Boglárka Nyúl

„No means no"

Rape myths acceptance and the perception of rape

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Introduction

Although victim blaming and rape myths are widespread when it comes to public reactions to (media reports and public opinion of rape cases in Hungary, little is known about the connection between rape myths aícceptance and the evaluation of different rape cases. The goal of this PhD dissertation was to understand which situational and attitudinal factors affect whether people blame the victim and label a case as rape. In addition, our study examines rape and rape myths acceptance in Hungary, which is, on the one hand, a highly gender unequal social context and on the other hand, social psychological research on this topic is largely missing.

Although rape affects millions of people worldwide, the exact number is unknown. One out of 20 women experienced rape in her lifetime according to the estimations of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Moreover, it is estimated that only 11 out of 100 000 people report rape to the police, and this number greatly varies among countries (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Whether or not a victim of rape reports the case to the police is influenced by rape myths acceptance of the person and the society.

Rape myths are descriptive and prescriptive beliefs about rape that serve to deny and justify men's aggression against women (Bohner et al., 1998) and trivialize its effects on the victim (Brownmiller, 1975). They constitute a specific domain of sexism that contributes to sexual aggression and coercion (Brownmiller, 1975), and their main function is to deny its pervasiveness and structural causes (Forbes, Adam-Curtis, & White, 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Rape myth acceptance functions as a cognitive schema that influences how people interpret social information (Greger et al., 2007). Those who endorse rape myths more, are

more likely to identify women's friendly behavior as sexually teasing (Willan & Pollard, 2003), less likely to help rape victims (Foster & Kidd, 2014), less likely to suggest rape victims to report the rape (Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2004), and less likely to label forced sex as rape (Burt & Albin, 1981; Norris & Cubbins, 1992; Peterson & Mehlenhard, 2004).

In the dissertation, I examined three main topics related to the social psychology of rape (see Figure 1). First, I wanted to get an understanding of how rape myths acceptance relates to evaluation of rape cases, how this relation is affected by the stereotypicality of the cases, and how does rape myths bias the perception of rape cases in itself or through different components. Second, I examined different factors that could serve as excuses or blames for perpetrators or for victims in the evaluation of rape cases. Third, I focused on the wider picture, and examined how rape myths acceptance is embedded into the wider social system which pertains status quo and gender inequality, and therefore focused on group-based male-entitlement in the context of rape evaluations.
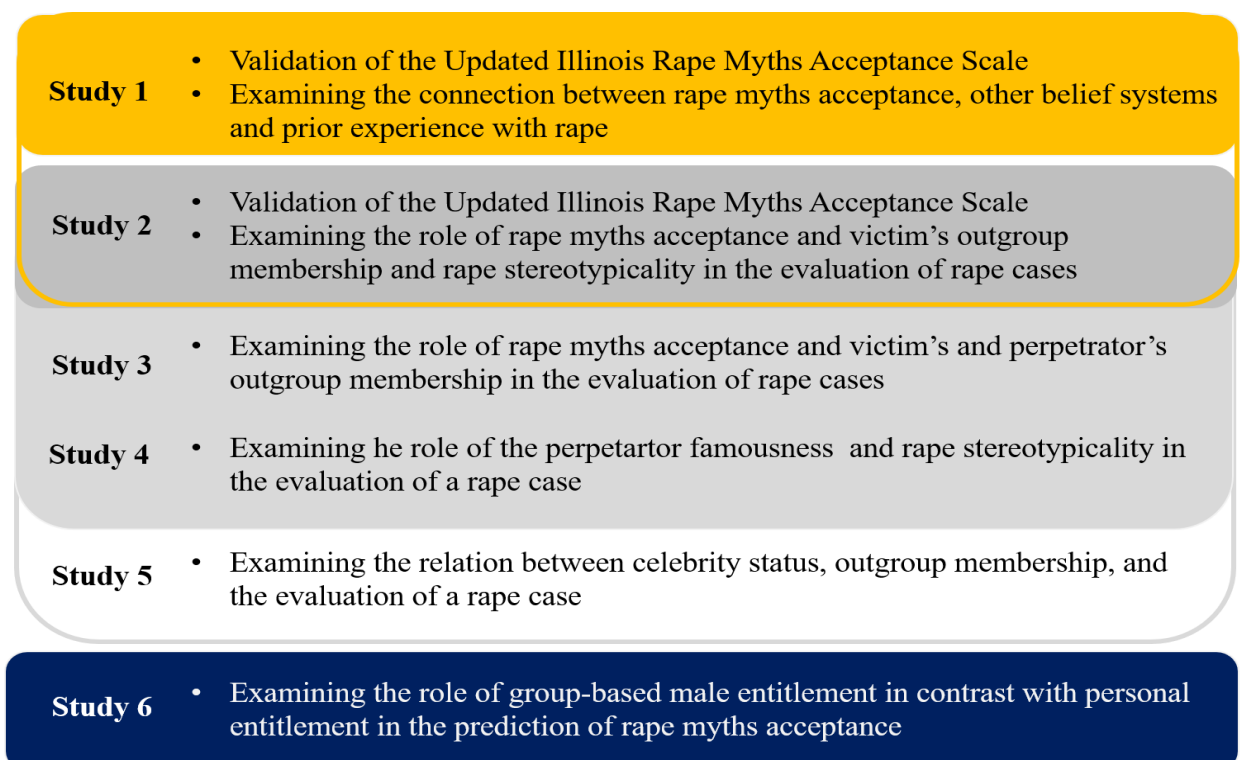
Study 1	• Validation of the Updated Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale • Examining the connection between rape myths acceptance, other belief systems and prior experience with rape
Study 2	• Validation of the Updated Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale • Examining the role of rape myths acceptance and victim's outgroup membership and rape stereotypicality in the evaluation of rape cases
Study 3	• Examining the role of rape myths acceptance and victim's and perpetrator's outgroup membership in the evaluation of rape cases
Study 4	• Examining he role of the perpetartor famousness and rape stereotypicality in the evaluation of a rape case
Study 5	• Examining the relation between celebrity status, outgroup membership, and the evaluation of a rape case
Study 6	• Examining the role of group-based male entitlement in contrast with personal entitlement in the prediction of rape myths acceptance

