

## **Attitudes on the Gender of Rape Victims**

### **Introduction**

In this paper, I will be analyzing how victims of rape are perceived based on their gender. The perception of victims is important as it can determine what happens to the victim after the assault. Unlike the common perception, rape is not solely confined to a male perpetrator and a female victim. There are cases with the genders reversed and cases with the same gender occupying both roles. While all these scenarios are important and should be addressed, the current essay will focus primarily on male/female sexual assault.

In order for the victim of a crime to receive justice, several things have to happen. For one, the victim has to realize that a crime has been committed against them and make a report. After that, it is up to law enforcement and also society to either believe or not believe the victim and act accordingly. If they believe the victim, then law enforcement officials must pursue justice for the victim by arresting and prosecuting the perpetrator. While this is how the process would work ideally, this is not always the case. Many factors can influence this process and prevent the victim from getting justice. One such factor is gender.

Gender can play a large role in how people are treated by the criminal justice system. Gender stereotypes can lead to people having preconceptions about what kind of people the victim and perpetrator of a crime are without knowing anything about them. When someone talks about rape, the “conceptualization of men as perpetrators and women as victims remains the dominant sexual victimization paradigm” (Stemple “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America” 1). While this is more commonly the case, that does not mean that the reverse scenario does not happen. However, because male perpetrators and female victims are considered the ‘norm’ in regards to rape, male victims often get forgotten or overlooked.

When an entire category of victims is written off, there are far fewer resources available for these victims, which can lead to harmful results. Because of how hidden male victims can be, “professionals who encounter male sexual abuse victims frequently fail to treat them accordingly” since they lack proper training and “are unaware of the forms of sexual abuse men may experience” (Stemple “Male Rape and Human Rights” 612). This means that male victims aren’t receiving the proper support that they need. With professionals trained to respond to the common paradigm, cases with the roles reversed enter a foreign territory. Even if they aren’t overlooked, the crime against them can be viewed as less egregious than if the victim was a woman. This can be due to legal definitions of rape and also gender expectations for men.

Gender expectations for men can lead to society or even themselves believing men can’t be raped. For instance, multiple male rape myths address ideas that men always enjoy sex and can’t be raped or that men should be able to fight off attackers. These myths “seem to be inextricably linked with our society’s traditional ideas about what defines a real man” (Sleath 14). Society can shun men for claiming they’ve been raped and claim that they aren’t a “real man”. It is already difficult for rape victims of both genders to speak up. If men believe they’ll be shunned for coming forward, they’ll be even more disinclined to report the crime.

I hypothesize that due to gender stereotypes and expectations, male victims of rape will be less likely to come forward than their female counterparts and also less likely to be believed when they do come forward, thus creating a scenario where they receive less favorable treatment from both society and law enforcement.

### Statistics

By looking at the statistics on the gender of rape victims, we can better understand the scope of the issue, as well as analyze and hypothesize on the impact of these statistics on the

treatment of rape victims.

According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), 1 of every 6 women and 1 of 33 men are victims of rape. Additionally, women make up 90 percent of rape victims, whereas men make up 10 percent (RAINN). From these statistics, it is clear that the grand majority of rape victims are female. This can explain why many have the perception that women are the only victims of rape given that the statistics for men can seem minuscule by comparison. Thus, attention to male victims of rape is often minimal, support programs choosing to focus their resources on the majority of victims: women. While women do and should have this support, this doesn't mean that men don't deserve the same.

It is also worthwhile to consider how these statistics can differ. For instance, the 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), which is "one of the most comprehensive surveys of sexual victimization conducted in the United States to date," found that "men and women had a similar prevalence of nonconsensual sex in the previous 12 months" (Stemple "The Sexual Victimization of Men in America" 1). Likewise, a 2015 study found that "43 percent of high-school and college boys said they'd been the victim of some form of sexual coercion...and 95 percent said the aggressors were girls" (Orenstein). If this is true, then it becomes necessary to reconsider how society approaches victims of rape. This contradicts the statistics provided by RAINN, showing instead that men are just as likely to be victims of rape as women.

These differing findings also bring into question the matter of the perpetrators of rape. While RAINN does not address the gender of perpetrators as they do for victims, a 2012 study using data from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC) found that "of those who affirmed that they had 'ever force[d] someone to have sex ... against

their will,' 43.6% were female and 56.4% were male" (Stemple "Sexual Victimization Perpetrated by Women" 5). According to this, women are almost just as likely to be perpetrators of rape as men are. All these findings mean that anyone can be raped, regardless of gender, and anyone can be a perpetrator of rape, regardless of gender. It is pointless and potentially harmful to assign gender expectations to rape victims and perpetrators. However, women continue to be seen as victims, and men continue to be seen as perpetrators.

### Definition

One factor contributing to this view of women as victims and men as perpetrators is that many countries' legal definition of rape excludes men and women as possible victims and perpetrators respectively. In the United States, the legal definition of rape ever since 1927 is: "the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will" and included "forcible male penile penetration of a female vagina" (US DOJ). The specificity of this definition makes it impossible for men to be victims and women to be perpetrators. It was not until 2013 that the definition was changed: "The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (US DOJ). Within those 86 years, men and boys who were victims of rape would've been unable to get legal support for the crime committed against them. The narrow definition also would've excluded them from accessing resources available to female victims of rape.

Considering how recent the change to the legal definition is, it is important to consider how the definition can impact statistics on rape victims. For instance, many statistics might be inaccurate and underrepresented because the "FBI doesn't report figures for male rape since it defines rape as having a female victim" (Damon 369). When an entire group of people who make up approximately half of the population can't be legally recognized as potential victims, then it makes

sense that they would be forgotten in the statistics. This is not to say that women aren't more likely to a victim of rape or that they don't make up the majority of the statistics, which they in fact do. However, this does not also mean that male victims shouldn't receive attention, too. These victims do exist, but are too often forgotten.

Additionally, the gendered nature of rape laws and the subsequent misrepresentation of victims also paints an inaccurate picture of what a perpetrator looks like. With the requirement of penetration within the legal definition, while both men and women can be victims, only men can be perpetrators. Again, this creates a space wherein certain male victims can't be seen as victims and receive support. This can serve to further the narrative of men as aggressive perpetrators and women as weak victims, which is both a dangerous and inaccurate representation of both.

