older, they become more interested in their relations with girls than their peers, which resulted in them becoming less tolerant of violence against females (p. 132).

Gender is seen to have a causal relationship with attitudes toward violence (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 127). Rather than focus on society's way of gender stereotyping, which is an element of rape culture, this focused on the gap between genders and their views on rape culture. An individual's gender orientation impacts their view of rape culture, and it is commonly found that males were more likely to believe in rape myths than females (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 127). In addition, research showed that there was a significant gap between genders' view of violence against women. 14% of males between the ages of 12-20 believed that forced sexual interactions were acceptable when a female flirts with them but only 3% of females, in the same age demographic, agreed with this sentiment (p. 128). Furthermore, societal views on violence also have an impact on what is taught to each gender role. Especially in countries like Canada, United States, New Zealand and Britain, where there is increased support for sexually violent behaviour (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 128). Which results in sexual harassment being common and, sexually aggressive behaviours by males, normalized. It is important to note, however, that attitudes towards traditional gender roles are less likely to predict violence against females than beliefs in hostile, patriarchal masculinity (p. 128). Instead, males' hostility towards woman positively correlated to the acceptance of rape culture, which in turn proved a misogynistic attitude (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995, p. 708). This was not seen with females' hostility towards

other females. Thus showing that men's understanding of rape is greatly influenced by their hostility towards females (p. 708).

### **Socioeconomic and Cultural Background**

An individual's socioeconomic status gives an understanding of the neighbourhood the person may come from. It is seen that people and neighbourhoods dealing with economic and social instability have higher instances of crime and violence (Bunge, Johnson, & Baldé, 2005, p. 51). These neighborhoods usually consist of people from a lower socioeconomic status. Exposure to such surroundings can result in people being more likely to support violence against females (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 129). This was seen in Burt's research (1980), where females' experience with interpersonal violence led to them having a more liberal view of sexual behaviour. However, experience with interpersonal violence had no impact on males' view of sexual behaviour (p. 228).

In contrast to Burt's statement, social learning theory states that people learn from the behaviours they see (Siegel, Brown, & Hoffman, 2013, p. 138). In support of this theory, research shows that children are influenced by witnessing violence (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 131). Interestingly enough, males were more likely to be influenced by social learning theory than females. This means that males were more likely to accept and perpetrate violence against females, if they experience it or witness it during childhood. On the other hand, there is also inconsistency in the evidence that females were likely to exhibit violent and aggressive behaviour, if they are exposed to it as children (p. 131).

Ethnicity also has an impact on an individual's tolerance of rape culture. Studies show that people from third world countries are more tolerant of rape culture than first world countries. The results of has shown that youth from Middle Eastern and Asian backgrounds are more



accepting of violence from both sexes (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 130). This was possible because many third world and non-English speaking countries are more likely to believe in traditional gender roles than first world nations. For example, in Palestinian culture, family reputation and female virginity are of utmost importance. Thus, female rape victims are re-victimized by their family because they are forced to suppress their feelings after an assault (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 130). Individuals from such honour-based, ethnic backgrounds are more accepting of rape culture because of their acceptance of gender stereotypes. It is important to note that looking at the influence of ethnicity on rape culture can lead to racist views (p. 130). Thus it is important to address this issue with the utmost care.

### **Organizations**

People join organizations to socialize with others, become participants of a certain group and identify with them, and, because they tend to share certain values and, or goals with those organizations (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 133). There are four types of formal organizations which have violence-supportive attitudes – sports, university fraternities, and religious institutions (p. 132). In addition, there is also one form of informal organization – social relations with peers.

Research has indicated a support for violent behaviour in sports, however, the presence of this attitude was prevalent more in young athletes and team-based sports than in individual sports (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 132). Fraternities, like men's sports teams, consisted of a male dominant membership. Under these organizations, violence against females was accepted and supportive (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 133; Burnett et al., 2009, p. 467). In addition, fraternities tend to have a higher rate of correlation between sexual violence and sociocultural beliefs like greater gender segregation, use of pornography, increased alcohol consumption and regarding females to be at a lower social status than males (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 133; Krebs et al.,

2007, p. 2-8). Krebs et al. (2007), found that more individuals were sexually assaulted by a fraternity member, while incapacitated, than through forced, physical assault (p. xvi).