Figure 1 Aims of the Studies

1. Exploring rape myths acceptance

In Study 1, the aim was twofold: on one hand we wanted to adapt a scale to be able to measure RMA and explore its correlates, on the other hand, we wanted to explore how experience with rape relates to rape myths acceptance in a society, where victim blaming is an everyday experience. we examined the reliability and validity of the Hungarian translation of the Updated Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale (UIRMAS), that is, in a social context with weak feminist movement, scoring relatively poorly on gender equality measures.

For this we conducted a confirmative factor analyses to assess the structural validity of the scale and identified the original factors of UIRMAS on a large convenience ($N = 758$) sample. We confirmed the adequacy of the five-factor solution of the rape myth acceptance scale established the scale's convergent, construct, and discriminant validity. Although differences were small, our results supported the hypotheses that men accepted rape myths more, people with higher rape myth acceptance endorsed hostile sexism and benevolent sexism more, and in line with previous research, people with higher rape myth acceptance believed more in a just world (e.g. European Commission, 2016; Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2004; Parti, 2002).

After the validation, we compared the level of rape myths acceptance between survivors, unimpacted people, and those who are affected by rape through a close relation. We

found that those with prior experience with rape (being a survivor or impacted through a close relation) were less acceptant of rape myths (see Figure 2).
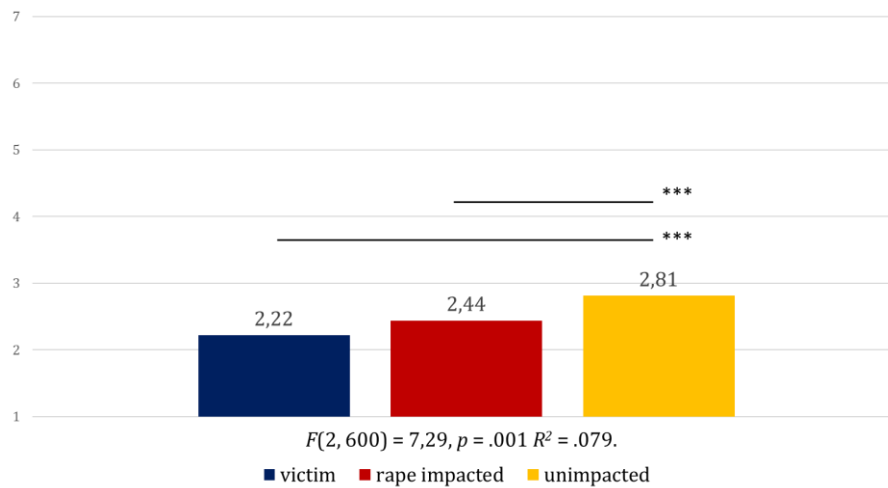

Figure 2 The relation between UIRMA and prior experiences regarding rape

This result suggests either that surviving or knowing someone who was raped decreases rape myths acceptance or that those who accept rape myths less, label their own or others' experience as rape, and rape victims may be more likely to share their trauma with people who endorse rape myths less. The importance of these result is, that these individuals can be the strongest potential allies of survivors in bringing about social change, which is particularly important in a gender unequal social context.