### Gender Stereotypes

There are certain expectations for the behavior of men and women, which can serve the perpetuate the idea of them being perpetrators and victims respectively. However, this means that instances wherein the roles are reversed are easily overlooked or just not believed. These gender stereotypes constantly put adult men in the role of aggressors, meaning that "Chastity is not a virtue to which men are generally taught to aspire and is not an attribute associated with proper manhood" (Stemple "Male Rape and Human Rights" 630). Stemple argues that chastity, which is commonly stereotyped with women, makes someone more sympathetic as a victim. Men, lacking this value, are thus unsympathetic and disregarded. Continuing off on this idea of chastity, the fact that "men are often raped in unappealing contexts such as prisons—one cannot imagine a setting in which innocence' is less prevalent—helps propel male victims to the bottom of a hierarchy of victim sympathy" (Stemple "Male Rape and Human Rights" 630). In essence, male victims of rape simply aren't given the attention that female victims are due to gender stereotypes portraying men

as not being harmed through rape, or simply not being victims at all.

Furthermore, some gender stereotypes perpetuate the ideas that “female-perpetrated abuse is rare or nonexistent, that male victims experience less harm, and that for men all sex is welcome” (Stemple “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America” 1). If women are stereotyped as being weaker than men, then it is hard to see them as abusers. If men are stereotyped as tough, then it is hard to consider that they can be harmed through sex.

Another harmful stereotype driving the invisibility of male rape victims is that of a man’s libido. For instance, many believe that men “can’t be the victim of an unwanted sexual advance because there’s no such thing as a guy who isn’t receptive to ANY sexual advance, at ANY time,” and that “men who do come forward...should be thankful for the experience” (Dean). Going by this stereotype, it becomes incredibly difficult for not just society to recognize male victims, but also for men to recognize themselves as victims. Even if they think what happened to them is wrong, they end up having to internalize this harm so to maintain this societal expectation for men and avoid being shamed. These stereotypes, in turn, can feed into rape myths, which further obfuscate male victims.

### Rape Myths

Many false beliefs about rape victims, such as the one regarding libido, are regarded as rape myths. These myths paint false and thus harmful pictures of rape victims, which can serve to minimize entire groups of victims. These rape myths are defined by Burt (1980) “as ‘prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists,’ which result in a rape-supportive climate hostile to victims” (as qtd. in Walfield 4). There are rape myths for victims of all genders, not just men. The myths for men include beliefs such as men can’t be raped because “real” men can protect themselves, men aren’t affected by rape, and women can’t rape men (Walfield 5).

These myths, particularly that of what makes a “real” man, are in line with the gender stereotypes described above and further supported by a gendered definition of rape. As such, they can influence how society treats these victims, if they are seen as victims at all.

These myths can be incredibly harmful to victims seeking help. For instance, the myths have a tendency to downplay “the harm of rape, particularly when the offender was female, yet research indicates the consequences of male rape are far-reaching and tend to be long-lasting, similar to female victims” (Walfield 18). This means that men are harmed by rape just as women are, but often don’t receive the same support due to myths that perpetuate beliefs to the contrary. Furthermore, the “acceptance of stereotypical ideas about male rape means that a person is more likely to engage in male rape victim blaming behaviours” and “where acceptance of male rape myths increases, the blaming of the perpetrator decreases” (Sleath 14-15). Thus, men are barely seen as victims at all, and women are similarly not seen as perpetrators. These myths closely adhere to the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm that often dominates discussion of rape.

#### Male Perpetrator-Female Victim Paradigm

As discussed, men are often framed only as perpetrators and women as only victims. This paradigm arises due to a lack of recognition of male victims and expectations for what a victim should look like. While this paradigm might be the majority of cases, it is most definitely not all of them. Those cases that make up the minority deserve significant attention as well, rather than to be overlooked as they too often are. The aforementioned NISVS report found similar numbers on nonconsensual sexual encounters for men and women, but the “public presentation of these data emphasized female sexual victimization, thereby (perhaps inadvertently) confirming gender stereotypes about victimization” (Stemple “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America” 3). In this way, many victims go unrecognized. The lack of reporting also shapes public perceptions,

further exacerbating the issue.

With the public accepting the dominant paradigm and with the legal definition of rape further supporting the paradigm, men are continually seen as perpetrators rather than victims, which “in turn makes it unsurprising that the female perpetrator-male victim paradigm is yet to be seriously considered” (Weare 113). Although the evidence for the existence and prevalence of this reverse paradigm is present, it is often overlooked in favor of the male-female paradigm. After all, it is the paradigm that comprises the majority of cases, and unlike the female-male paradigm, it is supported through law and commonly accepted gender stereotypes that shape people’s way of thinking.

The lack of focus on the reverse paradigm or just the number of male victims, in general, must be remedied. By not receiving attention and support, many come to the belief that “there is no urgent need for rape crisis centres to include help for male rape victims since their number is small” (Javaid 3). However, as proved by the study, numbers aren’t as small as people think. It is just the focus on the male-female paradigm that presents the statistics as such. As discussed above, male rape victims experience harm just the same as female victims, and neither is more or less deserving of support than the other. Thus, there is, in fact, a need to include male rape victims in support services, though this can only happen if it is recognized and accepted that the male-female paradigm is not the only one that exists.

### Feminist Perspective

Considering that the majority of rape victims are female, a popular feminist perspective is viewing rape as a women’s issue. While there is a need to recognize and empower female victims, it should be even more important to do this for all victims, regardless of gender. Those who support this perspective believe that “acknowledging male victims can ‘cover up’ what is happening in



reality... deny a common reality and...obfuscate men's sexual violence toward women" (Stemple "Male Rape and Human Rights" 629). The feminist perspective focuses on the gendered nature of rape, focusing on the common reality of gender inequalities in our society. Because of these inequalities, feminists focus on empowering women and dismantling societal structures that give men power over women.

However, empowering women does not, and should not, come at the expense of ignoring all other rape victims. As a matter of fact, recognizing male victims does not impede on the feminist perspective, but can rather support it. While some feminists believe in the female-specific approach as the best one, others "countered that the complexities of sexual violence must be acknowledged, noting further that the proponents of the female-specific approach to rape have failed to point to concrete evidence that inclusive laws have harmed women or jeopardized the enforcement of rape laws" (Stemple "Male Rape and Human Rights" 629). This proves that it is possible to help all victims without this help coming at the expense of others. The issue of rape extends far beyond the male-female paradigm, and acknowledging this is important.

Furthermore, only focusing on female victims can be harmful to all victims as "it misses male victims but also because it serves to reinforce regressive notions of female vulnerability." (Stemple "The Sexual Victimization of Men in America" 2). Just as the male-female paradigm constantly paints men as aggressors and lacking in "innocence," it also serves to reduce women to always be weak victims. This is an important point to consider for both female empowerment and recognizing male victims. Additionally, in discussing male rape, "it is important to examine feminist theory because it seeks to emphasise the gendered nature of rape" (Javaid 1). In this way, recognizing male victims and promoting feminist theory are crucial to each other. One does not have to be sacrificed for the sake of the other.

