

Police Officers' Rape Myth Acceptance: Examining the Role of Officer Characteristics, Estimates of False Reporting, and Social Desirability Bias

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This study examines police officers' perceptions of sexual assault and those who report sexual assault to the police, using a revised version of the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale along with a measure of social desirability bias. The study includes survey responses from 174 officers from 1 mid-sized police department in the Great Lakes region. Results show low to moderate levels of rape myth acceptance scores on the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, with highest scores related to victim lying. Officers report very high estimates of false reporting, indicating some rape myth acceptance. Officer level of education, rank, and estimates of false reporting influence rape myth acceptance; however, social desirability bias is an important explanatory factor. Implications for measurement and training are discussed.

Keywords: rape myths; attitudes toward rape; false reporting; police; social desirability

Sexual assault remains an underreported crime (Felson & Pare, 2008), with only 16%–39% of cases reported to the police (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Of those who report to the police, many experience secondary victimization (Campbell, 2005; Campbell & Raja, 1999, 2005; Martin & Powell, 1994; Patterson, 2011). Police officer perceptions of sexual assault, including their endorsement of rape myths, may contribute to both a negative experience of the individual reporting to the police and also a lack of case progression (Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Maddox, Lee, & Barker, 2011; Page, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Rich & Seffrin, 2012; Sleath & Bull, 2012).

Endorsement of rape myths may influence the way in which police officers respond, given the amount of discretion they have in interviewing the victim, writing and classifying the report, and pursuing a suspect. In report writing, police officers exercise discretion in selecting the information deemed important to include (or exclude) in the initial police report (Hazelwood & Burgess, 2008). Law enforcement officials, including police officers and detectives, also decide which cases to refer to the prosecutor (who then deems whether there is sufficient merit to bring the case to court), leading to substantial case attrition even before entering the legal system, where trial and sentencing may occur (Campbell et al., 2014; Lonsway & Archambault, 2012).

This study addresses gaps in the literature by exploring one of the factors—individual rape myth acceptance (RMA)—that may influence a police officer's response to reported sexual assaults. This study explores the characteristics of police officers that may relate to overall RMA as well as specific elements of RMA, such as beliefs that victims lie, victims provoke the assault, perpetrators do not mean to commit a sexual assault, and the event really should not be considered a sexual assault. This study contributes to an understanding of police officer RMA through both established quantitative measures of RMA as well as open-ended questions. It also explores the connections between RMA, estimates of false reporting, and social desirability bias.

ROLE OF POLICE IN SECONDARY VICTIMIZATION

Victim-survivors of sexual assault who decide to report to the police often experience secondary victimization (Campbell, 2005; Campbell & Raja, 1999; Campbell & Raja, 2005; Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001; Martin & Powell, 1994; Patterson, 2011; Wasco & Campbell, 2002). In general, victim-survivors often experience self-blame, shame, and self-doubt because of the blaming attitudes and behaviors of others (Wasco & Campbell, 2002). One in three victim-survivors develops posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), rape trauma syndrome, or another anxiety problem (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). Harsh treatment or even neutral or mixed reactions by police officers can invoke shame and other negative and sometimes long-term consequences for victims (Campbell, 2005, 2006; Campbell et al., 2014; Campbell & Raja, 1999; Kaukinen & DeMaris, 2009; Kaysen, Morris, Rizvi, & Resick, 2005; Maier, 2008, 2012; Norris & Thompson, 1993; Patterson, 2011).

Although this secondary victimization is well documented, police may underestimate, misinterpret, or deny the distress victims experience during police interviews (Campbell, 1998, 2005, 2006). Instead, police officers often exacerbate secondary victimization by using additional questioning or interrogation practices, especially when they consider victims less than “ideal” (Jordan, 2004). Roberg, Crank, and Kuykendall (2004) point out that this response by police officers may not be surprising, given that police training often focuses on identifying weaknesses in credibility. Even in attempts of police officers to respond quickly because of the perceived seriousness of the case, victims may feel as if their needs are secondary to finding and arresting the perpetrator (Martin, 2005). These experiences may negatively impact a victim's reporting experience and the potential for case progression.

ROLE OF POLICE IN CASE PROCESSING AND CASE ATTRITION

Adding to the harm of secondary victimization, police officers exercise power by influencing case attrition, both through their interactions with victims and how they decide to pursue the case. Research suggests that attrition remains high in sexual assault cases. For instance, Alderden and Ullman (2012a) found that only 9.7% of sexual assault cases resulted in charges, even though the factors that predicted these decisions were extralegal. A recent study focusing specifically on police decisions in sexual assault cases found that both legal (e.g., lack of suspect identification, DNA evidence) and extralegal factors (e.g., perceived lack of victim credibility) influence identification and arrest of a suspect by police (Tasca, Rodriguez, Spohn, & Koss, 2013).

Although multiple actors—including victim-survivors, police officers, prosecutors, juries, and judges—influence case attrition in reported sexual assault cases, first responding police officers have been labeled “gateways to justice” because of their discretion in initial case processing, including their decision to determine probable cause and arrest the alleged perpetrator (Kerstetter & Van Winkle, 1990). Kerstetter and Van Winkle’s (1990) study suggests that officers’ attitudes and beliefs are communicated to the victim and are experienced negatively, specifically influencing a victim’s decision not to prosecute, leading to case attrition. An officer’s RMA may not only affect a victim-survivor’s willingness to participate in the investigation and secondary victimization; it may affect the way in which they write the police report, impacting the potential for case progression in both the criminal justice and legal systems.

Police officers exercise discretion in how to proceed with a sexual assault case, even though many police officers do not believe that they exercise discretion. Research points to police discretion in their decision to found or unfound the case (Kerstetter & Van Winkle, 1990; C. Spohn, White, & Tellis, 2014), their decision to make an arrest (Frazier & Haney, 1996), and their decision to present a case to the prosecutor’s office (Campbell et al., 2014; Lonsway & Archambault, 2012). Police officers and detectives frequently decide if a case should move forward from the investigation phase to the prosecution phase for charging; thus, the vast majority of cases that do not lead to prosecution are dropped within the criminal justice system, as opposed to the legal system (Campbell et al., 2014; Lonsway & Archambault, 2012). Frazier and Haney (1996) found that a suspect is identified in fewer than half of reported sexual assault cases. Among forcible rapes reported to police in 2006, only 39% were categorized as cleared by arrest or by exceptional means (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2006). In small municipalities, patrol officers may exercise even more discretion, collecting detailed information usually collected by detectives (Schwartz, 2010). In a multisite evaluation of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs, implementation of the SANE program showed an increase in cases referred by police to the prosecutor’s office; however, the rates of nonreferral remained high (86% on average, across sites; Campbell et al., 2014). Although research clearly demonstrates substantial case attrition within the criminal justice system, and points out the role of police officers in this attrition, Page (2008a) found that 90% of police officers stated that they did not have individual discretion when deciding which cases to pursue, and 75% said that there were no written guidelines for choosing which cases to pursue.