2. Situational factors that bias the evaluation of rape cases

Group membership of the perpetrator and the victim can produce bias in how a rape case is perceived and evaluated (George & Martínez, 2002; Harrison et al., 2008; Bal & van den Bos, 2010; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; McKimmie, Masser, & Bongiorno, 2014). This can be explained by social identity theory suggesting that people are motivated to see members of their ingroup more positively than members of the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Previous research has shown that people blame an outgroup perpetrator more than an ingroup perpetrator (George & Martínez, 2002; Harrison et al., 2008; Bal & van den Bos,

2010; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003), and blame an ingroup victim less than a victim belonging to an out-group (Harrison et al., 2008).

However, previous research found that stereotypical rape scenarios are rare (Bongiorno, McKimmie, & Masser, 2016); still, people tend to label cases as rape and see it more certain if the case fits the stereotype. It is in this case that they evaluate the perpetrator harshly and blame the victim less (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994). If rape is not stereotypical, people are more likely to blame the victim and not label the case as rape (Sheldon & Parent, 2002).

Knight, Giuliano, and Sanchez-Ross (2001) found that perception of rape is influenced by the perpetrator's celebrity status as well: famous perpetrators were evaluated more positively than non-famous ones. Furthermore, participants recommended shorter sentences, considered the perpetrators more reliable and thought that victims enjoyed the rape more if the perpetrators were celebrities.

Therefore, the aim of Study 2-5 was to examine the situational factors that connects to the evaluation of rape cases, such as stereotypicality of the case, outgroup membership of the victim and the perpetrator, and famousness of the perpetrator.

In Study 2, using a large online sample which is demographically similar to the Hungarian population in terms of gender, age, education, and settlement type ($N = 1007$) we examined whether rape myth acceptance predicted uncertain rape cases more strongly than indisputable ones, considering that rape in its stereotypical form is condemned by all members of society, but cases do not always get labelled as rape when they are less stereotypical.

We used a within subject experimental design with an uncertain rape case with a medium status outgroup victim, an undisputable rape case, and an uncertain rape case where both perpetrator and victim were ingroup members.

Firstly, we found that rape myth acceptance predicted the evaluation of both rape scenarios, but the prediction was stronger when the rape was uncertain (see Supplementary material 1). These findings align in line with previous research (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russel, 2007) that when rape cases are uncertain – i.e. they don't fit to the stereotypical rape scenario which is in fact the case most of the time – rape myths affect people's way of thinking about the case even more, resulting in stronger victim blaming and the excusing of the perpetrator (see Figure 3).
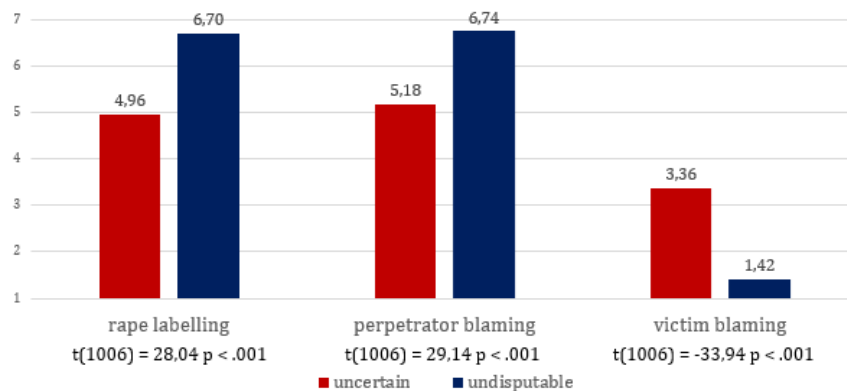

Figure 3 Difference in the evaluation of uncertain and undisputable rape cases

Secondly, we found that when the victim is a medium-status outgroup member, people tend to blame her more and label the case less as rape. In line with previous findings (e.g. Bongiorno et al., 2016) these results suggest that ingroup positivity and group membership has an effect on how people evaluate rape cases, when those are uncertain (see Figure 4).
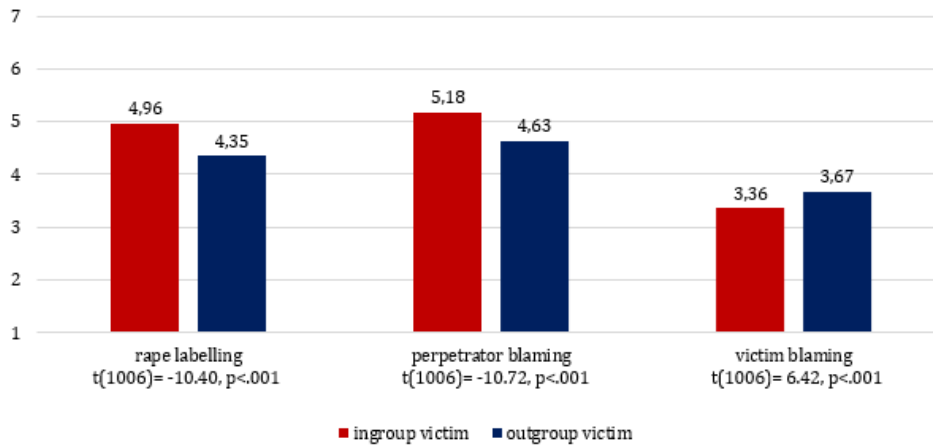
Figure 4 Difference in the evaluation of rape cases with an ingroup or with an outgroup victim