## **Literature Review**

For this paper, I consulted fifteen different resources in my research. These resources varied in type, including sites providing statistics and general information on rape victims, web articles detailing the stories of male rape victims, and academic articles on the treatment and experience of male rape victims.

Of the academic articles I consulted, three of these articles were written or co-authored by Lara Stemple. Stemple is an Assistant Dean at the UCLA school of law, and her writings focus on analyzing how male victims are excluded from the law and challenging the standard male perpetrator-female victim paradigm.

One article addressed the sexual victimization of men. This article called upon data and gender stereotypes to more closely examine the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm. She argues that it is “time to move past the male perpetrator and female victim paradigm” and to implement “a gender-conscious analysis of sexual victimization” (Stemple “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America” 7). The paradigm is harmful, reinforcing regressive norms about what it means to be a man or a woman. As such, there needs to be a closer examination of these norms and their impact.

Another article by Stemple discusses female perpetration. Like the previous article, this is also a challenge to the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm. Since men are most commonly associated with perpetrators, a female offender is given less attention and the male victim faces additional barriers. These barriers are due to gender stereotypes that expect men to “interpret sexual victimization by women in a way more consistent with masculinity ideals, such as the idea that men should relish any available opportunity for sex” (Stemple “Sexual Victimization Perpetrated by Women” 6). This article highlights how the treatment of victims differ depending

on their gender and also the gender of their assailant. Due to stereotypes about gender, gender determines whether a victim is more or less deserving of support and whether a rapist is more or less deserving of being brought to justice.

The third article by Stemple discusses male rape in the context of human rights. She notes that practically all international human rights legislation, men are excluded from laws meant to protect people from violence. Instead, these laws focus solely on reducing violence towards and protecting women and children. Men are addressed only as potential perpetrators of violence in such legislation and are seen as “actors who are important to its [violence] reduction” (Stemple “Male Rape and Human Rights” 624). Stemple argues that this consistent exclusion of men as potential victims of violence creates a victim hierarchy that disproportionately prioritizes female victims. Women do make up the majority of victims, but they aren’t the *only* victims. As such, male victims must receive support as well, rather than being excluded and painted as perpetrators.

Like Stemple, other authors of academic articles discuss the exclusion of male victims. For instance, Walfield discusses male rape myths. These myths promote ideas that men always want sex and can’t be raped, or that if they are sexually assaulted, men aren’t affected by it and thus don’t need support. Sleath discussed rape myths as well, finding that the more someone believes a rape myth, the more likely they are to blame the victim for what happened, and the less they believe the perpetrator, especially if the perpetrator is female, deserves to be punished. Sable found that because of these myths and subsequent ideas of what it means to be a man, men are less likely than women to come forward if they are raped.

In addition to the exclusion of male victims, there is also the exclusion of female perpetrators. For instance, many rape laws are structured so that only men can be perpetrators. Weare discusses this in the international context, noting that in England and Wales, the rapist has

to forcibly penetrate the victim in order for the attack to count as rape. As such, a woman forcing a man to penetrate her is not considered rape, and would be prosecuted under a different and less serious offense. The exclusion of male victims is due to “traditional sex script which assigns specific roles to men and women” (Weare 124). This script puts men in the dominant position and thus doesn’t see women as potential perpetrators. As such, cases with female perpetrators simply aren’t taken as seriously, and these women receive significantly less serious punishments as a result.

In addition to these academic articles, I also consulted a few web articles that contain personal accounts of male rape victims. Gallagher, for instance, discusses the experience of men who were raped by women. Like Weare, Gallagher writes from the UK perspective, noting how the gendered distinction in UK rape laws means that what happened to these men isn’t legally rape. As such, the female perpetrators receive considerably less severe sentences, some that don’t even involve jail time.

The structure of laws and the gender expectations that come with that often lead to cases wherein men are forced to deny their own victimization, especially if they were attacked by a woman. They fear being shamed by others since men are expected to be strong and able to fight off a woman. As such, they might deny that the encounter was non-consensual, both to others as well as themselves.

All in all, this variety of articles helps to paint a picture of the perceptions and experiences of male rape victims. They also give important insight into the impact of gender stereotypes and expectations. These discussions will help to formulate my hypothesis on male victims being less likely to be believed.

## **Survey**

In this study, I seek to better understand how people view rape victims of different genders. I also look at how their view of these victims affects how the victims are treated. Due to gender stereotypes, I hypothesize that people will be more likely to believe a female victim than a male one, and that this believability aspect in turn affects the resources and support victims can receive.

### Participants

140 people responded to this survey. The majority were sourced from online survey exchange websites while the rest were students from my school. The websites used for distributing the survey were Survey Sway, Poll Pool, Swap Survey, and Survey Circle. These websites allow you to post your own survey and have others respond to it. In order to get respondents, you must first fill out other surveys. Once you do, you receive a certain number of points, and the more points you have, the more respondents to your own survey you receive. In essence, they act as sites through which researchers can exchange surveys.

In terms of gender, the majority of the participants were female. Ninety-five (67.9%) were female and forty-five (32.1%) were male.

Most participants were young adults between the ages of 18 and 30. Six (4.3%) were under 18. Fifty-nine (42.1%) were between the ages of 18-22. Fifty-two (37.1%) were between the ages of 23-30. Seventeen (12.1%) were between the ages of 31-40. Four (2.9%) were between the ages of 41-50. Two (1.4%) were between the ages of 51-60.

The majority of the participants were liberals. Sixty-two (44.3%) of the participants were liberals. Nineteen (13.6%) were conservatives. Fifty (35.7%) were independents. Nine (6.4%) gave some other answer.

In terms of the participants' highest degree of education, seventy-three (52.1%) had Bachelor's degrees. Twenty-nine (20.7%) had a high school diploma. Twenty-three (16.4%) had

Master's degrees. Eight (5.7%) had PhDs. Six (4.3%) had Associate's degrees. And one (0.7%) answered with 'Pre-University'.

### Method

The survey conducted in this paper was a Google forms survey distributed online. Participants filled out the survey anonymously, only providing details on their gender, age range, political affiliation, and education history. The survey first asked participants whether they believed only women could be victims of rape. This question is to get a general understanding of how people see rape victims.

After that, I posed a series of four questions asking participants to rank how likely they were to believe a certain scenario. These scenarios included the likelihood of participants believing a woman who says she was raped and that she was partially responsible for it, as well as the same two questions except regarding a man. These questions are meant to ascertain whether there are any differences in how people view male and female victims of rape, or if they see them as victims at all.