RAPE MYTHS

One of the legally irrelevant factors that may influence the immediate response to a victim-survivor reporting a sexual assault, as well as subsequent case attrition, is the individual endorsement of certain attitudes about sexual assault, such as RMA. Rape myths, introduced by sociologists (e.g., Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1974) and feminists (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975), consist of stereotypes or false beliefs about the characteristics of “real rape” (Estrich, 1987) and “genuine victims” (LaFree, 1989). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) define *rape myths* as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Examples of rape myths include but are not restricted to the following: women ask to be raped, rape involves a weapon and obvious physical injury, rape is a result of uncontrollable passion, women lie about being raped, and only certain kinds of

women are raped. Rape myths function in ways that deny, trivialize, justify, and perpetuate sexual violence of men against women in society (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999) argue,

Like stereotypes, the importance of rape myths lies not in their ability to truthfully characterize any particular instance of sexual violence; rather, the significance of cultural rape myths is in their overgeneralized and shared nature as well as their specified psychological and societal function. (p. 30)

Although advocacy since the early 1970s began the process of legal and social policy reform related to sexual violence, broad public perceptions of sexual violence and the victim-survivors of such violence has not changed to the same extent (Edwards et al., 2011). RMA influences perceptions of sexual assault victim-survivors within the broader public and within police departments, and it continues to reinforce what is considered a “real rape” and a “genuine victim” (Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; Jordan, 2001; LeDoux & Hazelwood, 1985; Page, 2008a, 2008b; Ullman & Townsend, 2007). Because rape myths are widely held within the general public, they also shape perpetrators' views of victims (Temkin & Krahe, 2008) and victims' views of themselves (Ahrens, 2006).

RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE AMONG POLICE OFFICERS

Within the criminal justice and legal systems, rape myths influence the perceptions of juries (Tetreault, 1989), police officers (Brown & King, 1998; Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Edwards et al., 2011; Feild, 1978; Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; Galton, 1975; LaFree, 1989; LeDoux & Hazelwood, 1985; Maddox et al., 2011; Page, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Venema, 2016), and prosecutors (Campbell et al., 2001; DuMont & Myhr, 2000; Frazier & Haney, 1996; Frohmann, 1991; Gylys & McNamara, 1996; Lonsway, Archambault, & Lisak, 2009; Spears & Spohn, 1996, 1997; C. Spohn & Horney, 1993; C. Spohn & Spears, 1996; R. B. Spohn, Beichner, & Davis-Frenzel, 2001). Although extensive research has focused on the influence of rape myths on prosecutors' charging decisions, an increasing amount of research is now focusing on the role of first responding police officers because most cases are dropped within the criminal justice system before entering the purview of the legal system.

Although many studies have examined the acceptance of rape myths among police officers and detectives, findings are somewhat mixed (Brown & King, 1998; Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Edwards et al., 2011; Feild, 1978; Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; Galton, 1975; Gylys & McNamara, 1996; Jordan, 2001; LaFree, 1989; LeDoux & Hazelwood, 1985; Maddox et al., 2011; Page, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Venema, 2016). Some argue that police attitudes toward and responses to sexual assault have not significantly changed or improved over the past 30 years (Jordan, 2001; Rich & Seffrin, 2012; Temkin & Krahe, 2008;). Feild (1978) found that police officers' attitudes toward rape resembled those of perpetrators more than those of ordinary citizens or rape crisis counselors. Feldman-Summers and Palmer (1980) found that judges, prosecutors, and police officers believed that what they considered a victim's poor judgment, including choice of attire and behavior leading up to the incident, caused the assault. In this study, police officers in particular believed that only 36% of rapes reflected “true”

rapes, which stands in sharp contrast to social service personnel who believed that 70% of rapes were “true” rapes (Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980). However, LeDoux and Hazelwood (1985) found low endorsement of rape myths in a large sample of police officers and highlighted the potential shift in attitudes at that time.

More recent research on sexual assault–related knowledge and attitudes among police officers is also mixed, although current research consistently shows acceptance of rape myths within qualitative data. Police officers have shown more endorsement of rape myths than members of other professions and the general public (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), and in comparison to rape victim advocates (Campbell & Johnson, 1997). Campbell and Johnson’s (1997) study found that officers’ open-ended responses to questions about the definition of sexual assault included inaccurate understandings of its legal definition.

Other studies have shown that acceptance of rape myths among police officers are low on quantitative measures but remain to some extent in qualitative responses. For instance, Page (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010) used standardized measures to investigate officers’ perceptions of rape myths and victim credibility and found that most of the 891 police officers showed low endorsement of rape myths on a standardized Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Revised [RMA-R]). For example, they indicated that “any woman can be raped” (93%) and they would be likely to believe a victim even if s/he did not physically resist (75%; Page, 2008a, p. 53). In contrast, 6% of officers reported sexist feedback in narrative comments (Page, 2010). Similarly, Mennicke, Anderson, Oehme, and Kennedy (2014) found officers scoring low on RMA scales, although showing endorsement of rape myths in open-ended questions as well as inaccurate estimates of false reporting. Page (2008a, 2010) explains that police officers generally did not hold “old-fashioned sexist attitudes” toward women; rather they held “modern sexist attitudes,” rejecting most rape myths on standardized scales (e.g., only certain women get raped), while showing endorsement of rape myths through measures such as the Victim Credibility Scale and narrative comments. Recent findings from studies using open-ended questions and qualitative interviews suggest that officers still view certain victims (e.g., individuals involved in prostitution) and certain scenarios (e.g., assaults lacking a witness) as illegitimate (Page, 2010; Venema, 2016).

Elements of RMA are also found in officer perceptions of nonstranger assaults and high estimates of false reporting. Some studies suggest that police often do not perceive nonstranger assault as rape (Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; LeDoux & Hazelwood, 1985; Venema, 2016). In addition, officers tend to overestimate the percentage of false reporting (Ask, 2010; Lonsway et al., 2009; Page, 2008a; C. Spohn et al., 2014), even though approximately 2%–8% of sexual assault reports are actually false (Lonsway et al., 2009).

