Candidate 4 evidence

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Higher Sociology Assignment

The Impact of Media on Violence Against Women

Hypothesis: There is a direct link between misrepresentation of women in the media and increased violence against women.

The media. It's everywhere. Constantly wriggling into our subconscious and influencing our thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions. Even when we don't realise it's our motivation. The globe is filled with sexist, racist advertising filled with harmful stereotypes that both influence and are influenced by wider society. Although the main goal of advertising seems obvious; to sell a product or service, the methods are often less overt. Advertising is designed to subtly change the way we think or feel, manipulating our behaviour to encourage us to purchase or buy into the products and lifestyles that are being promoted. This means that adverts reinforce existing power structures within society, feeding the patriarchal cycle of misogyny and racism. Those that are most negatively affected by supporting the status quo are predominantly women of colour.

Unfortunately, women all around the world experience discrimination and oppression. Violence against women has been normalised, with women continuing to be systematically oppressed as patriarchal power structures remain dominant in society. Sociologists suggest this constant misrepresentation of women in the media has acted as secondary socialisation, the impact of which is ingraining harmful stereotypes in the minds of generations. This in turn contributes to shaping socially constructed roles, behaviours, attributes, and activities that society deems appropriate for women. By normalising the sexualisation, objectification and exploitation of women, we must ask whether these messages are contributing to the abuse and violence against women. This is not only a feminist issue but a Marxist one. In 'Feminist Perspectives on Class and Work,' Ferguson et al state "Women lose power when private property comes into existence as a mode of production. Men's control of private property, and the ability thereby to generate a surplus, changes the family form to a patriarchal one where women, and often slaves, become the property of the father and husband" (1).

Source 1: Neil M Malamuth, James V.P. Check (2004): The effects of mass media exposure on acceptance of violence against women: A field experiment. (Journal of research in personality)

This study took a group of two hundred and seventy-one male and female students and exposed them to films containing sexual violence which had positive consequences, to measure their reactions, and see how it altered their opinions, for example their acceptance of interpersonal violence against women, acceptance of rape myths, and beliefs in adversarial sexual relationships.

The first finding was that exposure to these films increased the male subjects' acceptance of interpersonal violence against women and acceptance of rape myths. Rape myths create cultural norms that contribute to violence against women. It is a comment on the expectations of men from an early age to be more dominant and aggressive, then leading to women to fulfil the submissive role. Some common rape myths associated with the first movie shown to subjects are that women find rape to be arousing, and that many women consciously or subconsciously invite rape through behaviour and choices. A rape myth associated with the second film that if a woman does not fight

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back, it cannot be considered a rape. These myths, or men's belief of them, contribute to more interpersonal violence against women, and the perpetuation of these myths via the media lead to more men having a positive opinion of rape.

The second finding is that women behaved oppositely, becoming less accepting of interpersonal violence and of rape myths. The results of this study also show how people are influenced by the media their entire lives, formulating these collective opinions, dividing the sexes, and oppressing women. The women in the films are depicted through the lens of the male gaze, therefore they are not accurate representation of real women. They are then embodiments of the expectations men have for women, which turns into societal pressure including pressure from women, translating into internal expectations women have for themselves. These expectations include typical stereotypes such as women being submissive to men and accepting of violence against them. The violence portrayed in the films were shown to have positive consequences, however these only appear to exist for the male characters, with the female characters ending up in unfavourable and abusive situations by the end of the film. This could be why the men left the films with more positive opinions and the women left feeling violated.

The last finding was that continuous exposure to stimuli like this will produce a social climate that promotes sexist ideology. This kind of violence, commonly seen in pornography, increased rape fantasies and desensitised viewers to this kind of violence, normalising it in their minds. Therefore, when sexual crimes are committed, the reaction from society is one of indifference. The perpetrators tend to face less severe consequences, due to jurors' opinions being influenced by such media. Furthermore, the perpetrators of these crimes do not consider their actions to be perverse, due to the normalisation of such violence in the media.
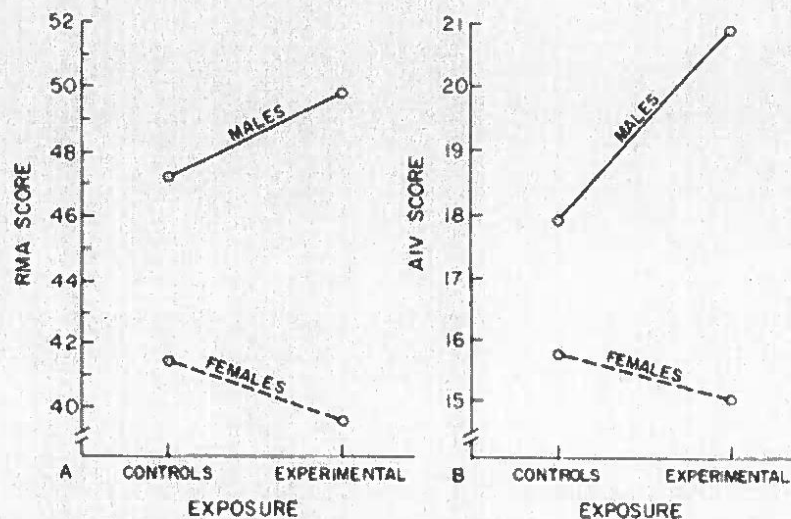