Next, I gave a set of six statements and asked respondents to either strongly disagree, disagree, be neutral, agree, or strongly agree. These statements included:

1. Victims of rape should be perceived the same regardless of their gender
2. Victims of rape should receive equal amounts of support regardless of their gender
3. Victim support resources that target only one gender are hurtful
4. Both men and women can be perpetrators of rape
5. There is no urgent need for rape support services to include help for male rape victims since their number is small
6. Men aren't affected by rape (or at least not as much as women are)

The first two statements are intended to assess what people think about how victims should be treated. The third is to gain an understanding of how people view victim support services and see if they believe these services are serving all victims to the best of their ability.

The final three statements address certain male rape myths or other beliefs about men who are raped. The fourth statement is a bit similar to the very first question of the survey as it brings into discussion the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm. This statement asks respondents to consider who they can and can't see as a potential perpetrator, which can in turn affect how they view victims. The fifth statement addresses a belief held by some and seeks to understand how many respondents hold the same view as well. The sixth statement poses a male rape myth that can impact how people treat male rape victims. If they aren't seen as being affected by what happened, then fewer resources are offered to them. As such, I wanted to see how many respondents subscribed to this particular belief.

Finally, I asked two short answer questions. One asked whether respondents thought that gender stereotypes play a role in male and female victims being treated differently. As my hypothesis is rooted in gender stereotypes having an impact on the treatment of victims, I wanted to assess how others viewed the issue. The question also addresses what stereotypes respondents believe to play a role, which brings to light certain beliefs about men and women that might make them a more or less sympathetic victim.

The last question asked if respondents saw rape as a women's rights issue or a human rights issue. This is to evaluate how respondents view the issue of rape in general. Addressing it as a women's rights issue means that less attention is focused on male victims. On the other hand, addressing it as a human rights issue means that all victims should be seen as equal, regardless of gender.

I also had a text box where respondents could give any final or additional thoughts they had, though this question was optional.

## Results

### *Survey*

In response to the first question which asked whether respondents believed that only women could be victims of rape, 128 (91.4%) answered 'No' while twelve (8.6%) answered 'Yes.'

The first 'How likely' question asked how likely respondents were to believe a woman who says she was raped. Fifty-two responded with 'Very likely' and seventy-seven responded with 'Likely.' Eleven answered with 'Neutral.' No one answered with 'Unlikely' or 'Very unlikely.'

The second question asked how likely respondents were to believe a man who says he was raped. Forty-seven responded with 'Very likely', seventy responded with 'Likely', fourteen responded with 'Neutral', eight responded with 'Unlikely', and one responded with 'Very unlikely.'

The third question asked how likely respondents were to believe that a woman was partially responsible for being raped. Nine responded with 'Very likely', fourteen responded with 'Likely', sixteen responded with 'Neutral', twenty-four responded with 'Unlikely', and seventy-seven responded with 'Very unlikely'.

The fourth question asked how likely respondents were to believe that a man was partially responsible for being raped. Eight responded with 'Very likely', thirteen responded with 'Likely', twenty-one responded with 'Neutral', twenty-four responded with 'Unlikely', and seventy-four responded with 'Very unlikely.'

The first agree-disagree statement was: Victims of rape should be perceived the same regardless of gender. To this statement, 102 strongly agreed, thirty-two agreed, three were neutral, one disagreed, and two strongly disagreed.



The second statement was: Victims of rape should receive the same amount of support regardless of gender. To this statement, 113 strongly agreed, twenty-three agreed, three were neutral, and one strongly disagreed.

The third statement was: Victim support resources that target only one gender are hurtful. To this statement, forty-eight strongly agreed, forty-two agreed, thirty-one were neutral, fifteen disagreed, and four strongly disagreed.

The fourth statement was: Both men and women can be perpetrators of rape. To this statement, ninety-nine strongly agreed, thirty-five agreed, four were neutral, and two disagreed.

The fifth statement was: There is no urgent need for rape support services to include help for male rape victims since their number is small. To this statement, nine strongly agreed, four agreed, twelve were neutral, twenty-nine disagreed, and eighty-six strongly disagreed.

The sixth statement was: Men aren't affected by rape (or at least not as much as women are). To this statement, four strongly agreed, seventeen agreed, fifteen were neutral, thirty disagreed, and seventy-four strongly disagreed.

The first short answer question asked if respondents thought that gender stereotypes played a role in male and female rape victims being treated differently. To this question, four respondents gave non-answers. Three respondents answered no, believing victims of both genders would have the same believability. One respondent said that rather than stereotypes, the difference in believability came from the "normalisation of the term rape and its association as 'male-only' perpetration."

The remaining respondents answered yes, citing a variety of reasons. These stereotypes included beliefs of men being strong and women being weak. If a man speaks up about rape, then he is considered weak for not being able to stop it from happening. A few brought up the

male perpetrator-female victim paradigm, under which men are seen as the only possible aggressors. Some called on the stereotype of men always wanting sex and thus being less affected. Another respondent answered: “Men are less likely to come forward hence the statistics are biased.”

The final short answer question asked whether rape should be regarded as a human rights issue or a women’s rights issue. There were four non-answers. One person answered that it doesn’t matter as “it’s only a terminology” and the “focus should be put on help, not political naming.” Three people saw rape as a women’s rights issue since the majority of victims are female. Six people considered rape to be both a women’s rights and human rights issue, citing the fact that the victims are predominantly female, but acknowledged there’s a human rights aspect to it as well since men are also affected.

The remaining respondents answered that rape is a human rights issue. Many acknowledged that the victims are primarily female, but that there are male victims as well. For these respondents, all people deserve equal rights regardless of gender. Equality seemed to be the common theme amongst these answers, with respondents stating that “all victims deserve equal resources and to be believed” and that “everyone should be entitled to safety.”

For the final thoughts question, several people provided additional thoughts that furthered the purpose of the survey. One addressed the restrictive nature of the legal definition of rape, which makes it hard for many rape victims, not just men, to get support. Some echoed the answers to the previous question, acknowledging that women are victimized more, but that doesn’t mean that men should be treated differently. One respondent stated that because female rape gets more attention, male rape is less understood. Another answered that victim services can specialize in treating men or women, as long as the needs of both are addressed.

### *Victim Advocate Interview*

In addition to the survey, I also emailed a victim advocate a list of questions regarding gender and rape victims. As a victim advocate works closely with victims, this conversation lets me get a better idea of how rape victims are treated and the support they can receive.