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE AMONG POLICE OFFICERS

Because rape myths consist of various assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that are incongruent with the realities of sexual assault experiences and legal definitions, research has explored the factors related to levels of RMA among police officers. Police officer perceptions of sexual assault victims and general acceptance of rape myths are influenced by case characteristics that either fit or do not fit with officer expectations—expectations that may be influenced by RMA (Venema, 2016). Police officer definitions of sexual assault and

RMA are often related to perceptions of victim credibility, a factor deemed important by police officers in their processing of a report (Jordan, 2004; Venema, 2016). Jordan (2004) analyzed sexual assault cases that were closed or withdrawn and found that mistrust in women's testimony continues to be evident in police processing of sexual assault cases. In qualitative interviews with police officers, Venema (2016) found that perceived credibility of the victim played a major role in influencing how police officers mentally categorized cases as false, ambiguous, or legitimate. Consistent with Feldman-Summers and Palmer's (1980) research, Sleath and Bull (2012) more recently found that officers doubt victims who are not considered "ideal victims" because of their attire or intoxication prior to the assault. Schuller and Stewart (2000) found that victim intoxication affected assessments of victim credibility, blame, and guilt, whereas suspect intoxication did not affect evaluations of the suspect credibility, blame, and guilt.

Although research describes case characteristics that may influence RMA and case outcomes, less research explores the influence of police officer characteristics on RMA, such as education level, gender, training, and experience responding to sexual assault cases. Education and professional experience have been associated with lower RMA (Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Page, 2007). Page's (2007) study found higher levels of RMA among officers with lower educational levels and among officers who had worked five or fewer rape investigations.

Although research on RMA in general populations has concluded that in general, females endorse fewer rape myths than males (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Temkin & Krahé, 2008; Ward, 1995; Wentz & Archbold, 2012), research is mixed regarding the relationship between gender and RMA among police officers (Alderden & Ullman, 2012b; Brown & King, 1998; Jordan, 2002; Martin, 2005; Rich & Seffrin, 2012). Jordan (2002) found that RMA among female police officers was just as pervasive as that of male police officers and argued that organizational culture, socialization, and peer pressure may influence personal attitudes, and in police work, for example, individual attitudes may be more reflective of a work referent group than the referent group of one's gender. In a more recent study, Wentz and Archbold (2012) found qualitative evidence that female officers endorse rape myths and victim blaming more than male officers; however, no differences existed within quantitative results. Alderden and Ullman (2012b) found that female detectives were significantly less likely than male detectives to arrest suspects in sexual assault cases. In contrast, other studies have presented findings in the opposite direction, with female police officers accepting fewer rape myths (Brown & King, 1998; Martin, 2005; Rich & Seffrin, 2012).

Studies also suggest that sexual assault related training is associated with lower RMA (Ask, 2010; Campbell, 2005; Rich & Seffrin, 2012). In a sample of 429 police officers, Rich and Seffrin (2012) found that sexual assault training was a significant predictor of interviewing skill; they also found that lower RMA predicted better interviewing skills. There remains a gap in the literature about the type and amount of training that may influence both attitudes, such as RMA, and behavior, such as interviewing skill.

CURRENT STUDY

Although some studies show that police officer endorsement of rape myths has decreased over time, most research still shows some level of RMA, whether in standardized measures or qualitative data. It is important to better understand what elements of RMA are endorsed, and the factors that are related to RMA because it is clear that these attitudes influence

both the experience of victim-survivors and case progression. This study explores the relationship between officer demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, education level), police characteristics (e.g., years in law enforcement, training on sexual assault, rank), estimates of false reporting, and RMA. This study builds on previous research by using a longer version of a revised Subtle Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; McMahon & Farmer, 2011), which includes four specific subscales: She Asked for It, She Lied, It Wasn't Really Rape, and He Didn't Mean to. The study includes open-ended items that elicit further explanations to survey question responses. The study also includes a measure of social desirability bias, which is lacking in many previous studies. The first two research hypotheses mirror those of Mennicke and colleagues (2014):

1. Officers will report low endorsement of rape myths on a standardized scale.
2. Officers will report estimates of false reporting to be significantly higher than 2%–8% (Lonsway et al., 2009).

Additional bivariate hypotheses include the following:

3. Female officers and those with higher education levels will report lower RMA and lower scores on all subscales.
4. Officers with more years of experience, those who have received training on sexual assault, and those with higher rank will report lower RMA and lower scores on all subscales.
5. Higher estimates of false reporting will be associated with higher RMA and higher subscale scores.

Additional multivariate hypotheses will examine the effect of officer demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, educational level), police experience (e.g., years of experience, training, rank), estimates of false reporting, and social desirability bias on RMA and all subscales.

METHOD

Participants

The participants include sworn police officers from one municipal police department in a mid-sized city in the Great Lakes region. The police department has a specialized unit within the detective division that investigates sexual assault; however, there is no specialized sexual assault unit within the patrol division. Potential participants were informed about the study through an in-person introduction at roll call and by e-mail. Anonymous survey data were collected through the online survey software Qualtrics. All sworn officers with active assignment ($N = 294$) were recruited to participate, and approximately 60% responded ($N = 174$). The final sample of sworn officers ($N = 174$) roughly mirrors sworn officers in the police department as a whole (Table 1).

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of those who responded ($N = 174$). Most of the sample self-identified as between 30 and 50 years (90.9%), White (85.9%), male (82.2%), and having at least a college degree (72.7%).

Two thirds (66.7%) of participants were patrol officers; 21.3% were detectives. Most participants described their rank as officer (79.9%), whereas 17.8% described a supervisory role. Almost three-quarters of participants (73.6%) stated that they had received training on sexual assault (Table 3). On average, participants had been in law enforcement for 17.53 years ($SD = 6.1$), with slightly fewer years at the police department where the

TABLE 1. Comparison of Sample With Police Department Statistics on All Sworn Officers

	All Sworn Officers (<i>N</i> = 292) <i>n</i> (%)	Final Sample (<i>N</i> = 174) <i>n</i> (%)
Rank	<i>n</i> = 291	<i>n</i> = 169
Supervisor (captain, lieutenant, or sergeant)	53 (18.2)	30 (17.8)
Officer	238 (81.8)	139 (82.2)
Racial/ethnic identity	<i>n</i> = 292	<i>n</i> = 163
White	255 (87.3)	140 (85.9)
Black/African American	11 (3.8)	4 (2.4)
Hispanic	11 (3.8)	6 (3.6)
Asian	—	2 (1.2)
Native American	6 (2.1)	1 (0.6)
Other	9 (3.1)	2 (1.2)
Prefer not to answer	—	10 (6.1)
Gender	<i>n</i> = 292	<i>n</i> = 163
Male	258 (88.4)	134 (82.2)
Female	34 (11.6)	19 (11.7)
Prefer not to answer	—	10 (6.1)

study took place ($M = 15.87$, $SD = 5.6$). Participants stated that they had responded to an average of 7.67 ($SD = 21.9$) sexual assault calls in the past year, although the range and standard deviation were quite high on this item.