In Study 3, we examined the effect of either the victim's or the perpetrator's low status outgroup membership on the evaluation of an uncertain rape case in which they are involved. We conducted an online survey with a nationally representative sample ($N = 1068$) with a between subject experimental design with three conditions: (1) ingroup victim and ingroup perpetrator, (2) ingroup victim and outgroup perpetrator, and (3) outgroup victim and ingroup perpetrator. We expected harsher evaluations of low status perpetrators and stronger victim blaming of low status victims.

In contrast with our expectations, we found no main effect of the conditions in the evaluation. In fact, we found that the low status outgroup victim was blamed less for the rape, than victims in the other conditions (see Figure 5). These results seem to contradict the findings of Study 2, but they may be explained by perceptions of a victim's lower group status and the content of the stereotypes about Roma women. According to common stereotypes, Roma women may be seen not as a threatening outgroup, but those who deserve pity, who are miserable and less intelligent (Bernáth & Messing, 2001). If this stereotype prevailed, this can explain why participants blamed the Roma victim less.
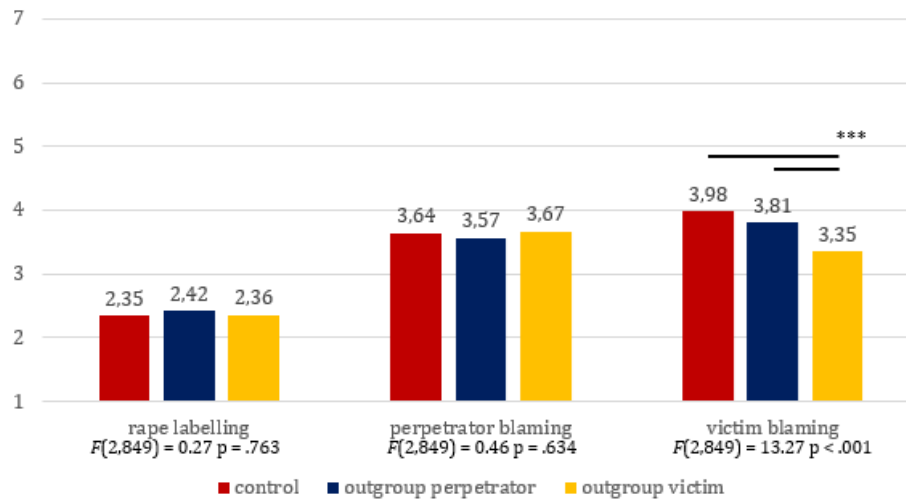
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Figure 5 Difference in rape evaluation between the conditions

In Study 4, we examined the much-publicized real-life rape case of Hungarian swimming coach, László Kiss that took place 55 years before it was publicly revealed. We tested whether people's opinion about the coach's rape case was affected by rape myth acceptance and the perception of the perpetrator as a successful person. We hypothesized that RMA would predict a higher importance of the perpetrator's success in labelling the case as rape (in line with Eyssel & Bohner, 2011; Süssenbach, Bohner, & Eyssel, 2012) and in the moral judgement of the reactions to the rape case, such as its denial by the perpetrator. We also hypothesized that RMA would directly predict labelling the case as rape (Eyssel & Bohner, 2011).

We conducted two online surveys to reveal this connection at two different points in time: we used a convenience sampling method and collected data from a student pool and via social media in Study 4A ($N = 870$), when the case was still ambiguous because the perpetrator denied it; then after the perpetrator admitted his crime, we collected the data for Study 4B ($N = 105$) among undergraduate students.