I found this interview particularly interesting because many of the answers she provided contradicted with the responses I got in the survey, as well as the research I conducted, which will be discussed in the next section.

I asked a total of eight questions. The questions are as follows:

*1. How many of the rape victims that you hear from are female? How many are male?*

I asked this to get a better sense of the statistics of rape victims. This helps me to understand who victim support services encounter and work with. The victim advocate informed me that they worked with around 5,000 clients last year, the majority of which were children under 18. She said that 96% of their adult clientele were female. However, she also informed me that many of their child victims were male.

*2. How does the victim's gender impact the treatment they receive from the legal system?*

Here, I wanted to know if gender impacts the treatment of rape victims. However, the victim advocate said that the treatment is not necessarily different and that victims go through the system similarly, wherein the outcome is based on what can be proven.

*3. Are male victims of rape believed less than female victims?*

Similar to the previous question, I was looking to assess how gender impacts how rape victims are perceived. The victim advocate said that it is the circumstances of the crime rather than the gender of the victim that gets questioned the most. In essence, she did not believe gender to be an issue.

4. *If the victim is male and the perpetrator female, does the case receive less attention than if the genders were reversed?*

In this question, I address the prevalence of the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm. Since this paradigm is so widely accepted, I wanted to understand what happens when the roles are reversed. Again, the victim advocate stated that gender probably doesn't have that significant of an impact. She did acknowledge that individual officers might question a female perpetrator-male victim situation and might question males more as to why they didn't stop the perpetrator.

5. *Does a person's gender impact whether they believe rape victims of all genders?*

The victim advocate explained that when children are sexually assaulted, the issue of gender becomes more prominent. For instance, she said that it would be harder to charge a female offender with a child victim as it is harder to prove the offense.

6. *Do male or female victims have a harder time coming forward about a crime and discussing the incident?*

With this question, I wanted to see if gender played a role in victims speaking up about what happened to them. After all, in order for a victim to receive support, they have to seek it. The victim advocate answered that both genders have a hard time coming forward, with shame being the most common reason for people not coming forward. She did acknowledge that this is a bigger issue amongst men.

7. *Do you think that there are enough resources available for victims of both genders? Do you think that because male rape victims make up a small minority of overall victims, support resources for them are lacking?*

A part of how victims are treated is related to what resources are available to help

them in the first place. As such, I wished to assess whether there was a difference between genders. The victim advocate explained that funding for rape victims was lacking as a whole. She also answered that those who work with victims are trained to work with all genders, so there isn't a service gap.

8. *What do you think can be done to dismantle rape myths that perpetuate the idea that only women can be raped?*

I wanted to address one of the most prominent and harmful male rape myths with this question, as this myth prevents males from being seen as victims at all. The victim advocate acknowledged that this myth is harmful to men, but saw the more prominent issue being with rape victims in general. She answered that we should focus on the fact that people think that it is alright to take advantage of others, and that by doing so, all genders would be impacted.

Something else of note is that she acknowledged that she saw I was trying to dismantle the stereotype of only women being victims. To her, this line of thinking misses the mark since rape victims are primarily women.

### *Limitations*

Given the format of my survey, there were some limitations that might affect the accuracy of the results. First of all, the sites that I posted the survey on found respondents but could not guarantee that they would fill out the survey seriously. Respondents get points for filling out surveys, but there is nothing stopping them from just putting in random answers. For instance, some respondents inputted just a dash in the short answer questions so that they could submit the survey.

Another limitation was that I included a 'neutral' option in the 'how likely' and

‘agree/disagree’ sections. I should not have done this as this option is not indicative of anything substantial. In order to get a more accurate view of the respondent’s opinions, I should have excluded this option entirely.

One final limitation is that I only talked with one victim advocate. As such, I only got a single perspective whereas I got over a hundred with the survey. To get a better idea of what victim advocates believe, I should’ve consulted more advocates to get a variety of perspectives.

## **Discussion**

The results of my survey and my research both support my hypothesis of a gendered difference in the way rape victims are treated. On the other hand, the victim advocate interview I conducted significantly disagreed with my hypothesis, my survey, and my research. I will synthesize the results of my survey with my findings from my research. Then, I will consider the victim advocate’s response to this information and postulate why this disagreement occurs.

The majority of survey respondents believed that both men and women could be victims of rape, but twelve believed that only women could be victims. While this latter number is small, it still speaks to the existence of those that view women as the only possible rape victims. At the beginning of this essay, I addressed how the legal definition of rape, gender stereotypes, and the commonly accepted male-female paradigm can contribute to such a belief.

It is also of note that most respondents believed that both men and women could be victims. This would appear to contradict my previous findings of the overwhelmingly dominant male perpetrator-female victim paradigm. These respondents seem to agree in part with the victim advocate, who claimed that both male and female victims were seen and supported by victim services. However, unlike the advocate, these respondents also called out how gender stereotypes would inform that paradigm, claiming that while they believe both men and women can be victims,

many oppose such a belief. While I cannot say for sure why this is, I can make several guesses. For instance, the majority of respondents are between the ages of 18 and 30. People of these ages represent a generation that is characterized as thinking that “gender no longer defines destiny or behavior as it once did” (“Millennials and Gender: A Major Attitude Shift”). This means that people of this generation are more likely to challenge stereotypes about gender that say the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm is the only logical one. As such, this could be why so many respondents answered ‘yes’ to that question while still raising concerns that others would answer the opposite.

For my first two ‘How likely’ questions, I asked after the believability of male and female victims. In response to this, 129 respondents answered strongly agree or agree for believing a female victim whereas 117 responded as such for male victims. Additionally, while no respondents said they would not believe a female victim, nine answered that they wouldn’t believe a male victim. I found similar results when addressing victim-blaming, with 101 respondents answering they wouldn’t blame a woman for being raped and 98 saying they wouldn’t blame a man. While the gap between these figures isn’t significant, my research findings are. These findings prove the existence of a gendered difference in the perception of rape victims.

My research echoed my findings in this gendered difference, and also discussed the impact of the gender of the perpetrator as well. For instance, a study on the acceptance of male rape myths found that a third of respondents “would have a hard time believing that a male could be raped by a female” (Walfield 18). This is due to the expectations of men to be strong and women to be weak, the latter thus incapable of overpowering the former. As such, men are often not even considered actual victims, which adds on to the blame that they receive. The study cited an earlier one on the same issue and found that “nearly half of the men agreed that a male victim was to blame for being

raped by a female and that a male should be able to escape a woman, whereas one in five men indicated it is not possible for a male to be raped by either a male or female, and a male is to be blamed for being raped by another male” (Walfield 5). This proves that gender stereotypes impact how victims are perceived. Men are expected to be able to fend off a potential rapist, making them more likely to be blamed and thus far less sympathetic as victims.