Measures

Revised Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. To determine attitudes about sexual assault and victim-survivors, the study used a measure developed from both the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale—Short Form (IRMA-SF; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) and the Subtle Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Because of concerns about the language used in the IRMAS, McMahon and Farmer (2011) developed a slightly revised version of the IRMAS, the Subtle Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. This scale eliminates potentially biased language (e.g., caught having an illicit affair) and replaces with more common vernacular (e.g., caught cheating), and uses the word *girl* rather than *woman*. The measure used in this study combines wording from both the IRMAS and the Subtle Rape Myth Acceptance Scale; in particular, the survey items use the more common vernacular but use the term *woman* rather than *girl* throughout. Individual items were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with the overall scale score possibly ranging from 25 to 175. In this study, scores on the RMA scale ranged from 28 to 114 (25 items, $\alpha = .91$), with higher scores indicating a higher level

TABLE 2. Demographic Characteristics of Sample

	(<i>N</i> = 174) <i>n</i> (%)
Age	<i>n</i> = 155
Younger than 20 years old	0 (0.0)
20–29 years old	3 (1.9)
30–39 years old	52 (33.5)
40–49 years old	89 (57.4)
50–59 years old	11 (7.1)
60 years and older	0 (0.0)
Racial/ethnic identity	<i>n</i> = 163
White	140 (85.9)
Black/African American	4 (2.5)
Hispanic	6 (3.7)
Asian	2 (1.2)
Native American	1 (0.6)
Other	2 (1.2)
Prefer not to answer	10 (6.1)
Gender	<i>n</i> = 163
Male	134 (82.2)
Female	19 (11.7)
Prefer not to answer	10 (6.1)
Educational level	<i>n</i> = 165
High school diploma/GED	1 (0.6)
Associates degree	25 (15.2)
Some college	13 (7.9)
College degree	97 (58.8)
Graduate degree	23 (13.9)
Prefer not to answer	6 (3.6)

Note. GED = general educational development.

of RMA. Within the full scale, individual items formed four subscales, based on previous research, again with higher scores indicating more agreement (i.e., higher levels of RMA; McMahon & Farmer, 2011): She Asked for It (eight items, $\alpha = .82$), She Lied (five items, $\alpha = .82$), It Wasn't Really Rape (six items, $\alpha = .74$), and He Didn't Mean to (six items, $\alpha = .71$).

TABLE 3. Police Officer Characteristics

	(N = 174) n (%)
Area assignment	N = 174
Patrol	116 (66.7)
Detective	37 (21.3)
Other	21 (12.1)
Rank	n = 169
Officer	139 (82.2)
Captain, lieutenant, or sergeant	30 (17.8)
Training on sexual assault	N = 174
Yes	128 (73.6)
No	46 (26.4)

Note. Because the *n* was small on some area assignment positions, not all categories are included to not identify individual officers. This is why there is no total *n* for Area Assignment in the second column. In addition, chief of police is not entered as a category to avoid identifying study participation or not.

Estimates of False Reporting. Participants responded to one survey item that asked, “Based on your experience, what percentage of reported sexual assaults do you think are false?” Participants could respond with any number between 0 and 100.

Police Experience. Participants responded to items about years in law enforcement, rank (recoded to 1 = officer, 0 = supervisor), whether or not they had ever received training on sexual assault (1 = yes, 0 = no), and the number of sexual assaults they responded to in the past year.

Demographic Characteristics. Basic demographic information was collected, including self-reported gender (recoded to 1 = male, 0 = female), race (recoded to 1 = White, 0 = non-White), and educational level (recoded to 1 = graduate degree, 0 = less than graduate degree).

Social Desirability. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form C (M-C Form C) was included as a control variable (Reynolds, 1982). The Marlowe-Crowne Scale is often used as an adjunct measure to assess the impact of social desirability on self-report measures. The M-C Form C consists of 13 items that are answered by selecting either “True” or “False.” An example is “No matter who I’m talking to, I’m always a good listener.” Indicating “True” on this response would indicate higher social desirability bias. Necessary items were reversed and computed to form the scale, which ranged from 13 to 24 out of a possible 13–26 (13 items, $\alpha = .70$, $M = 19.49$, $SD = 2.5$).

Open-Ended Response Item. Participants were asked to respond to a short hypothetical vignette with their perceptions of the case and intended response. In this study, a basic vignette was used with two key characteristics (i.e., victim alcohol use and relationship with suspect) inserted or deleted (noted in brackets), which produced four distinct versions

of the vignette. Each respondent was presented one version of the vignette.¹ The vignette included the following language:

At 3:00 in the morning, a call came in from dispatch stating that a young woman had reported a sexual assault. You respond to the call by going to the alleged victim's apartment. Upon arriving, the woman states that she had been at a party the night before for her friend's birthday. While she was at the party she [had/had not] been drinking and [met a guy/ran into her ex-boyfriend]. [The guy she met/Her ex-boyfriend] said she should go over to his apartment to talk more and have coffee. The woman reports that she agreed to go to his apartment but that [the guy she met/her ex-boyfriend] had sexual intercourse with her even after she asked him to stop.

After responding to perceptions of this case, an open-ended question asked participants to "Briefly list additional information you would need, or additional questions you would ask." This open-ended question provided participants the opportunity to explain their responses or make remarks that offer insight on the study topic (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2008).

RESULTS

Rape Myth Acceptance

Hypothesis 1 was supported, with officers reporting low endorsement of rape myths on a standardized scale. RMA scores on the full scale ranged from 28 to 114 ($M = 61.48$, $SD = 17.8$). When looking at participant responses in comparison to the possible range of scores on the scale, Hypothesis 1 was supported with 61.4% of respondents reporting low RMA (or falling in the bottom quadrant of the scale), 38.0% reporting low to moderate RMA (or falling in the second quadrant of the scale). Only one officer had an RMA score in the top half of the possible scale range. Overall, this indicates that RMA, as measured by this scale, is relatively low among police officers, although certain items indicate higher levels of RMA (Table 4). For instance, officers tend to agree that women report sexual assault when they either regret a consensual sexual exchange or when they are caught cheating. Lower RMA is evident in responses that acknowledge the possibility of sexual assault without physical resistance, without physical injury, without the presence of a weapon, and when the perpetrator is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Officers show more varied responses on two items that question whether a victim can claim sexual assault when a "woman is a sexual tease," or when a woman initiates some sexual activity (see Table 4).

Participant responses to items that comprise subscales show a more nuanced picture of the types of rape myths that are endorsed. Results demonstrate that even though overall RMA scores are relatively low, items about victim blame and victim credibility are endorsed with higher levels of agreement. The She Asked for It subscale ranged from 8 to 43 ($M = 20.4$, $SD = 7.3$) out of a possible 8–56; She Lied ranged from 6 to 35 ($M = 18.4$, $SD = 5.3$) out of a possible 5–35; It Wasn't Really Rape ranged from 6 to 24 ($M = 10.6$, $SD = 4.0$) out of a possible 6–42; and He Didn't Mean to ranged from 6 to 30 ($M = 12.1$, $SD = 12.0$) out of a possible 6–42. When comparing endorsement of particular subscales by looking at quadrant sections of possible scale scores, responses indicate much higher percentages of officers endorsing beliefs in victim blame (She Asked for It subscale) and lack of victim credibility (She Lied subscale) in comparison to the It Wasn't

Really Rape and He Didn't Mean to subscales. Most officers do not show high levels of endorsement (i.e., strongly agreeing with RMA statements) on any subscale; however, there are moderate levels of rape endorsement on several individual items.