In line with our predictions, using Structural Equation Modelling, we found that in the uncertain context of Study 4A, rape myth acceptance and the perception of the perpetrator as

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a successful person predicted whether respondents labelled the incident as rape, and how the perpetrator's reactions were judged morally (see Figure 6).
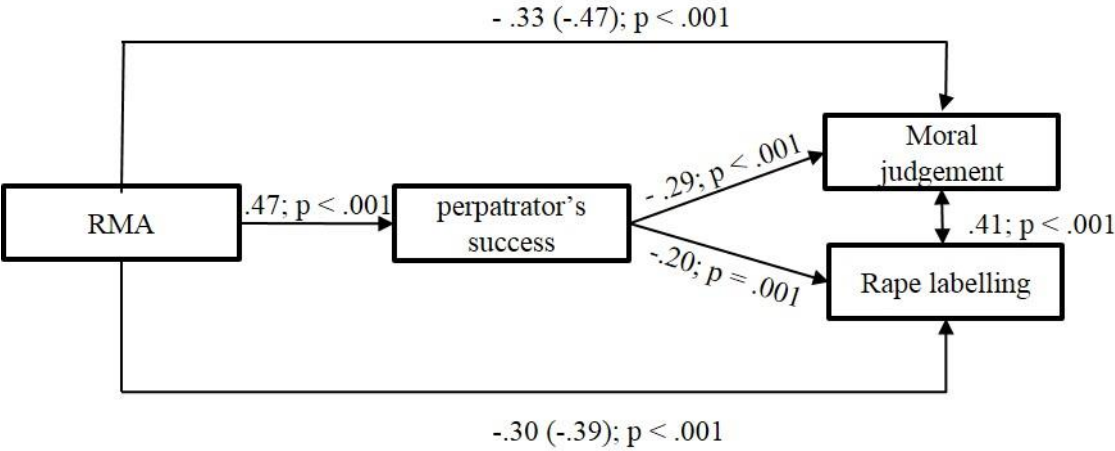
Figure 6 Standardized path model of the direct and indirect effects on Moral judgment and Rape labeling in Study 4A

In the certain condition of Study 4B, rape myth acceptance still predicted moral judgements, but it no longer predicted whether the incident was labelled as rape (see Figure **7**). These findings showed that in the evaluation of a rape case of a popular and powerful person, perception of the perpetrator's success can affect the overall evaluation of the case based on rape myths acceptance. However, such a connection is more pronounced when there are more ambiguities in the case.
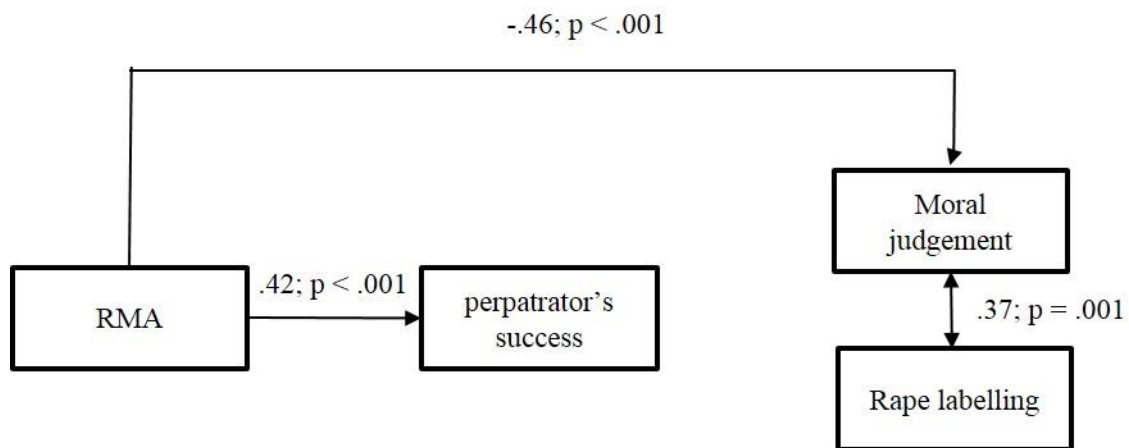
−.46; p < .001

.42; p < .001

RMA

perpatrator's
success

Moral
judgement

.37; p = .001

Rape labelling

Figure 7 Standardized path model of the direct and indirect effects on Moral judgment and Rape labeling in Study 4B

In Study 5 we examined the perpetrator's outgroup membership and celebrity status in interaction. Our main purpose was to clarify the connection between group membership and celebrity status, as elements that can potentially increase or decrease victim blaming, perpetrator blaming, and rape labelling. Based on previous literature (e.g., Knight, Giuliano, & Sanches-Ross, 2001) we hypothesized that when the perpetrator is famous, participants will label the case less as rape, blame the perpetrator less, and blame the victim more. While in case of group membership, our research contradicts the literature, therefore we simply wanted to explore, whether group membership affects the evaluation of a rape case, increases or decreases victim blaming when the perpetrator is either famous or not.