Support of violence can also be seen through informal groups of male friends since homosocial male behaviour, as seen in the previous two organizations, can also increase tolerance of rape culture (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 134). This can be done either through male bonding or through peer pressure. One's association with individuals who support violent behaviour was directly correlated to physically and sexually aggressive behaviour towards females (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 134; Burgess, 2007, p. 988; Burnett et al., 2009, p. 475). Evidence supporting this was a research done in Germany, among male students. The study discovered that males were more accepting of rape culture if they were informed that others in their group of friends also supported rape culture (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 134). In addition, peer pressure to have sex and remain popular could also result in males reading into a female's behaviour – justifying their actions (Burgess, 2007, p. 988). Since these organizations have similar male dynamics, it is not the membership with the organization, but the culture of gender inequality and male bonding which allows for the presence of rape culture (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 133).

Another example where information interpretation is important, is with religion and religious institutions. Religion is a subjective topic and how it is interpreted makes a great deal of difference with one's belief in rape culture. For example, some interpretations of the Koran (Islamic sacred book), can result in the belief that violence against females is allowed by God. Another example is Christian Evangelism which places increased emphasis on female submission. Thus, one could interpret this into meaning that a female must remain passive, and not fight back if abused (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 134). However, there are also interpretations

that inform one to follow justice and compassion – opposite of violence-supportive attitudes (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 134).

### **Society**

Society is defined as relating to the community (Schmidt, 1995, p. 1). A community as defined by Pfeil & Zaphiris (2010), consists of people who get together to meet and discuss things in an environment (p. 1) There are major determinants that impact a society – media, law and various social movements. As stated earlier, since the focus of this research is on media, it will be discussed in the following section.

The enforcement and process of law, in a society, determines how individuals cope with crime. Despite a lack of evidence showing an impact of various policies on society, studies show that certain sanctions can impact one's view of violent behaviour. In addition, one's view of the criminal justice system can also influence how they react to the crime, criminal and victim – which can be impacted by the consistency in implementing the law (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 136; Dinos, Burrowes, Hammond, & Cunliffe, 2015, 39). For example, when an offender is found guilty of assault, the victim will have faith in the system. On the other hand, if a guilty offender is found innocent then people's attitudes towards the victim could change (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 136; Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 799). This would result in a society which believes in rape culture and rape myths (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 799). While the criminal justice system can negatively influence a society, social movements, tend to do the opposite.

Social movements consist of protests conducted by members of a community to inform others of a certain topic. One movement, positively impacting rape culture is the women's movement. This is because the women's movement advocates for victims of violence and, in a subtler manner, impacts gender stereotypes and relations between genders (Flood & Pease, 2009,

p. 136). There are many movements with the power to impact society's attitudes towards rape culture, yet, a lack of research means that there is no indication whether the impact is positive or negative (p. 136).

### **Influence of Media on Attitudes of Rape Culture**

#### **Definition**

Discussions on the topic of rape culture can take place over various mediums, however, focus will be placed on media for the purposes of this research. Defined by Mulder (2006), media is an instrument used to broaden an individual's senses into the public domain; it is a blend between journalists and opinions of the public (pp. 289-293). With recent developments in technology, media can now consist of both mass media and social media. Over time, mass media was digitized and now, it can be found on electronics like laptops and cell phones (Mulder, 2006, p. 294). The move to digital carriers also led to the inclusion of mass media on social networking websites. This was a significant move for news outlets since social media is the most common activity conducted by people online (Boux & Daum, 2015, p. 15). Thus, the presence of news on social media means that more people can remain aware of recent events and issues taking place around the world (Zaleski et al, 2016, p. 922).

#### **Media's Influence on Rape Culture**

Malamuth's research (1981) indicated media was a major source of information for males and that it had the ability to impact peoples' perceptions of rape (p. 150). There are many forms of media which can potentially impact one's attitude towards rape culture – pornography, television and other popular media, marketing campaigns, news coverage and social media (Flood & Pease, 2009, pp. 135-136; Boux & Daum, 2015, p. 16). Viewing pornography, violent or non-violent, can lead to a significant increase in both sexual and behavioural aggression. Furthermore, people who watch pornography at an increased rate also have stronger views of rape culture (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 135). Lad's magazines, while are not seen to be