FIG. 1. (A) Rape Myth Acceptance and (B) Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence as a function of Exposure and Gender.

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Source 2: Ravinder Barn, Ráchael A. Powers (2018): Rape Myth Acceptance in Contemporary Times: A Comparative Study of University Students in India and the United Kingdom

This study aimed to find out if the endorsement of rape myths is country specific and to investigate the impact rape myths have in relation to the criminal justice system and the perception/response to victims and perpetrators.

The first finding from this study was that more educated individuals like students, tend to be less accepting of rape myths. Leading to the conclusion that in countries with less media exposure of violent crimes may lead to more regression and misinformation. The study also found that the overall acceptance of rape myths is more common in India, Japan, and Kuwait than in the US and that Indian students were most likely out of the three to perpetuate and accept these myths. Men in all countries were more likely to endorse these views than women. It was speculated that this could be due to the cultural norms found in non-western countries.

The second finding was that in countries with higher media exposure, such as the UK, the victims are often villainised and therefore rape myths are yet again imposed. By discounting the impact these crimes have on the victims, mass media has trivialised the crime to such an extent that around eight out of ten rapes remain unreported in India. It is key to note that due to their being extremely minimal exposure of these crimes, with all reports being negative and leaning toward victim blaming the impact is much larger than that of the mixed media seen in the United Kingdom. However, as India and the United Kingdom share the same colonial roots, there are many similarities that can be drawn in their attitudes towards women.

The last finding from this study was typically there are other intersections that contribute to the influence the media has on societies likelihood to agree with rape myths, such as age, social class, caste gender, and religion. Overall, the clearest divide was between men's acceptance and women. Those who were not religious were overall less likely to endorse rape myths. In the UK more people were of the belief that sexual assault was a product of women being promiscuous, whereas in India, more people believed it to be a product of men's increased sex drive. Following this both countries continued to victim blame with most subjects agreeing that women's clothing is one of the main factors.

Table 2. Mean Differences in Rape Myth Acceptance: The United Kingdom and India.

	The United Kingdom		India			
	M	SD	M	SD	M Differences	t
If a girl is willing to "make out" with a guy, then it's no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex	1.565	0.807	2.281	1.155	0.716	9.281***
Girls tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them	1.357	0.610	1.930	1.119	0.573	8.571***
Rape happens when a guy's sex drive gets out of control	2.192	1.143	2.716	1.322	0.524	5.249***
Guys from middle-class homes almost never rape	1.437	0.674	1.946	1.012	0.509	7.625***
A lot of girls lead guys on and then they cry rape	1.883	0.932	2.351	1.171	0.468	5.549***
Although most girls wouldn't admit it, they generally find being physically forced into sex a real "turn-on"	1.523	0.837	1.980	1.130	0.457	5.871***
If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is at least partially her own fault if she is raped	1.803	1.004	2.258	1.219	0.455	5.092***
Rape is unlikely to happen in the girl's own familiar neighborhood	1.427	0.652	1.854	1.101	0.427	6.268***
A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped just have emotional problems	1.560	0.778	1.985	1.102	0.425	5.564***
Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away	2.123	0.994	2.549	1.178	0.414	4.723***
If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape	1.407	0.717	1.810	1.029	0.404	5.886***
If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control	1.860	1.015	2.148	1.226	0.288	3.205***
If the rapist doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape	1.141	0.411	1.427	0.823	0.286	6.009***
When girls are raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was ambiguous	1.592	0.769	1.843	1.041	0.252	3.510***
Many girls secretly desire to be raped	1.178	0.491	1.394	0.820	0.217	4.261***
If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get in trouble	2.390	1.199	2.353	1.274	0.164	1.614
Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys	2.136	1.026	2.266	1.019	0.130	1.528
A girl who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a guy tries to force her to have sex	1.690	0.894	1.782	1.006	0.092	1.185
It is usually only girls who wear slutty clothes who are raped	1.460	0.723	1.490	0.862	0.030	0.471

Note. Satterthwaite approximation employed due to unequal group variances.
*Not significant when gender is controlled. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

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Table 4. Within-Country Correlates of Rape Myth Acceptance.