There can be significant harms that come with these beliefs. For instance, minimizing male victims “can impose regressive expectations about masculinity on men and boys. The belief that men are unlikely victims promotes a counterproductive construct of what it means to ‘be a man’” (Stemple “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America” 2). When the expectation for men is that they should be able to fend off attackers, the inability to do so thus imposes the belief that they have somehow failed as a man. These expectations of “male invincibility are constraining for men and boys” and “may also harm women and girls by perpetuating regressive gender norms” (Stemple “The Sexual Victimization of Men in America” 2). Similar to the way that men are bound to expectations of being strong and able to fend off attackers, women are seen as weak and more likely to be victims. These expectations are regressive and harmful for both genders.

Despite these findings, the victim advocate seemed to disagree fundamentally with these gendered differences. When I asked about the believability of male and female rape victims, she answered that the circumstances of the assault would impact believability, but the gender of the victim would not. This answer echoed all of her other responses, which continued to assert her belief that male and female victims simply do not receive different treatment despite all my research findings to the contrary.

I also addressed the impact of the gender of the perpetrator with the victim advocate. Again, while she did acknowledge that individual officers might question male victims more, she didn’t



believe that a case with a female perpetrator and male victim would be handled any differently than one with the genders reversed.

In my survey, when I posed the statement: “Both men and women can be perpetrators of rape” only two respondents disagreed. This shows a general understanding among respondents that anyone can be a perpetrator and anyone can be a victim. What was more telling was with my first short response question, which asked after gender stereotypes. As previously discussed, several respondents commented on the commonly accepted male perpetrator-female victim paradigm, noting that deviation from the paradigm would be met with dubiousness. Under this paradigm, only men can be aggressors and only women can be victims.

Through my research, I’ve learned that cases with a female perpetrator are less likely to be reported than those with a male perpetrator, and that “when it is reported, law enforcement officers believe intervention to be less warranted than if the perpetrator is male,” meaning that “female perpetrators are less likely to be charged and prosecuted” (Stemple “Sexual victimization perpetrated by women” 8). This is an indicator that gender does play a significant role in the treatment of both victims and perpetrators, depending on their gender. By treating female perpetrators more leniently, law enforcement is essentially sending the message that male offenders are more deserving of punishment than female offenders and that female victims are more deserving of support than male victims.

Many of my respondents agreed that gender stereotypes would play a role in this differing treatment. My research supports this, finding that women are seen as more sympathetic victims. On the other hand, “for then men who were assaulted by women, some of them are told that they should be grateful,” which is harmful as this “inaccurately regards the incident as ‘sex’ when it indeed was rape” (Fischl). The stereotype of men always wanting and enjoying sex contributes to

this treatment. If men always find sex enjoyable, then there is no reason for them to complain about a woman forcing them to have sex. This in turn plays into the myth that men can't be raped and that all sexual encounters are sex and not rape.

My research also yielded of male rape victims failing to obtain legal support simply because of their gender. In one such example, a judge in New York questioned a male victim who had been forced to have sex to the point of ejaculation with a woman, asking '[W]hat's your problem? How could you not have liked this?'" (Walfield 18). Questions like this demonstrate the belief that men always enjoy sex, that it is inconceivable that a man wouldn't want to have sex with a woman. Simply put, a woman forcing a man to have sex with her simply isn't a problem.

Another telling example comes from a researcher who interviewed high school boys about unwanted sexual experiences. She highlights the case of a boy who was drunk when a girl forced him to have sex with her. The researcher asked him about what would have "happened if the genders were swapped, if she'd been drunk and *he'd* been the sober aggressor," to which the boy responded that in that case he'd be expelled and in jail, since he was "basically unconscious" and didn't consent (Orenstein). This is a particularly telling statement. The only difference between these two scenarios, the one that happened and the proposed hypothetical, is the gender of each person. Yet, the outcome is completely different. In the boy's case, he still sees the girl that raped him at school. She's faced no consequences and the boy was scorned the one time he tried telling someone about what happened. On the other hand, in the hypothetical, he'd be severely punished and have to face legal consequences. Again, this demonstrates the significant impact of gender on the treatment of both victims and perpetrators.

An important dimension of these gender-based differences is in the legal definition of rape. As discussed earlier, up until very recently, only women could be raped based on the words of the

law. Even with an updated definition that includes men in the category of possible victims, with penetration on the part of the aggressor being written into the law, only men can be aggressors. This means that cases with a female perpetrator and male victim aren't legally considered rape. Such a limiting definition can influence the experiences of victims. One respondent even mentioned this in their response, explaining how restrictive laws meant that male victims aren't able to come forward since legal officers wouldn't be able to do anything for them.

With this information, I can begin to speculate as to why gender stereotypes about men as aggressors and women as victims persist despite evidence suggesting that the two are almost equally likely to occupy either role. Legal decisions and laws inform the way people behave. Similar to this, it would also be reasonable to assume that laws inform the way that people think. If people have faith in the country's laws, and they don't look too deeply into the issues that laws address, then they could assume that what is in the law is the truth. If laws only address male perpetrators and female victims, then people might believe that there are only male perpetrators and female victims. Of course, this is only speculation on my part. What remains true is that gender plays a significant role in what people believe and what laws allow for.

Gender is the main factor separating a crime from being classified as rape or as sexual assault. Gender is the main reason that people tell male victims that they can't be raped or should be grateful for the experience. While I do agree that the circumstances of each incident play a role as well, I think that the victim advocate may have been too quick to write off the impact of gender on the treatment of the victim and perpetrator.

In order to further assess how gender impacts the perception of rape victims, I posed several questions on support services for victims. Thirteen respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there's no urgent need for rape support services to include help for male rape victims since their

number is small. Twenty-one respondents strongly agreed or agreed that men aren't impacted by rape (or at least not as much as women are). I posit that these beliefs happen for the same reason as the lack of legal support. That is, the stereotype that men are always open to sex. The perpetuation of this stereotype "suggests that [men] do not experience negative emotional or psychological consequences when they are compelled to penetrate a woman" (Weare 122). If people don't believe that men experience negative consequences, then they also won't believe that there's a need to include men in rape victim support services. While it was a minority of respondents that agreed to these beliefs, their numbers were not insubstantial.