Again, we used a low status out group to be able to compare our findings to Study 3. We used an online between subject 2 (perpetrator's group membership) x 2 (perpetrator's celebrity status) experimental design ($N = 516$) with an uncertain rape scenario.

We found that celebrity status had a significant main effect on rape labelling ($F(1,482) = 5.16$ p = .024) but outgroup membership did not ($F(1,842) = 1.72$ p = .190, and there was no significant interaction between the effects of celebrity status and outgroup membership

($F(1,482) = 0.01$ p = .936). We found neither main effect of celebrity status ($F(1,482) = 1.10$ p = .294) or outgroup membership ($F(1,482) = 0.60$ p = .440), nor interaction between celebrity status and outgroup membership ($F(1,482) = 2.43$ p = .120) on perpetrator blaming. We found the same results for victim blaming: celebrity status $F(1,482) = 0.66$ p = .416, outgroup membership $F(1,482) = 2.95$ p = .086, interaction: $F(1,482) = 1.43$ p = .232). We ran a planned independent sample t-test to understand the difference in rape labelling, and found that people labelled the case less as rape ($t(514) = 1.97$ p = .049), when the perpetrator was a non-celebrity ($M = 3.79$ $SD = 1.88$) than a celebrity ($M = 3.46$ $SD = 1.94$).

Our results suggest that celebrity status works as an excuse, but in contrast with our predictions, group membership does not put more blame on the perpetrator. Perhaps because people tend to pick up information in line with their rape myths, and excusing a celebrity is more in line with rape myths than blaming outgroup member for it. Furthermore, it seems, that as a result of anti-Roma prejudice, people put more blame on the victim, possibly suggesting that she should pick her acquaintances more carefully, and therefore, to be blamed for her misfortune.

3. Underlying mechanism of rape myths acceptance

Rape is a gender-specific phenomenon, embedded in gender relations in society. Therefore, rape myth acceptance is a reflection of a deeply held view about men's entitlement to their social status and to dominating women. In the third part of the dissertation, in Study 6, we focused on how group entitlement explains rape myths acceptance amongst men and women, because both phenomena serve to justify men's higher status in society, but the previous one is more generally, while the latter more specifically fulfills this function.

Men in powerful political positions, in better paid jobs, and in higher positions are just a few of various examples that strengthen the view that men deserve more in life than women. Therefore, men tend to score higher in entitlement than women, which is one of the most

direct evidence, that group status affects entitlement (e.g. Nadkarni & Malone, 1989; Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998, Pelham & Hetts, 2001). This suggest that masculine entitlement is directly connected to men's higher status in society and it is a male privilege (e.g Kaschak, 1992). Furthermore, even women's gender role socialization strengthens this view, because it teaches that women's role is to satisfy men's needs (e.g. Hill & Fischer, 2001).

Although different types of entitlements may be related to each other, there are important differences between them (Bouffard, 2010; Hill & Fischer, 2001). Personal entitlement is when a person feels entitled to a particular outcome or level of outcomes and feels that they should receive that outcome (Major, 1987), while group entitlement is a prescriptive view of the group's status for what the ingroup is entitled (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1999). The source of personal entitlement is the self, while group entitlement is based on group membership. Previous research conceptualizes group entitlements differently and mention sexual (the belief, that men deserve sex whenever and however they want, just because they are men (Beech & Mann, 2002; Pemberton & Wakeling, 2009) general (that what [men] do or want takes precedence over the needs of women and that [men's] prerogatives should not be questioned" (Gilbert, 1992, p. 391) and patriarchal (normalizes that men have the power and control over the women's body and sexuality and depict it as natural (Lynch & Nowosenetz, 2009; Schuhmann, 2010) entitlements. Although there are differences between the aforementioned types of entitlement, they all contain the idea that men have the power and the right to control women (and women's body) by birthright, and that they can use this power to maintain the current status quo. Therefore, because the source (men's birthright) and aim (maintain the current status quo and men's superior position in society) of these entitlements are the same, we propose to unite these types of entitlement as group-based male entitlement.

In the study we propose that group-based male entitlement specifically, and not personal entitlement leads to rape myth acceptance and consequently to victim blaming and