pornographic, are deemed to be very similar. This is because the only difference between the two seems to be that magazines do not show nude females (Horvath et al., 2011, p. 455). In addition, these magazines can teach young males gender stereotypes and how to behave in such a manner. For example, many magazines “educate” young males to fake sincerity and “zone in on vulnerable women” for sexual intercourse (p. 455). Unfortunately, there are times when these magazines also promote sexually aggressive behaviour, and rather than apologize for the content, editors tend to blame it on production. An example of this was when Danny Dyer, in the lad’s magazine Zoo, told a 23-year old to get over his ex by cutting her face so no one will want her. In response to this, the staff of Zoo said that the advice was a cause of production error (p. 456). This behaviour was similar to sexual offenders justifying their actions. Thus, Hovarth et al. (2011) focused on the possibility of lad’s magazines normalizing rape culture for young males (p. 456). They presented participants with quotes from lad’s magazines and interviews conducted with convicted rapists; asking them to identify the source of the quote and which quote they relate to more. Through this process they discovered that certain statements in lad’s magazines were seen to be more derogatory than statements made by rapists, and that participants had a hard time differentiating between the two sources (p. 461). Some examples of these statements were:

“...girls are like plasticine, if you warm them up you can do anything you want with them.”

“Mascara running down the cheeks means they’ve just been crying, and it was probably your fault ... but you can cheer up the miserable beauty with a bit of the old in and out.”

“Filthy talk can be such a turn on for a girl ... no one wants to be shagged by a mouse

...

“A few compliments won’t do any harm either ... ‘I bet you want it from behind you dirty whore’ ...” (Hovarth et al., 2011, p. 458).

This was evidence that young males’ view on rape culture can be severely impacted by media promoting some form of pornography.

While the impact is yet unknown, television was known to impact rape culture through increased media on violence (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 798; Flood and Pease, 2009, p. 135). The likelihood of an individual behaving in an aggressive manner increased as frequency of viewing and age increase (Flood and Pease, 2009, p. 135). As a matter of fact, a child’s beliefs and behaviours can be dependant on actions observed as a child. Thus, if a child viewed violent behaviour, they had a higher tendency to accept views on rape culture. There are two major forms of media which impact an individual’s view on rape culture – music and video games. Essentially, “sexually violent, misogynist, and objectifying themes” in media, can impact one’s belief in rape myths (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 135). Similarly, marketing campaigns, especially those that sexualize females, also have an increased likelihood of increasing a male’s sexual aggression (p. 135). The impact of news coverage, on the other hand, can be positive or negative depending on how the journalist chooses to view the incident (p. 136).

A journalist’s job depends on their ability to provide non-biased information, however, they are also human. Thus there are times when their view can impact the manner in which news may be presented. Susceptible to views of society, studies indicate that journalists are more likely to create doubt in the victim’s story than the perpetrator’s (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 799). The rape myth most often supported in these instances are victim blaming or falsifying the

victim's statement. For example, when basketball player, Kobe Bryant, was accused of sexual assault in 2003, information of the victim was also brought into the media – her past sexual and mental history. Yet, more articles validated rape culture behaviour rather than discuss how her history made her chances of being violently victimized higher. Unfortunately, the media attention to this case resulted in the victim denying to testify. Which, in turn, resulted in the charges being dropped – possibly because of the media blaming her for the attack, rather than Bryant (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 798).

If rape culture is seen to be prevalent in the media, then it can impact the view people have about rape culture. Media has a tendency to focus on “real rape” situations more often than not (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 798). The concept of “real rape” focuses on mostly on stranger rape, men who use excessive force or weapons during the rape, and instances of gang rape (Boux & Daum, 2015, p. 6). This can have a significant impact on both the victim and the perpetrator. Victims may choose not to see their assault as assault, or they may fear being blamed for the assault. Either way, they will be less likely to report the assault to the proper authorities. The perpetrator, on the other hand, may not see their actions to be sexually aggressive (p. 798). If both parties do not know or acknowledge the incident as sexually aggressive, then reporting will decrease even more. This can impact society because they will remain clueless to towards perpetrator behaviour, and they will not understand the magnitude to which sexually aggressive behaviour exists. This will lead to society not doing anything to decrease rape culture (p. 798).