It is even more important to assess the beliefs of victim support workers, as they are the ones who are meant to provide help and support. When I asked the victim advocate whether resources for male victims were lacking, she responded that those who work with victims are trained to help both genders, so there are no discrepancies in the support that men and women receive. My research seems to disagree with this, holding to the stereotype discussed above. For instance, in cases with a female perpetrator and male victim, "professionals often fail to recognize that this abuse can be damaging, perhaps informed by the stereotype that men have an insatiable desire for sex" (Stemple "Sexual Victimization Perpetrated by Women" 8). It is one thing for the general public to believe that men aren't affected when their rapist is a woman, but another entirely for professionals to hold to this belief as well. If the people who are meant to help victims don't believe that male victims actually need help, then these victims aren't likely to receive that help. Instead, there is a "culture of denial" among professionals "in fields such as mental health, social work, public health, and law, as a range of scholars have demonstrated...that fails to recognize the seriousness of the abuse" (Stemple "Sexual Victimization Perpetrated by Women" 7). This contradicts what the victim advocate told me. Rather than having victim support trained to help all

victims as she suggested, there seems to be a belief among professionals that only female victims need support.

As prevalent as these beliefs might be, they simply aren't true. For instance, studies have "found that men were reporting the same consequences of rape as female victims, including negative mental health, inability to trust and form relationships, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and suicide attempts" (Gallagher). This means that men and women need to have equal access to victim support services. In my own survey, all respondents except for four strongly agreed or agreed that rape victims need to receive the same amount of support regardless of gender. The victim advocate does not seem to disagree with this either, believing that support services are ready to help both men and women. However, research has found that not only do men "deal with similar issues females face when reporting such as disbelief but also contend with structural barriers due to lack of services and support systems" (Walfield 3). This suggests that rape victim support services are built in a way that primarily focuses on women. While this makes sense since women make up the majority of rape victims, this support should not come at the expense of ignoring other victims.

The stereotypes that drive this lack of support only makes things worse. For instance, "for some men, the dominant societal and gendered constructions around masculinity and the traditional sex script exacerbated their emotional trauma" (Weare 124). This differentiates the experiences of male victims from those of female victims. This means that in some cases, there need to be support services that not only include male victims, but specifically focus on them, just as there are support services that specifically focus on female victims. Thus, there is a "need for greater sensitivity toward male rape victims and...even though victims are primarily women, services could be tailored to male victims and their different needs" (Sable 160). This seems to be

what the victim advocate suggests already exists, which could be why she believes there is no service gap between male and female victims. Of course, all genders receiving the support they need would be ideal. However, from my research, it is clear that this ideal situation does not exist.

Through my survey, I learned that many of my respondents agreed with my hypothesis that gender stereotypes influence the perception and treatment of victims. My research also supports this, pointing out how male victims are believed less than female victims, seen as less sympathetic and not needing support. However, the victim advocate I interviewed consistently denied these gendered-based differences throughout all the questions I posed to her. What was even more interesting was that she acknowledged my intention of dismantling the stereotype of only women being victims, but that this “misses the mark.” She acknowledges that men are victims, but asked: “what good is just focusing on that when it is a crime primarily perpetrated upon females.” This makes me think of the last question I posed on my survey, asking whether respondents view rape as a women’s rights or a human rights issue. While the majority of respondents answered with human rights, the response from the victim advocate seems to echo the feminist perspective on rape, which holds to the belief that “acknowledging male victims can ‘cover up’...a common reality and...obfuscate men’s sexual violence toward women” (Stemple “Male Rape and Human Rights” 628). This perspective seems to believe that focusing on male victims will detract from the attention to female victims. As such, since women make up the vast majority of rape victims, proponents of the feminist approach want to focus on female victims, perhaps at the expense of male victims.

I think there are different ways to consider the feminist approach. It is true that the majority of rape victims are female, and I do agree that these victims deserve proper support and attention. As such, I can see why proponents of the feminist approach would want to focus solely on female

victims. However, this approach can also produce significant harm. For instance, due to framing rape as solely a women's rights issue, male victims have "typically been downplayed or ignored by the scientific community" (Walfield 2). Men are in the minority when it comes to rape victims, but through this approach, they are still an entire category of victims that are discounted. As discussed above, ignoring these victims produces significant harm as they have a harder time getting justice for what was done to them and seeking out resources for support. Additionally, focusing specifically on female victims "reifies hierarchies that treat some victims as more sympathetic than others, perpetuates norms that essentialize women as victims, and imposes unhealthy expectation about masculinity on men and boys" (Stemple "Male Rape and Human Rights" 606). Focusing specifically on female victims sends the message that they are more important than male victims. This goes beyond simply responding to the fact that women make up the majority of victims. The differences in how victims are treated might speak to thoughts on how deserving of support a victim might be. With the stereotype of women being weak and unable to defend themselves, they are seen as more sympathetic. On the other hand, men are expected to be able to defend themselves, so they are blamed more, especially if their assailant is a woman. Gender expectations such as these are the ones I seek to address with my research. Through my research, I also learned that proponents of the feminist approach view the dismantling of these stereotypes and the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm as "challenging the harmful status quo" (Stemple "Male Rape and Human Rights" 635). Under this view, discussing harm done to men by women shifts focus away from tackling the patriarchy to secure rights for women. The victim advocate had an answer similar to this, emphasizing that rape is primarily perpetrated by men on women, so it is not prudent to bring so much attention to male victims. My critique of these arguments is that they promote a false claim of mutual exclusiveness: advocating for

women's rights and challenging patriarchal structures cannot occur alongside recognizing male victims and female perpetrators. I do not believe this claim to be true.

It is possible to promote women's rights and recognize male victims at the same time. Dismantling the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm and bringing focus to male victims does not have to mean taking attention away from female victims. In fact, addressing harmful gender norms and critiquing the female-specific approach to rape can have benefits for everyone, regardless of gender. For instance, the female-specific approach has "the unintended consequence of reaffirming women as defenseless victims in need of protection" (Stemple "Male Rape and Human Rights" 635). When women are the only possible victims according to the law, then they are seen as weaker. There is a subsequent imbalance between women and men, with the former being painted as more vulnerable. Including both in the legal language begins to eliminate this imbalance, showing that all genders can be vulnerable. Further analysis and critique of the female-specific approach allows us to "evaluate the extent to which feminism is fulfilling its aim of nourishing gender equality, and how broader feminist theory could facilitate the investigation of male rape" (Javaid 2). Under the female-specific approach, men are often excluded as potential victims. This approach instead sticks to the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm. Under such a paradigm, men are painted as strong aggressors and women are painted as weak and vulnerable. This situation does not seem indicative of gender equality. However, this does not mean that a feminist approach to rape is ineffective and harmful.