Open-ended responses mostly correspond with responses on the quantitative RMA measure, including some legally relevant factors, and others that represent rape myths. In order of frequency, these open-ended responses focused on (a) determining consent, (b) getting more specific narrative of the incident, (c) finding injury and other physical evidence, (d) identifying witnesses, (e) uncovering more detail about the amount of drinking or intoxication, (f) asking about the relationship with the suspect, (g) asking about the victim's response to the incident, (h) determining the victim's current relationship status, and (i) getting more information on the history of both parties. The two most prominent responses—wanting additional narrative of the incident and needing to know if the event was consensual—could be considered legally relevant variables; however, the vignette stated that the assailant “had sexual intercourse with her [the victim] even after she asked him to stop,” indicating that consent was not given.

Other themes prominent in officers' narrative responses focused on legally irrelevant characteristics that coincide with rape myths, such as wanting to know if alcohol was involved or if the victim had a relationship with the suspect, or questioning the victim's demeanor or late reporting. For instance, one comment asked, “What took so long to call the police?” Another officer wrote, “Demeanor, past truthfulness or lack of, signs of injury, etc.”

Estimates of False Reporting

Hypothesis 2 was supported, with officers reporting higher estimates of false reporting than 2%–8%. Officers responded with estimates of false sexual assault reporting between 3% and 90% of all reported sexual assaults. The most common estimate of false reporting was 50%, with a median of 30% and mean of 36.37% ($SD = 22.46$). Using Lonsway and colleagues' (2009) study on false reporting as a comparison, three categories were created: those with lower than best estimates ($<2\%$), within best estimates (2%–8%), and higher than best estimates ($>8\%$). None of the officers who responded in this study reported an estimate lower than the best estimates; 6% of officers ($n = 9$) reported a number within the best estimate, and 94% reported an estimate of false reporting higher than the best estimate ($N = 149$), showing support for Hypothesis 2. Of those who reported an estimate higher than best estimates, 15.7% ($n = 22$) of officers estimated false reporting between 10% and 19%, 47.9% ($n = 67$) of officers estimated the rate between 20% and 49%, 30.0% ($n = 42$) estimated the rate between 50% and 79%, and 6.4% ($n = 9$) placed the rate above 80%.

Officer Characteristics, Estimates of False Reporting, and Rape Myth Acceptance

Hypotheses 3 and 4 were partially supported. RMA scores and subscale scores did not differ by officer gender. RMA scores also did not differ by officer educational level; however, officers with a graduate degree scored lower on the It Wasn't Really Rape subscale. In relation to Hypothesis 4, RMA and subscale scores did not correlate with years of experience. Training did not correlate with the full RMA score and several subscales; however, officers with training showed lower scores on the She Asked for It subscale.

TABLE 4. Quantitative Response to the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Revised (N = 166)

Question	SD %	D %	DS %	NAD %	AS %	A %	SA %	M (SD)
If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.	30.7	33.1	15.1	9.6	9.6	1.8	0.0	2.40 (1.4)
Women who are caught cheating sometimes claim that it was rape.	0.6	4.3	4.3	13.4	34.1	32.9	10.4	5.17 (1.2)
A lot of times, women who say they were raped agreed to have sex and regret it.	6.7	16.4	17.0	23.0	25.5	8.5	3.0	3.82 (1.5)
If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.	51.8	38.4	5.5	3.7	0.6	0.0	0.0	1.63 (0.8)
When women go around wearing low-cut tops or short skirts, they are just asking for trouble.	28.9	35.5	9.0	13.3	9.6	3.0	0.6	2.50 (1.5)
Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.	8.5	17.7	22.0	26.2	22.0	3.0	0.6	3.47 (1.3)
A rape probably didn't happen if the woman has no bruises or marks.	49.7	43.0	2.4	3.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	1.64 (0.8)
If a woman goes home with a man she doesn't know, it is her own fault if she is raped.	38.0	34.3	12.0	9.0	4.2	1.8	0.6	2.15 (1.3)
If the accused rapist doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it a rape.	69.7	29.1	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.32 (0.5)
When a woman is a sexual tease, eventually she is going to get into trouble.	15.1	23.5	12.0	18.7	22.9	6.6	1.2	3.36 (1.6)
A lot of times, women who say they were raped often led the man on and then had regrets.	13.3	27.7	19.3	16.3	16.9	5.4	1.2	3.17 (1.5)
A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.	21.1	28.3	18.1	19.9	10.2	1.8	0.6	2.78 (1.4)

If a woman doesn't physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can't be considered rape.	55.2	32.1	4.2	3.6	1.8	1.8	1.2	1.75 (1.2)
If a woman initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.	16.3	13.9	10.8	23.5	22.3	9.6	3.6	3.65 (1.7)
When women are raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.	34.9	42.2	10.8	8.4	3.0	0.6	0.0	2.04 (1.1)
A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex.	40.0	38.2	6.7	10.9	4.2	0.0	0.0	2.01 (1.1)
A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on the first date is implying that she wants to have sex.	30.9	40.0	12.1	7.3	7.9	1.8	0.0	2.27 (1.3)
If a woman claims to have been raped but has no bruises or scrapes, she probably shouldn't be taken too seriously.	51.2	40.4	6.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.60 (0.7)
If a woman doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.	29.7	34.5	6.7	10.3	11.5	4.8	2.4	2.64 (1.7)
When men rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.	26.7	40.6	10.9	14.5	4.2	3.0	0.0	2.38 (1.3)
Men don't usually intend to force sex on a woman, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.	29.9	32.3	10.4	18.9	7.3	0.6	0.6	2.46 (1.4)
Rape happens when a man's sex drive gets out of control.	39.0	37.2	6.7	8.5	7.3	0.6	0.6	2.12 (1.3)
If a man is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.	44.8	36.8	5.5	8.0	3.7	0.6	0.6	1.93 (1.2)
It shouldn't be considered rape if a man is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing.	60.2	35.5	3.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.45 (0.6)
If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.	47.3	38.8	6.7	4.2	2.4	0.6	0.0	1.78 (1.0)

Note. Descriptive statistics included in this table only include those with valid responses; it does not include any imputation of missing values. SD = *strongly disagree* (1), D = *disagree* (2), DS = *disagree nor disagree* (3), NAD = *neither agree nor disagree* (4), AS = *agree somewhat* (5), A = *agree* (6), SA = *strongly agree* (7).