### **Social Media**

One form of media yet to be discussed is social media. As stated above, news outlets joined social media in an effort to keep people informed of current events and issues in a more



convenient way (Zaleski et al, 2016, p. 922). It was convenient because social media is the most common activity conducted by individual who are online (Boux & Daum, 2015, p. 15). Research by Zaleski et al. (2016) looked at the comments section of online news articles, to determine how comments can impact an individual's attitude towards rape culture (p. 923). The article stated that people's opinions could be shaped based on positive or negative discussions, however, opinions could also be positive and negative (p. 923). The research looks at comments, of articles from four of the top 25 newspapers in U.S., regarding rape, sexual assault, and rape culture, during the time period of December 2014 to March 2015 (p. 923). They discovered that rape culture was extremely prevalent in social media and found victim blaming to be the most common element present (p. 926). In addition, increased use of social media could lead to individuals accessing uploaded information almost immediately. As a result, comments made on a post could also be seen as fast. Thus, a regretted comment could be shared and viewed by many others, before the individual had a chance to remove said comment. This can lead to a reinforcement of rape culture since people are influenced by what they read (Boux & Daum, 2015, p. 15).

In contrast, not all social media influence is negative. There are instances when people use social media as a medium to advocate against rape culture, through critiquing rape culture, satire humour and discussing how males talk to them. In addition, social media gives individuals an opportunity to provide support for victims of rape culture (Sills, Pickens, Beach, Jones, Calder-Dawe, Benton-Greig, & Gavey, 2016, p. 937). With statistics indicating that many young to middle aged individuals spend 70% of their smartphone activities on social media, there were chances that the presence of positive media could also have a positive impact on their view of rape culture (Boux & Daum, 2015, p. 15). In fact, by viewing such behaviour, youth may also

become inclined to advocate against rape culture (Sills et al., 2016, p. 947).

Armstrong & Mahone (2017), conducted a research to determine people's willingness to take action against sexual violence, based on their usage of social media (p. 109). They found four factors that impacted one's willingness to take action – gender, social media privacy concerns, belief in rape culture and one's willingness to engage in bystander intervention. They conducted two studies – the first study consisted of mostly of journalism and strategic communication majors while the second consisted of participants from general education classes (pp. 102-108). Overall, females were more likely than males to speak out, regardless of the major. In addition, participants in the first study, who were more concerned about their social media privacy, were also more likely to engage. Among the two studies, there were mixed results regarding people's belief in rape culture and their willingness to take action against sexual violence. The most significant finding was that people who were willing to engage in bystander intervention were also extremely likely to engage in taking action against sexual violence (p. 106). This article showed that while social media may be used as a medium to advocate against rape culture, not everyone is comfortable with allowing others to see them take action.

### **Prevalence of Rape Culture on Universities and Colleges**

Violent victimization rates show people, between the ages of 20 to 24, were more likely to be victimized; 170 per 1,000 people in Canadian population (Perrault, 2015, p. 12). According to Statistics Canada, violent victimization consists of robbery, physical and sexual assault. Robbery is the theft or attempted theft with the use of a weapon, threat of violence, and/or violence. Physical assault is a “face-to-face threat” of harm or when there is a weapon present during the incident (Perrault, 2015, p. 4). Sexual assault consists of “forced sexual activity, attempted forced sexual activity, unwanted sexual touching, grabbing, kissing or fondling, or sexual relations without being able to give consent” (Perrault, 2015, p. 4). However, it was possible that age was a factor for victimization because of different lifestyles experienced within each age group. For example with the 20-24 age group, statistics show increased likelihood of engaging in activities during the evening, and using drugs. This statistic was supported by the fact that people aged 65 and older did not partake in such activities as often and their rate of victimization is six times lower (Perrault, 2015, p. 12). When the age group of 15-19 was added to the group, they were still more likely to be violently victimized. With this addition, rates of violent victimization increased to 325 per 1,000 of the population (Perrault, 2015, p. 12). In contrast, women were more likely to be violently victimized than males, 85 for every 1,000 women and 67 per 1,000 males (Perrault, 2015, p. 11). However this was because rates of sexual assault, which has mostly females victims, remained stable while the rate for robbery and physical assault decreased. Despite the change, women were still 20% more likely than men to be victims of violent crimes (Perrault, 2015, p.11).

In addition, many campus assaults were likely to occur after females would voluntarily drink alcohol, as opposed to being intoxicated without their consent (Krebs et al., 2009, p. 639).