the tendency not to label cases as rape. Relying on an online convenience sample of undergraduate students ($N = 482$), path analysis revealed an association between on the one hand group-based male entitlement and personal entitlement and on the other hand, rape labelling and victim blame. In line with Studies 2-5, we found that rape myths acceptance predicted the evaluation of rape cases (see Figure 8). Participants who endorsed rape myths more, blamed the victim more and labelled the case less as rape. In line with our hypothesis, the results revealed that group based male entitlement predicted rape myths acceptance while personal entitlement did not. We also found that participants who endorsed male entitlement more, accepted rape myth more and consequently blamed the victim more and considered the case less as rape. We also found a weak direct effect of personal entitlement on victim blaming and rape labelling, but the connection was not mediated by rape myth acceptance. Although personal entitlement did not predict rape myths acceptance when male entitlement was in the model, the two types of entitlements were weakly positively correlated.
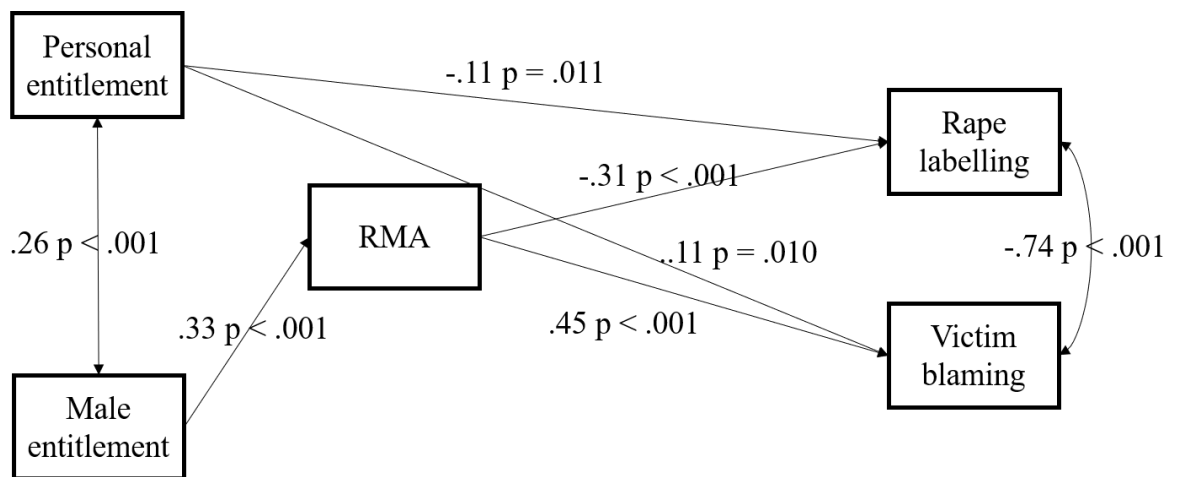
Figure 8 Standardized path model of the direct and indirect effects on rape evaluation

These results supplement previous research that suggested a connection between entitlement and rape-related attitudes (Bouffard, 2010). However, in contrast to earlier studies we only found the connection with group based male entitlement. Because previous studies argue (Hill & Fisher, 2001) that male entitlement is a result of male privilege and power, our

findings suggest that rape myths are connected to beliefs about male supremacy and women's lower status more than about feelings about deservingness and personal entitlement. Furthermore, these results suggest that ideologies of rape and the evaluation of rape cases may be connected not to individual but group-level processes and therefore more directly connected to gender relations in society than personal relations.

General discussion

In our research we found that victims and rape impacted people accept rape myths less than unimpacted people. The importance of this result is, that rape impacted people can be allies to rape victims. On the one hand, they can offer a direct support to the victims, because they are close to them, and victims felt safe to share they trauma with them. On the other hand, they can have an important role in interventions and social change movements. Based on previous findings (Drury & Kaiser, 2014), they can confront people's rape myths more effectively than victims, because they do not seem to directly benefit from change, just like men are sometimes more effective in confronting sexism than women.

Furthermore, our findings support the experience, that people are more likely to blame the victim, if the rape was counter-stereotypical and fill the blind spots with their rape myths. This is especially dangerous, because most of the rape cases are counter-stereotypical, the perpetrator is not a deviant or violent stranger. Therefore, this phenomenon is especially harmful and can cause "second rape", when victims seek help from police force, health professionals, or from the justice system. When victim has the courage to seek help, he/she meets with these people first or regularly, therefore, it is extremely important to educate these people about the social psychology of rape, it is not only for them to help to process their trauma, but for the whole society, because stronger support of the victims, less minimalization of their trauma, and more serious punishment to the perpetrators would increase trust in the

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police and send the message and affirm the norm, that rape have various forms, and neither of them is acceptable.

Furthermore, we found, that irrelevant factors bias the perception in line with rape myths. Therefore, not only professionals who directly meet with the victim should be educated, but the media also, who presents the cases to the wider public. However, there is a good tendency in the last years in the language that journalists use about rape or intimate partner violence, there is still room for change. Based on our results, it is questionable, how to present the side of the perpetrator, who is often more powerful than the victim, therefore not only people's rape myths, but his higher powerfulness in comparison to the victim also points into the direction of excusing him. Furthermore, the presentation of the victim, as a vindictive or insecure person who somehow deserved or triggered the case should be not accepted anymore, there should be always emphasized, that rape is the perpetrator's choice.