RMA did not significantly vary by officers' demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, educational level, race), years in law enforcement, or whether or not an officer had received training on sexual assault, although those with training did show slightly lower RMA scores. Hypothesis 4 was partially supported with RMA scores significantly varying by rank, $F(1, 165) = 5.117, p < .05$, with supervisors—including sergeants, lieutenants, and captains—showing lower levels of RMA ($M = 55.29, SD = 14.95$) than officers ($M = 63.01, SD = 18.14$).

When looking at specific aspects of RMA measured by the four subscales, additional patterns surfaced related to an officer's training, educational level, rank, and estimates of false reporting. Within scores on the She Asked for It subscale, officers who had received training on sexual assault had lower ($M = 19.6, SD = 7.2$) scores than officers who had not received training ($M = 22.4, SD = 7.5; F[1, 165] = 4.56, p < .05$). There was an association between an officer's educational level and their score on the It Wasn't Really Rape subscale, such that officers with a graduate degree showed significantly lower beliefs that certain types of incidents are not legitimate sexual assaults ($M = 8.3, SD = 2.4$), compared with officers with a college degree or below ($M = 10.8, SD = 4.1$), $F(1, 155) = 7.86, p < .01$. Officers with higher rank (e.g., lieutenant, sergeant, captain) showed lower scores on the It Wasn't Really Rape subscale ($M = 8.7, SD = 2.9$) compared to patrol officers ($M = 11.0, SD = 4.2$), $F(1, 165) = 9.34, p < .01$. Officers with higher rank also showed lower scores on the He Didn't Mean to subscale ($M = 10.7, SD = 3.3$) compared to patrol officers ($M = 12.6, SD = 4.6$), $F(1, 165) = 6.60, p < .05$.

Hypothesis 5 was fully supported, with higher estimates of false reporting correlating with higher RMA and higher subscale scores. Results showed that the higher an officer's RMA, the higher the estimate of false reporting in sexual assault cases ($r = .434, p < .001$). Scores on the She Asked for It subscale ($r = .366, p < .001$), She Lied subscale ($r = .545, p < .001$), It Wasn't Really Rape subscale ($r = .265, p < .001$), and He Didn't Mean to subscale ($r = .240, p < .001$) all correlated with higher estimates of false reporting, supporting Hypothesis 5.

The Social Desirability Scale correlated with the full RMA scale ($r = -.209, p < .01$), the She Asked for It subscale ($r = -.222, p < .01$), and the She Lied subscale ($r = -.231, p < .01$). Social desirability did not significantly correlate with the It Wasn't Really Rape or the He Didn't Mean to subscale.

The results from the regression models² demonstrate that when controlling for social desirability bias and other demographic and experience variables, officer rank ($\beta = .212, SE = 4.070, p < .05$) and estimates of false reporting ($\beta = .487, SE = 0.063, p < .001$) remain as significant predictors of RMA ($F = 8.32, p < .001$), with supervisors and those with lower estimates of false reporting showing lower levels of RMA. It should be noted, however, that the higher the officer's score on social desirability ($\beta = .228, SE = 0.546, p < .01$), the lower the RMA score (see Table 5).

In the regression models for RMA subscales, training no longer has a significant effect on the She Asked for It subscale; however, higher estimates of false reporting predict higher scores on She Asked for It, and higher social desirability scores predicted lower scores on She Asked for It ($F = 5.88, p < .001$). The same pattern was found on the She Lied subscale, with higher estimates of false reporting predicting higher beliefs about victim lying, and higher social desirability scores predicting lower beliefs about victim lying ($F = 11.90, p < .001$). In explaining It Wasn't Really Rape subscale scores, lower educational level ($\beta = -.211, SE = 0.971, p < .05$), lower rank ($\beta = .258, SE = 0.954, p < .01$), and higher estimates of false reporting ($\beta = .302, SE = 0.015, p < .001$) signifi-

TABLE 5. Regression of Police Characteristics, Estimates of False Reporting, Social Desirability, and Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA)

Variable	RMA		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Gender (1 = male)	7.183	4.511	.120
Education level (1 = graduate school)	-6.351	4.141	-.121
Years in law enforcement	0.318	0.265	.101
No. of sexual assault calls in past year	0.007	0.181	.003
Training on sexual assault (1 = yes)	0.512	3.094	.013
Rank (1 = patrol officer)	9.560	4.070	.212*
% estimate of false reporting	0.410	0.063	.487***
Social Desirability Scale	-1.651	0.546	-.228**

Note. Reference categories are in parentheses. *SE* = standard error.

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

cantly predict higher It Wasn't Really Rape scores, whereas social desirability has no significant effect ($F = 4.27, p < .001$). In explaining He Didn't Mean to scores, more years in law enforcement ($\beta = .191, SE = 0.070, p < .05$), lower rank ($\beta = .314, SE = 1.076, p < .01$), higher estimates of false reporting ($\beta = .295, SE = 0.017, p < .001$), and lower social desirability ($\beta = .201, SE = 0.144, p < .05$) significantly predict higher He Didn't Mean to subscale scores ($F = 4.40, p < .001$; Table 6).

DISCUSSION

This study adds to the literature that examines police officers' RMA by including a longer measure of RMA, RMA subscales, several officer characteristics, a measure of social desirability bias, and an open-ended survey question. Responses to the RMA scale are similar to recent research, with very few officers demonstrating strong levels of agreement (i.e., RMA) to items across the scale (Mennicke et al., 2014; Page, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). On one item, "A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on the first date is implying that she wants to have sex," this study showed that 83% of participants disagreed to some extent, 7.3% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 9.7% agreed to some extent. This compares similarly with Mennicke and colleagues' (2014) finding that 71.9% of respondents disagreed, 21.9% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 6.2% agreed. Although other scale items are not amenable to an exact comparison, this study showed higher levels of disagreement on scale items, and fewer neither agree nor disagree responses throughout, compared to Mennicke and colleagues' study. Although endorsement of RMA showed variation across the sample, certain items showed high levels of endorsement. For instance, 77.4% of responses agreed to some extent that "women who are caught cheating sometimes claim that it was rape."