I believe that it is important to draw a distinction between the female-specific approach and the feminist approach. The latter does not signify focusing only on women as the former does, but rather on tackling the idea of gender altogether. In order to fully confront these gendered power imbalances, there must be "an accurate understanding of rape and a thorough critique of gender



assumptions—and should not and cannot come at the expense of failing to account for other victims” (Stemple “Male Rape and Human Rights” 646). It is important to dismantle regressive stereotypes for women and for men, which can be beneficial for both and still meet feminist goals without excluding an entire group of victims. In the study involving high school boys, the researcher commented: “if a boy is supposed to deny his own violation, how can he feel compassion for—or even recognize—a girl’s?” (Orenstein). Excluding a group of victims in order to focus more on another does not do anyone any good. This only serves to drive a wedge between these groups, with one being deemed less important than the other. As the researcher comments, if one group is ignored in favor of the other, it is difficult for there to be any compassion and understanding between the two. Instead, this serves to promote stereotypes of men being strong and unsusceptible to harm and women being weak. The victim advocate seemed concerned that a focus on male victims would be harmful to women, but this isn’t true. Bringing focus to one group does not mean removing focus from another. Again, this situation is not mutually exclusive. Rather, by giving equal attention to both groups puts them next to each other as equals.

## **Conclusion**

Rape is a serious crime. However, victims of rape are never looked upon as favorably as victims of other violent crimes. There is a trend of blaming victims for the rape, believing they somehow asked for it or deserved it. In tackling this harmful and false stereotypes, many feminists claim rape as a women’s rights issue. As such, they take a female-specific approach to rape, concentrating solely on empowering women and supporting female rape victims. While there is nothing wrong with this on its own, such an approach becomes problematic when it isolates and excludes all other victims, sometimes going so far as to deny their existence. Women do make up the vast majority of rape victims, and the majority of perpetrators are male. There is a history of

the subordination of women under the patriarchy that needs to be addressed and dismantled. However, none of this makes the male victim any less deserving of justice and the female perpetrator any less deserving of punishment.

In the beginning, I posed a question as to the impact of gender on the treatment of rape victims. I hypothesized that the differing gender stereotypes for men and women would result in rape victims being treated differently. My research supported this hypothesis.

Past studies have found that men are often less likely to be believed than women. This is not as much to do with the credibility of each gender, but rather the stereotypes surrounding sex. For instance, there is a stereotype that men are always willing to have sex. As such, cases with a female perpetrator and male victim are not seen as instances of rape, but rather of consensual sex. In this way, male victims are completely disregarded. There are also expectations of masculine strength, leading people to find it questionable that a man was raped. On the other hand, women are seen as weak. They are not what people have in mind when they think about sexual predators. As such, to many the idea that a woman could be a rapist is inconceivable.

Something that exacerbates this difference in the treatment of female and male victims is the legal definition of rape. Up until 2013 in the United States, only a woman could be raped and only a man could be a rapist according to the law. The update to the definition now makes no distinction in gender when it comes to victims. However, as the definition still requires penetration on the part of the rapist, the law still essentializes rapists as men. This has troubling implications for the male victim and female perpetrator. As some web articles discussed, cases such as this are prosecuted under a different law, one with less serious ramifications for the rapist. This is troubling as it promotes the idea that a female rapist is less deserving of punishment than a man, that a male victim is less deserving of justice than a woman. This idea that what a person deserves is based on

their gender goes against the basic tenets of gender equality.

With the gendered nature of rape laws and statistics showing the majority of rape victims to be female, it makes sense that many feminists would view rape as a women's issue. Three of my respondents and the victim advocate I interviewed held onto such a belief. The victim advocate in particular seemed opposed to my attempts to shed light on male victims and analyze the gendered nature of the treatment of rape victims. She went so far as to ask me what good it did to focus on male victims when the majority are female.

Despite having come across mentions of the female-specific approach to rape in my research, this answer was not one that I was expecting. After all, the grand majority of my respondents viewed rape as a human rights issue. Many acknowledged that while the majority of victims are female, men can be victims as well and thus deserve equal support. However, they also acknowledged that men don't always receive this support. There are often systemic (such as the law) or societal barriers (such as belief in rape myths) that prevent men from receiving support and justice. The victim advocate does not seem to believe in the existence of these barriers, at least not as far as I can tell from the answers she provided. Throughout the questions, she maintained that there is little if any difference in how male and female victims are treated. This was interesting since all my research refuted this.

While I cannot speak to why the victim advocate didn't believe there was a difference in the way male and female victims are treated, I have a few guesses as to why she reacted to my attempts to shed light on male victims with such reluctance. Proponents of the female-specific approach hold to the belief that focusing on male victims will be harmful to female victims. With women making up the majority of victims, they should be the recipient of all the attention and support resources. However, this approach seems to be operating on the belief that there is only a

certain amount of resources to be divided up or given to one group entirely. While this might be true for monetary purposes, it does not also hold true for sympathy and attention. There is no need for one group of victims to be seen as more sympathetic than another. If we address rape as a human rights issue, then we can find ways to help all victims. There is no need to disregard one group for the benefit of the other.

Despite the victim advocate's answers, I have found through extensive research that the treatment of rape victims is heavily gendered. The gender of a victim plays a crucial role in whether they are believed, how much they are blamed, and whether they can even legally call what happened to them rape. Gender stereotypes create ideas of men being less affected by rape than women. This in turn creates a hierarchy of victims, with women being seen as more sympathetic and thus higher on the hierarchy, and men being seen as less sympathetic and thus lower. However, it is important to keep in mind that men are not the only ones that face damaging gender stereotypes. There are ideas about women tempting men into having sex, ideas that if a woman is raped, she must have invited it somehow. Whether it's for men or women, these false beliefs that lead to victim-blaming or the victim not receiving adequate support are deeply rooted in gender. As such, it is important to consider both male and female victims, the way that gender stereotypes are applied to them, and the different ways that they are treated based on those stereotypes. Ignoring one group of victims does a disservice to both, as all victims need to be considered in order to achieve a complete and comprehensive idea of how to address the issue.

Through my research, I've discussed and analyzed the impact of gender stereotypes on the treatment of victims. Doing so has sparked an interest in the gendered nature of rape laws. The way that these laws seem to isolate men and women as perpetrators and victims respectively is both curious and concerning. It raises questions as to how these laws came to be and the extent of

their impact on gender stereotypes and the beliefs that inform the treatment of rape victims. It would be of interest to evaluate the influence of rape laws on the persistence of gender stereotypes about aggressors and victims. Further analysis of this topic could prove useful in understanding the legal origins of differential treatment for male and female victims. Deconstruction of these laws can serve as a way to promote equality and ensure that victims are all treated the same regardless of their gender.

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