In research conducted by Krebs et al. (2009), they discovered that of the 20% of females sexually assaulted, 16% of them were assaulted while incapacitated (p. 643). To be more specific 5.9% of sophomores (second year university students), 3.6% of juniors (third year of university), and 3.6% of seniors, were assaulted while incapacitated, in the 12 months before the research (Krebs et al., 2009, p. 643). This provided a negative correlation between university experience and incapacitated sexual assault (Krebs et al., 2009, p. 643). However, the addition of alcohol, could be one reason to explain the discrepancy in the statistics regarding 20%-28.5% of females being sexually assaulted during their four years – people did not want to admit that they were assaulted because they do not want to be blamed for their assault (Burnett et al., 2009, p. 467).

The presence of rape culture on a university or college campus can be attributed to people who came on campus with a belief in rape culture or through the presence of fraternities and sororities, across North America. Individuals who have attended university or college or have attained higher level education are less tolerant towards rape culture than those who do not, or have not (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 133). On the other hand, people who took part in fraternities, sororities, or similar organizational behaviour also attended university. They also attained higher-level education, yet, they are also held responsible for the presence of rape culture on a university or college campus (Burnett et al., 2009, p. 467). Responsibility is shown through the correlation of alcohol consumption, sexually aggressive behaviour and rape culture. Since fraternities and sororities tend to abuse alcohol more than the average student, they are also more likely to consume alcohol before sex. Coupled with fear of victim blaming when alcohol is involved, it can create an atmosphere where victims are silenced (Burnett et al., 2009, p. 467). Thus explaining why less than 5% of sexual assaults are reported to law enforcement (Burnett et al., 2009, p. 467) and why on-campus reporting consisted of only 700 documented cases from 87

Canadian universities and major colleges, between 2009 and 2013 (CBC News, 2015). It is interesting to note, despite such low numbers of sexual assault reporting, many colleges and universities in Canada just recently started discussing policies to address on-campus sexual assault.

### **Methodology**

For the purposes of this research, focus was placed on a leaked video of, now president, Donald Trump. This video revealed him discussing sexually aggressive behaviour with Billy Bush, another television personality (Filipovic, 2016). This event was chosen because of Trump's public and media presence. In addition, the position of President of the United States of America is a position admired by many and one which many youth respect and aspire toward.

Research was conducted on the posts and comments on "MRU Confessions", a public Facebook page. To post on this page, people can send in their posts to the administrators, who will then upload them anonymously. Since the page is public, the content can be seen by anyone who happens upon the page and anyone can comment on these posts. It was these posts and comments that were used for the purposes of the research.

### **Content Analysis**

The preferred method of analysis for this research was summative content analysis. This form of analysis was chosen because it is a blend of latent and manifest analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1283). Manifest content analysis was used to determine the frequency with which themes of rape culture appeared on the page. This identified patterns in the data and created a coding scheme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1285). Then, latent content analysis was used to interpret the context and circumstances under which the the word or phrase was used. This was done by connecting the content to the original source, and the context surrounding the term or phrase (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2010, p.6). This method of analysis was chosen because the blend of the two methods helps attain "unobtrusive and nonreactive" information (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1285).

Content analysis was conducted on the posts and comments on the Facebook page “MRU Confessions”. Data collection was completed within a six-month time frame – between August 4, 2016 and December 10, 2016. This time frame was chosen because the video of Trump was leaked on October 7, 2016 – which sat in the middle of the time frame for the research. The purpose of this was to determine whether there would be a change in the prevalence of rape culture before and after the release of Trump’s video. This source was chosen because it provides a look into the minds of the MRU student body. Furthermore, data was collected by reading all the posts and comments, during the previously stated time, and categorized accordingly. Then, the posts and comments relating to rape culture, were further categorized into the different elements of rape culture.

A summative content analysis will ensure that peoples’ thoughts and ideas will be categorized in a certain category of rape culture, despite the way their thoughts and ideas may have been phrased. However, among its benefits, there were also limitations to using this form of analysis. One was that it focused on the narrow meanings of certain statements (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1285). Meaning that the researcher had a tendency to subjectively interpret words and phrases based on the context. This can hinder research because the aim of research is to be unbiased. Yet, interpreting the data subjectively, can impact its impartiality. In addition, analysis is based on the reliability and validity of the information present at the time of the research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1285). Reliability is when research stays consistent, and validity is when the findings reflect the data researched (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 34).