In line with previous research, we found that rape myths acceptance is embedded in different oppressive belief systems, such as sexism or group-based male entitlement. Intervention programs should not only focus on rape myths acceptance and target its reduction in itself but should consider talking about myths as a part of an oppressive social system. People through endorsing rape myths want to preserve status quo, therefore, if the lower status group (i.e. women) wants to change it will probably face with backlash, while higher status group (i.e. men) could be powerful allies to achieve a more fair system. Therefore, education programs have to tackle the importance of gender relations in this topic, and educate men as well, because living in a fair and safe system should be everyone's interest.

Conclusion

The main strength, of our research is that (a) we systematically examined the role of situational factors and prior attitudes toward rape in the biased perception and evaluation of

rape cases (b) with different methods (e.g. case study, experiment) and procedures that helped us to get a better understanding the data and constructing theory. We used (c) different samples and cases to increase generalizability of the results (d) and we did this outside the Western world in an underrepresented region of social psychological research, and especially of research on rape and rape myths. This region is not simply underrepresented in these research areas, but also the level of sexism is higher and gender equality is lower in Hungary than in the US or in Western Europe (Global Gender Gap Index, 2020). Therefore, our findings could show that the connection between rape myth acceptance, the biased perception of the perpetrator and the evaluation of a rape case is also pronounced in a cultural context in which sexism appears in more overt, more hostile and more explicit ways than in the most commonly studied countries, such as the US. These understandings could help us to understand, which mechanism are different in this gender unequal social, and which are universal and applicable in different contexts.

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Supplementary material

Supplementary material 1 Hierarchical linear regressions on rape labelling and on victim blaming in an uncertain and undisputable rape case

	Outcome variable: Rape labelling											
	Uncertain case						**Undisputable case**					
	B	SE	β	p	ΔR^2	R^2	B	SE	β	p	ΔR^2	R^2
Step 1					.008	.008					.006	.006
Constant	4.13	0.27					6.38	0.14		< .001		
Gender	0.26	0.12	0.07	< .001			0.12	0.06	0.06	.042		
Age	0.01	0.01	0.07	0.029			0.00	0.00	0.04	.174		
Step 2				0.026	.035	.043					.004	.010
Constant	5.48	0.39					6.15	0.120		< .001		
Gender	0.02	0.13	0.00	< .001			0.14	0.06	0.07	.034		
Age	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.891			0.00	0.00	0.04	.246		
Hostile sexism	-0.26	0.04	-0.20	0.060			0.01	0.02	0.01	.801		
Benevolent sexism	0.02	0.04	0.02	< .001			0.04	0.02	0.06	.049		
Step 3				0.628	.106	.149					.018	.028
Constant	5.81	0.37					6.22	0.20		< .001		
Gender	0.15	0.12	0.04	< .001			0.16	0.06	0.09	.011		
Age	0.01	0.00	0.09	0.210			0.00	0.00	0.05	.113		
Hostile sexism	-0.01	0.05	-0.00	0.002			0.06	0.03	0.09	.020		

	B	SE	β	p	ΔR²	R²	B	SE	β	p	ΔR²	R²
Benevolent sexism	0.12	0.04	0.09	0.901			0.06	0.02	0.09	.005		
RMA	-0.63	0.06	-0.39	0.005			-0.13	0.03	-0.16	p < .001		

Outcome variable: Victim blaming

	B	SE	β	p	ΔR²	R²	B	SE	β	p	ΔR²	R²
Step 1					.001	.001					.003	.003
Constant	3.56	0.24					1.64	0.14				
Gender	-0.02	0.11	-0.006				-0.10	0.06	-0.05			
Age	-0.00	0.00	-0.032				-0.00	0.00	-0.02			
Step 2					.084	.085					.044	.047
Constant	1.58	0.33					0.75	0.21				
Gender	0.32	0.12	0.094				0.05	0.07	0.02			
Age	-0.00	0.00	-0.017				-0.00	0.00	-0.01			
Hostile sexism	0.36	0.04	0.306				0.16	0.02	0.22			
Benevolent sexism	0.01	0.04	0.008				0.01	0.02	0.01			
Step 3					.085	.170					.010	.057
Constant	1.32	0.32					0.70	0.21				
Gender	0.21	0.10	0.064				0.03	0.07	0.01			
Age	-0.01	0.00	-0.046				-0.00	0.00	-0.02			

Hostile sexism	0.15	0.04	0.131		0.11	0.03	0.16
Benevolent sexism	-0.07	0.04	-0.055		-0.01	0.02	-0.01
RMA	0.50	0.05	0.348		0.10	0.03	0.12