	England			India		
	b	SE	t	b	SE	t
Male	0.206	0.094	2.19*	0.331	0.059	5.63***
Age	−0.004	0.006	−0.69	−0.044	0.012	−3.77***
Race						
White	−0.274	0.086	−3.18**	—	—	—
Mother tongue						
Urdu	—	—	—	−0.085	0.121	−0.70
Other	—	—	—	−0.139	0.077	−1.82
Caste	—	—	—	0.266	0.088	3.03**
Religion (England)						
Non-Christian	−0.206	0.114	−1.81	—	—	—
No Religion	−0.164	0.081	−2.03*	—	—	—
Religion (India)						
Muslim	—	—	—	0.113	0.081	1.39
Other	—	—	—	−0.200	0.086	−2.31*

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

Analysing findings

Marxist feminism recognises that capitalism requires the systematic oppression of women to function. Marxist feminism can also show how a women's socioeconomic status links to rape rates. This also highlights how the patriarchy is the primary societal system that ensures the distribution of power favours men and how women are viewed in society is predominantly because of men's position and influence within it. Historically Marxists observe societies fixation on sexual purity and morality, with hyper fixation on virginity, women being submissive and more lenient consequences for rape.

Source 2 demonstrates a pervasive level of Rape Myth Acceptance across four countries. Each country conforms to a patriarchal power structure in which the roles of the sexes have been clearly defined. This is particularly rigid in India where there is greater culpability assigned to female victims of sexual assault.

Marxist feminists would agree that it is in the medias interest to continue to perpetuate ideals and myths that reinforce male dominated power structures, to keep women low down in the social hierarchy so that they may be exploited as a resource and traded as a commodity.

Labelling theory says that we are shaped by how other people label us. Therefore, in a society dominated by men, women end up fulfilling the expectations set by the men who control the structures of society. This can be shown in the second finding of source one, where we see the effects the medias stereotypes of women, have on women.

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Evaluating sources

The first source used was published in 2004, therefore it is not the most recent source and may be slightly outdated, despite the age of the report, the information still pertains to the present day. As the paper was written by two men, with predominantly male sources, the paper may be biased/slightly misdirected, due to lack of perspective. This source only had 271 subjects, and was limited by factors such as age, and education level as they were all university students, therefore opinions may be the same based on these factors.

The second source was first published in 2018, and so is much more recent, however the source corroborates the information found in the first source. As this report was written by two women, the report is stronger in terms of the extent of the research done and the explicitly honest nature of the results than the first paper. They analysed results from several different countries with a much larger sample size than that of the first paper, this may allow them to have collected more accurate and reliable results. The study has found a correlation but not causation between rape myth acceptance and rate of rape, that may not be because there is not a link between these things, however it has not been covered in the study and there are too many confounding factors to consider such as age, race, socioeconomic background, and religion. The paper only looks at university student populations, but it would be more useful to look at a wider range of young people from the same age group to gather more data. A narrow student sample means it's not representative of the wider population. The study used qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect their information, such as surveys, questionnaires, and numerical analysis of data collected through these polls.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings from each of the studies support the hypothesis that there is a direct link between misrepresentation of women in the media and increased violence against women.

Source 1 demonstrates an increase in Rape Myth Acceptance in men, as their exposure to these myths through the media increases (though this decreases in women) while source 2 shows that there are increased levels of Rape Myth Acceptance in countries that rigidly adhere to gendered power structures.

Whilst neither source have evidenced a causal link between Rape Myth Acceptance and the number of rapes and serious sexual assaults, I believe that with a wider range of evidence a link could be better established.

The second finding from source 1 links into labelling theory. Since men's expectations for women are so highly enforced throughout media, and the media acts as a form of secondary socialisation, women end up internalising the expectations society places upon them per labelling theory. This then applies to rape myths and the different ways in which men and women internalise rape myths and the consequences of this. Mass Media constantly endorsing these messages, not only shapes and influences individuals but also whole institutions. Individuals internalising these messages and shifting cultural mindsets and opinions of victims and perpetrators of rape, leads to changes in the criminal justice system and eventually the law. This gross misconduct of justice and intimidation of victims, leads to a drop in the number of cases reported and the number of perpetrators convicted.

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References

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