Unfortunately, with studies like this, the results will not be the same in replicated studies, which means the reliability of this research was low. This is because one cannot conduct the same research in a different time period to get the same results. Regardless of this fact, content

analysis is one of the most effective methods through which such research is conducted. In fact, this research was very similar to the one conducted by Zaleski et al. in 2016, except, that the current research was on a smaller scale. Zaleski et al. (2016) conducted a content analysis on articles from four of the top 25 U.S. newspapers for four months – December 2014 till March 2015 (p. 923). The research was conducted on the comments section, of the website and the Facebook page, of various articles that had the terms “Rape” or “Sexual Assault” in the headlines (p. 923). Then through “naturalistic observations”, the researchers will find common themes, and their prevalence. It is important to note that the unit of analysis in the research was the comments, not the commenters, in an effort to show the complexities of rape culture (p. 923). The unit of analysis for this research, on the other hand, are the post and the comments on MRU Confessions. The research looked at all posts and comments during the specific time frame to collect data.



## Results

The analysis showed that of the 873 posts and comments, only 15 exhibited a belief in rape culture. While a majority of the posts discussed Donald Trump, through the election and the instance of the “Make America Great Again” hat controversy on MRU, many posts and comments did not mention the video.<sup>1</sup> Further analysis of the data revealed an acceptance of rape culture before the video of Donald Trump was leaked. Before the video, there were 12 instances where rape culture statements appeared; however, afterwards, the prevalence of rape culture statements decreased to only three instances. The most prominent themes of rape culture were gender stereotypes and justification of assault. Surprisingly, there was no prevalence of victim blaming, before or after the release of the video. The most prevalent theme of rape culture was the belief in gender stereotypes. Various posts and comments either described or discussed traditional, masculine stereotypes and sexually aggressive behaviour. Some would consist of allowing sexually aggressive behaviour, while others would consist of promoting competition – reinforcing male dominant behaviour. Some quotes are:

“... I get the sex vibe from her every time I see her.”

“... drug her, and have your filthy son-of-a-lawyer way with her.”

“Ask her again come on be a man”

The second theme was of traditional, rigid gender norms, including males justifying sexually aggressive behaviour. Some examples were:

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<sup>1</sup> The “Make America Great Again” hat was worn by a student on MRU campus, when a student asked him to remove it because it was seen as “racially charged” (Dormer, 2016, para. 1). This was a controversial moment for the university because it brought about discussions on freedom of speech and safe space (para. 1).

A meme which said “She said ‘Hi’. She wants the ‘D’”.<sup>2</sup>



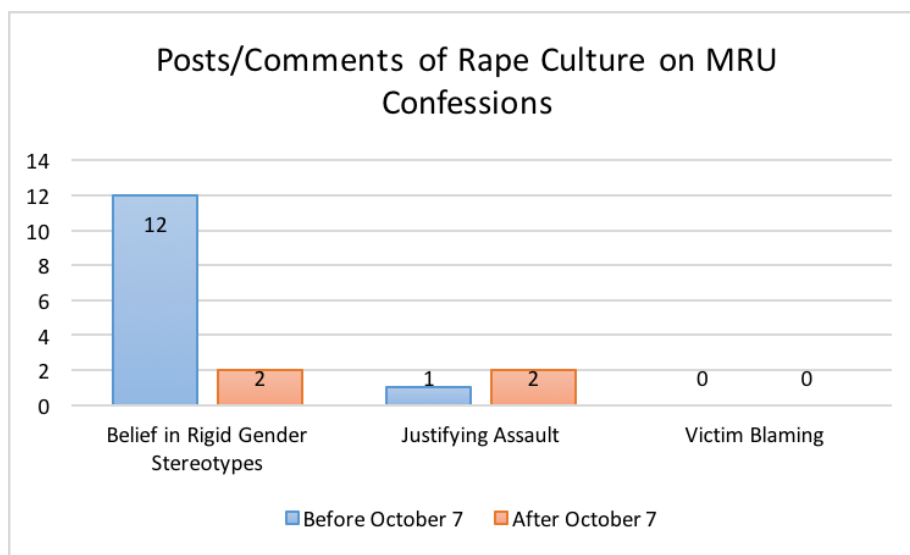
“You MRU guys better protect your girls...”