This study points to the importance of looking at specific aspects of RMA rather than overall RMA endorsement. Similar to previous research, results indicate that officers

TABLE 6. Regression of Police Characteristics, Estimates of False Reporting, Social Desirability, and Rape Myth Acceptance Scale Subscales

Variable	SA			SL			NR			DM		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Gender (1 = male)	2.447	1.976	.099	2.396	1.273	.132	1.496	1.057	.117	0.843	1.193	.058
Education level (1 = graduate school)	-2.739	1.813	-.126	-0.227	1.169	-.014	-2.361	0.971	-.211*	-1.024	1.095	-.081
Years in law enforcement	0.168	0.116	.130	-0.042	0.075	-.044	0.047	0.062	.070	0.145	0.070	.191*
No. of sexual assault calls in past year	-0.029	0.079	-.029	0.062	0.051	.086	-0.030	0.042	-.060	0.004	0.048	.006
Training on sexual assault (1 = yes)	1.099	1.354	.065	0.199	0.873	.016	-0.903	0.725	-.104	0.116	0.818	.012
Rank (1 = patrol officer)	2.826	1.782	.151	0.821	1.149	.060	2.487	0.954	.258*	3.425	1.076	.314**
% estimate of false reporting	0.143	0.028	.410***	0.153	0.018	.598***	0.054	0.015	.302***	0.060	0.017	.295***
Social Desirability Scale	-0.643	0.239	-2.14**	-0.481	0.154	-.219**	-0.176	0.128	-.114	-0.352	0.144	-.201*

Note. Reference categories are in parentheses. SA = She Asked for It; SL = She Lied; NR = It Wasn't Really Rape; DM = He Didn't Mean to. SE = standard error. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

show higher levels of endorsement in certain elements of the RMA scale, such as items that indicate beliefs that victim-survivors lie or behave in some way that provokes assault. Higher endorsement of rape myths related to victim credibility is also consistent with previous research (Jordan, 2004; Page, 2010; Schuller & Stewart, 2000; Sleath & Bull, 2012; Venema, 2016). Officers show lower endorsement of items that indicate a belief that the perpetrator did not mean to commit a sexual assault or that certain types of incidents should not be considered sexual assault.

Although Page (2008b) argues that new “modern sexist attitudes” exist within law enforcement, this study would suggest that perhaps “old-fashioned sexist attitudes” still exist—evidenced by high estimates of false reporting—but only “modern sexist attitudes” are reported on current quantitative scales. *Modern sexist attitudes* seen within this study continue to promote the idea that victims lie about sexual assault and contribute to the assault in some way, whether by drinking alcohol or leading someone on sexually. Officers are less likely to endorse viewpoints that have gained a level of social awareness and political correctness, such that officers recognize that stereotypical elements of rape are not necessary to be considered sexual assault. Officers also show less inclination to endorse the belief that a suspect might not have known he or she was committing a sexual assault. This points to some change in awareness and knowledge related to sexual assault, including the identification of rape myths that may be more or less socially acceptable to endorse.

This study also points to factors that explain varying levels of RMA among police officers, particularly an officer's educational level, rank, and whether or not they had received sexual assault-related training. Results indicate no differences in overall RMA by officers' demographic characteristics, including race, gender, and years in law enforcement; however, educational level and years in law enforcement did predict certain elements of RMA measured through RMA subscales. The nonsignificant finding on gender is consistent with some existing research and theory (Jordan, 2002; Wentz & Archbold, 2012) and differs from others (Brown & King, 1998; Page, 2007). It should also be noted that this particular sample was quite homogeneous, leaving little room for systematic patterns of variation by race and gender, for example.

Educational level did significantly predict scores on the It Wasn't Really Rape subscale, even when controlling for other demographic variables, indicating that officers with lower levels of education are more likely to view certain types of cases or cases involving certain characteristics (e.g., lack of physical resistance) as less legitimate. The relationship between educational level and RMA shows consistency with some research (Page, 2007, 2008b; Roberg et al., 2004) and conflicts with other studies (Rich & Seffrin, 2012). It should be noted, however, that the significant difference was only found when looking at graduate education compared to educational levels below a graduate degree. Having a college degree did not significantly reduce RMA when compared to officers with less than a college degree. Officer characteristics, such as educational level, remained influential on specific RMA subscales, such as It Wasn't Really Rape, even when controlling for other variables. This indicates that officers with higher education (particularly those with a graduate degree) may accept more accurate definitions of sexual assault.

Similar to Page (2007), years in law enforcement did not predict scores on the full RMA scale; however, more years in law enforcement did correspond to certain types of rape myths. Additional years in law enforcement predicted higher endorsement of beliefs that the perpetrator did not mean to commit a sexual assault. Item responses indicate some level of sympathy for suspects in certain situations; for instance, “If a man is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.” This is an important finding (and double standard),

given that officers tend to exhibit more blame to the victim when he or she was drunk at the time of the alleged sexual assault but less to the suspect when “he” (in this survey item) was drunk at the time of the incident. It is likely that police encounter similar scenarios in reported sexual assaults, and over time develop sympathy for the alleged perpetrator when they deem that the victim either provoked the assault or the suspect did not intentionally assault the victim. This finding points to the need for continued training throughout one’s career in law enforcement as well as future research that explains the endorsement of this particular rape myth.

Results demonstrate higher RMA among officers, compared to those in supervisory roles. This should not be surprising, given that those in supervisory roles may have had more opportunity for training. In addition, supervisors are often involved in cases at different points, from the initial response to follow-through in the detective’s investigation. It is plausible that supervisors have had more experience dealing with sexual assault cases and therefore have more accurate definitions and expectations. In contrast, years of experience actually predicted higher endorsement of beliefs that the perpetrator did not mean to commit a sexual assault, suggesting something unique about those in supervisory positions besides years of experience. Officers in supervisory positions report lower scores on *It Wasn’t Really Rape* and *He Didn’t Mean to* subscales, even when controlling for factors such as educational level and social desirability.

Estimates of false reporting are high within this sample, consistent with previous research (Ask, 2010; Lonsway et al., 2009; Page, 2008b; C. Spohn et al., 2014). Almost all officers (94%, $n = 140$) provided an estimate of false reporting higher than best estimates (Lonsway et al., 2009), some of which were substantially higher than best estimates. In comparison to Mennicke and colleagues’ (2014) data, police officers in this sample made slightly lower estimates of false reporting, even though they remain high.³ Estimates of false reporting also correlate to the full RMA scale and all four subscales. Further research should explore the utility of RMA measures and estimates of false reporting. This study suggests that RMA may be more influenced by social desirability bias than estimates of false reporting and that estimates of false reporting may be a more accurate measure of police officers’ perceptions of sexual assault victim-survivors and the cases they report. Even though levels of RMA are reported as relatively low to moderate, estimates of false reporting remain very high, much higher than best estimates. Although it is difficult to determine the order of influence, high estimates of false reporting (regardless of RMA) point to the need for training, especially when evidence suggests relatively low levels of false reporting (Lonsway et al., 2009). Developing a more accurate perception of the extent to which false reporting occurs may improve initial interactions between victim-survivors and police officers as well as case progression. This is important because without support from officers, victims may behave or interact with officers in ways deemed “noncredible,” increasing police skepticism (Maddox et al., 2011).