“Bring it on fuk boiiiiiiiis!” – in response to the previous statement

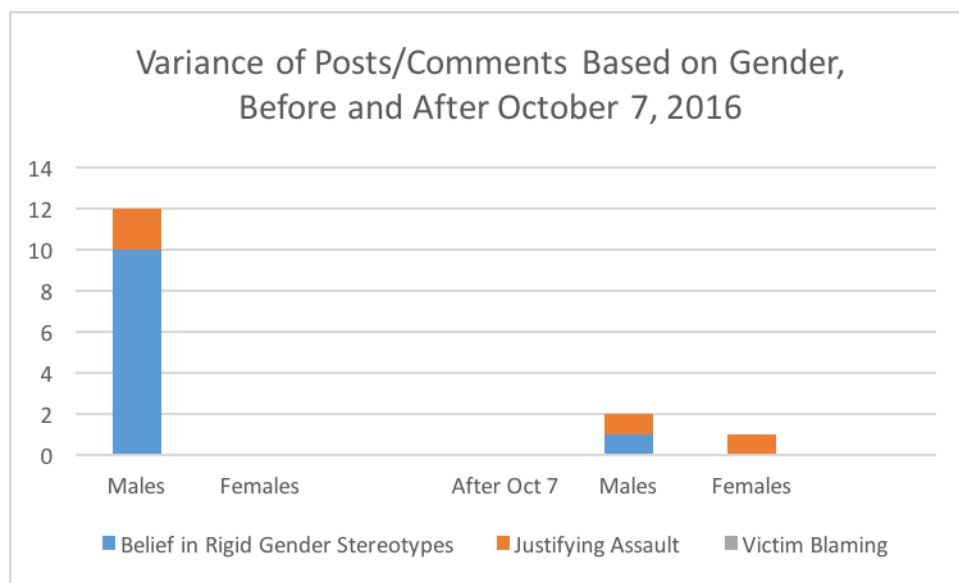
The significant decrease in the occurrence of rape culture statements could show that the appearance of the video, and the criticisms towards it, has had a positive impact on the MRU campus rape culture. As shown in the graph below, posts and comments showing belief in rape culture went down. This could have happened because people became more aware of what they were saying or because they did not want people to know what they were saying. I feel that there was a greater chance of the latter because people could have still made anonymous posts on various topics, yet they did not do that. So one could interpret that they became more aware of what they were saying because of discussions on the internet regarding Trump’s video. In addition, comments justifying rape culture went up. This could mean that Trump’s justification towards his actions may have impacted others to believe that such actions of sexual assault were acceptable.

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<sup>2</sup> The meme was found in a comment on Facebook from one of the commenters, and the original artist of this image could not be found.



**Figure 1.** Changes in prevalence of rape culture before and after the release of Trump's video.



**Figure 2.** Changes in prevalence of rape culture based on gender, before and after the release of Trump's video.

Another surprising change was with the variance in gender. Before Trump's video was released, all comments were made by males. However, after the release of the video, there was an increase in females posting or commenting on statements which also matched the definition of rape

culture. Another interesting finding was that comments and posts never explicitly stated “rape” or “sexual assault” despite them alluding to just that. This shows that people may be unaware that they are promoting sexually aggressive behaviour. On the other hand, they may know that they are promoting such behaviour but may think that by avoiding such terms, it is not as serious of an issue.

### **Limitations**

One of the biggest limitations with this research was the issue of how often MRU Confessions is used and how many people read it. Not all students of MRU post or comment on MRU Confessions, in fact there was also the possibility that individuals, who are not students at MRU, were posting or commenting on the page. After all, MRU confessions is a public page, available to anyone who happens upon it. This could lead to the possibility that a very small number of individuals, who support rape culture on campus, were commenting or posting on the page.

Another limitation could be that the prevalence of rape culture was shown by a certain few. Since the research was conducted only on posts and comments, and, not on the individuals posting it, there could be instances when the same person was posting pro rape culture beliefs more than others. It is possible that they would do this because, as stated earlier, post or comments supporting rape culture, can bring rape culture to people who don't believe in it or it can help reinforce an individual's view of it. Either way, it has the ability impact many people.