Implications for Police Practice

Results confirm the need for continued and ongoing training of police officers related to sexual assault. Rape myths are endorsed by many police officers in this sample, and specific elements of RMA may need extra attention. Specifically, analysis of RMA subscales demonstrates that officers more readily endorse beliefs that victim-survivors may have caused the assault or provoked it in some way, indicating high levels of victim blame prevalent within police officer attitudes. In addition, officers are likely to endorse beliefs

that victim-survivors lie, indicating prevalent doubts of victim credibility across sexual assault reports. Given the low levels of reporting at the onset, and low levels of false reporting in sexual assault cases, addressing inaccurate beliefs about victims or unrealistic expectations about the crime of sexual assault remains an incredibly important element within police training.

Based on this study's findings, there is less need for attention to beliefs about what constitutes a sexual assault because police officers score low on acceptance of scale items that indicate stereotypical beliefs about the crime and beliefs that the perpetrator did not mean to commit a sexual assault. Officers in this sample reported an understanding that a victim's verbal or physical resistance, or presence of a weapon, are not necessary components of a sexual assault. For example, 95.7% of the police officers in this sample disagreed with the statement, "If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape." In contrast, some of these beliefs still appear in narrative comments and may indicate their existence within police officer schema at the same time that officers do not endorse those beliefs on a standardized scale.

In most jurisdictions, patrol officers are charged with being first responders, taking the initial report and forwarding the case for investigation, even though officers show higher endorsement of rape myths than those in supervisory positions. This suggests that those who potentially receive more training and those with higher rank do not get involved in the case until damage may have already been done (e.g., secondary victimization, questions about credibility documented in official police report). In addition to more widespread training of officers, prior research suggests intentional selection of certain police officers to conduct victim interviews (Rich & Seffrin, 2012; Venema, 2016). A similar model of specialized training and response occurs through crisis intervention team (CIT) training for police officers, which focuses on appropriate responses to persons with a mental illness (Compton, Bahora, Watson, & Oliva, 2008). Perhaps, officers with higher levels of education and low RMA could be selected as first responders to sexual assault calls.

Training did not show an effect on RMA scales, although those with training did score lower on the She Asked for It subscale, indicating some attitudinal change or knowledge gained through training. This contrasts with previous research, in which Sleath and Bull (2012) found no effect of specialized training and Lonsway, Welch, and Fitzgerald (2001) found no difference in RMA pre- and posttraining of officers. In contrast, Lonsway and colleagues found that training did influence behavioral change as measured by interviewing skill, although these changes did not last long term.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by use of a convenience sample of police officers within one jurisdiction; however, it should be noted that the response rate was quite high, indicating less selection bias within the sample itself. A lack of findings related to officer demographic characteristics may be related to the homogenous nature of this jurisdiction and should be interpreted in light of that.

Some of the variables (e.g., training) lack precision; therefore, application to practice is also less precise. For instance, the variable used in the analysis for training was operationalized as "ever having received sexual assault-related training." Although two follow-up questions provide additional information about where and when this training was received, it was not possible to thoroughly examine the role of various types and amounts of training in officer attitudes.

Low to moderate endorsement of rape myths may point to changing attitudes; however, it may instead point to the possibility that awareness, education, and popular attention to the issue of sexual violence may lower responses to general endorsement of rape myths, although the function of rape myths still operates in the ways in which officers perceive real (and hypothetical) victims. Because the measure of RMA is not linked to any behaviors, it remains unclear the extent to which RMA influences police officers' perceptions of real victim-survivors and their decision-making behaviors. In addition, both the RMA measure and the vignette focus exclusively on a female victim, limiting the generalizations of this study's findings to perceptions of officers toward female victim-survivors only.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study confirms the importance of careful measurement in further research assessing police officer attitudes related to sexual assault. High estimates of false reporting as well as narrative responses give evidence that responses on RMA scales do not capture all of what officers believe related to sexual assault and may not capture "modern sexist attitudes" (Page, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). These study results confirm the suggestion of Schwartz (2010)—that is, asking about the percentage of false reports may more accurately capture negative beliefs among police officers compared to formal RMA scales. As Edwards and colleagues (2011) recommend, further research should refine self-report measures of rape myths and should be used consistently across studies to analyze patterns over time and across populations. Future research should continue to explore other methods to assess police officer attitudes toward sexual assault victim-survivors beyond RMA scales.

Social desirability bias is a strong predictor of the RMA full scale, as well as three of the four subscales in this analysis. This points to the need to consistently include a measure of social desirability when studying RMA through standardized scales. Although Mennicke and colleagues (2014) suggest that the RMA full scale may not be a useful tool, this study shows that the inclusion of subscales may provide more accurate descriptions of rape myth endorsement, including a substantive understanding of the types of rape myths that are endorsed.

In addition to paying close attention to measurement choices, future research should continue to explain the relationship between attitudes, such as RMA, perceptions of false reporting, and other police officer characteristics, with the interactions between officers and victim-survivors as well as decision-making behavior. Recent research begins to explain these relationships (Maddox, Lee, & Barker, 2011; Rich & Seffrin, 2012), making the connection between RMA, empathy, and positive case outcomes.

Furthermore, research needs to develop better ways to implement and evaluate training related to sexual assault, to better understand the way in which training may influence attitudes and behavior, and ultimately the experience of victim-survivors and case progression. Future research should evaluate changes in attitudes, knowledge, and behavior as well as perceptions of the reporting victim-survivor about sensitivity and thoroughness in the victim interview and overall responsiveness to the case. Too little is known about what may influence negative attitudes among police officers and, more important, what may influence the behavior of police officers. With such high rates of secondary victimization and case attrition, it is increasingly important that those who are charged with being first responders to the crime of sexual assault develop a culture of sensitivity toward those reporting this crime.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that to avoid unintended “cognitive-based” or “normative-based” order effects or priming, branching techniques were used within the Qualtrics survey (Dillman et al., 2008). To reduce possible order effects, the RMA scale section and the section with the vignette and vignette response questions were counterbalanced. This counterbalance allowed half of the participants to answer the RMA first and then questions about the sexual assault scenarios, whereas the other half of participants answered the survey questions in the opposite order. There were no significant differences in responses based on whether or not a participant completed the RMA scale at the beginning or end of the survey.

2. Tests for multicollinearity were included in all regression analyses and variance inflation factor (VIF) never exceeded 5.

3. In comparing this study with data from Mennicke and colleagues (2014), of those who reported an estimate higher than best estimates, 15.7% of officers estimated false reporting between 10% and 19% (compared to 15.8% in Mennicke et al., 2014); 47.9% estimated the rate between 20% and 49% (compared to 27.2% in Mennicke et al., 2014); 30.0% estimated the rate between 50% and 79% (compared to 43.0% in Mennicke et al., 2014); and 6.4% placed the rate above 80% (compared to 10.5% in Mennicke et al., 2014).

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