There was also the limitation that tone is not easily conveyed over social media. Since tone is not conveyed, people may be using sarcasm in their posts and comments. This could show that not everyone who posted or commented on MRU confessions, believed in pro rape culture. While this could alter the prevalence of pro rape culture behaviour, it does not take away from the fact that such statements have the ability to trigger victims of sexually aggressive behaviour.

### Discussion

This research shows a lack of immediate impact of media on campus rape culture. However, it is important to note that remarks made before the video became public knowledge showed rape culture on the campus. In addition, research conducted by Tavcer (2015), shows that our student body is impacted by the media. Tavcer conducted research similar to that of Horvath et al. (2011), except this research was targeted specifically towards male students in the second or third year of their degree, at MRU. The research discovered an inability, of many participants, in deciphering whether certain statements were made by a mens' magazine or a rapist. For example, approximately 90% of the students were unable to decipher that a men's magazine said, "You do not want to be caught red- handed, go and smash her on a park bench. That used to be my trick" (Tavcer, 2015, p. 16). The research had results similar to Hovarth et al. (2011), where in many participants felt that derogatory and potentially dangerous statements, made in men's magazines, were made by rapists instead (p. 461). Another example of such a statemnt was, "I think women are like plasticine [putty], if you warm them up you can do anything you want with them" (Tavcer, 2015, p.20). Tavcer's research showed that 56% of the students thought that this statement was made by a convicted rapist. The participants' inability to decipher between the statements proved that mens' magazines can promote hostile and sexually aggressive behaviour to young males. If educated males were unable to identify their hostile behaviour, it is also possible that they will not comprehend hostile behaviour when they see it, or even practice it. The lack of a proper policy, places future victims in harm's way because they will not know who to inform, the procedure to get justice for their victimization or even how to identify violent behaviour.

When this research began, MRU did not have a sexual assault policy in place. However,

in March of 2017, they released their own sexual assault policy to help foster a safer environment for sexual assault victims. While this policy is a good start, it fails to define the various instances of what sexual assault could look like. They have included a definition of what constitutes as sexual violence, but they do not go further in defining the various acts within that definition (E.16, E.17 and E.20). Consider issues like relationship violence, where victims may not realize that if their partner carries forward with a sexual act, despite the victim saying no, it is still sexual violence. Unfortunately, since many students remain unaware of that fact, they may not say anything about it. Furthermore, the policy states that every employee enforcing the policy must maintain a knowledge of the Trauma-Informed Process (s. 14.3). This should be changed to state that all employees of the university must be trained in such a manner. This is because a disclosure of assault can occur at any moment and, faculty and employees must know how to handle the situation. Thus, while it may be a good start, a lot of work still needs to be done on this policy before it can truly foster a safer environment and combat campus rape culture.

Another area where MRU fails to effectively combat rape culture is through the information they can provide to victims of sexual assault. If one goes on the MRU website and searches "sexual assault", the first thing that would come up was how people can become a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE nurse). The second link that came up provided individuals information on what sexual assault is, what it looks like and how it is categorized under the Criminal Code of Canada. In fact, the sexual assault policy did not even appear on the first page of the search. Furthermore, a link appeared to look at policies of MRU and once you enter that link, you still have to look for the sexual assault policy. This shows that while the university is trying help victims, they can do more and be more proactive in doing so.

In the U.S., Title IX, a legal policy, is present to deal with all sexual assault allegations in the nation. It states:

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” (Suran, 2014, p. 279)

Essentially, Title IX is a policy which promotes fairness for genders (Suran, 2014, p. 282). It has been in the law since 1972, however it was not until protests began in 2013 that Title IX became known in the media for colleges and universities. Protests were conducted to force the Department of Education, in Washington, to hold colleges and universities accountable to Title IX (Suran, 2014, p. 305). The protests were successful and in 2014, pressure increased for colleges to take more action in preventing campus sexual violence (Suran, 2014, p. 306). There is a benefit to having a center where all allegations of sexual assault can be kept. This is because if a similar assault takes place at two different universities or colleges, people know that it could be the same person. Furthermore, it will help keep more accurate statistics of sexual violence on a campus, in the nation. Thus, if the U.S. can take initiative to make such an incredible change for such a massive nation, then what is holding Canada back from implementing similar policies and procedures?



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