

# The impact of victim-perpetrator relationship, reputation and initial point of resistance on officers' responsibility and authenticity ratings towards hypothetical rape cases

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DOI:

[10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.01.001)

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*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Hine, B & Murphy, A 2017, 'The impact of victim-perpetrator relationship, reputation and initial point of resistance on officers' responsibility and authenticity ratings towards hypothetical rape cases', *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 49, pp. 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.01.001>

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Previous studies suggest that judgments of responsibility and authenticity made towards hypothetical rape cases differ when specific case factors are varied. However, few studies have examined whether police officers exhibit similar variations in judgment.

**Methods:** Sixteen vignettes depicting a hypothetical rape scenario were created. Vignettes varied on *victim-perpetrator relationship*, *victim reputation*, and *initial point of resistance*. Police officers from a large police force in the United Kingdom (n = 808) provided judgments of victim and perpetrator responsibility, as well as rape authenticity.

**Results:** Officers rated perpetrators as less responsible and gave lower rape authenticity ratings when a partner was the perpetrator, and in 'late' resistance scenarios. Officers rated victims as more responsible in 'bad' reputation conditions and in 'late' resistance conditions. Additional effects of officer sex and receipt of specialist training were also found (i.e., male officers rated the victim as more responsible than female officers), as were several interactions between factors.

**Conclusions:** Results suggest that police officers in the UK may judge victims of rape differentially based on extra-legal case factors. The potential impact on the investigation of rape cases is discussed, and a recommendation for thorough and prompt review of specialist and non-specialist training is made.

### **Keywords**

Rape, Rape Myths, Police Officers, Judgments, Objective Policing

## Introduction

Rape myths are defined as ‘descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape (i.e., about its causes, context, consequences, perpetrators, victims, and their interaction) that serve to deny, downplay or justify sexual violence that men commit against women’ (Bohner, 1998, p.14). Examples of rape myths include specific beliefs regarding victims (e.g., if a woman wears revealing clothing she is partly responsible for her victimization), and perpetrators (e.g., once men reach a certain level of sexual arousal, they are unable to control their actions), as well as broad ideas about rape as a crime, such as the ‘real rape stereotype’ (i.e., the belief that legitimate rape cases occur suddenly, at night, by an aggressive stranger, with a weapon, and typically involve visible victim resistance and emotional trauma for the victim; Horvath and Brown, 2009). Rape myths can therefore be characterized as a general cognitive schema that enables negative attributions to be made about the crime of rape and those involved (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Rape myth acceptance - the extent to which a person adheres to such beliefs - is substantial in members of the general public (between 19% and 57%; Sussenbach & Bohner, 2011). Furthermore, whilst it is true that a number of rape myths also exist regarding male victims (Coxell & King, 2010; Davies & Rogers, 2006), this paper focuses on male-on-female rape, and rape myth beliefs regarding female victims and male perpetrators.

In recent years, several studies have demonstrated that rape myths influence those within the criminal justice system in their assessment of both real and hypothetical rape cases. For example, studies utilising ‘mock juror’ paradigms have revealed that general levels of rape myth acceptance, as well as specific case manipulations, correspond with variations in judgments of victim and perpetrator responsibility, as well as verdict outcome and severity of sentencing (Dinos, Burrowes, Hammond, & Cunliffe, 2015; Ellison & Munro, 2009, 2013; Gray, 2006; Lynch, Wasarhaley, Golding, & Simic, 2013; McKimmie, Masser, & Bongiorno, 2014). Those responsible for presenting cases in court (e.g., lawyers and barristers) are also susceptible to the endorsement of rape myths, as well as playing on the attitudes held by jurors to build or dismantle cases (Temkin, 2000; Temkin

& Krahe, 2008). Furthermore, it has been highlighted that judges demonstrate some level of rape myth acceptance through their comments regarding the increased responsibility of victims in certain cases of rape, both in academic studies (Temkin & Krahe, 2008) and in the popular media (e.g., comments that victims are 'foolish' for drinking too much prior to their assault; Evans, 2015).

Despite their relative importance in the criminal justice system, the attitudes and beliefs of police officers are rarely examined, particularly concerning rape. This is an important line of enquiry, as police officers: act as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system (Sleath & Bull, 2015); play a crucial role in victims' interactions within said system (Du Mont, Miller, & Mhyr, 2003); have a key impact on the progression of cases (Spohn & Tellis, 2012); and are largely responsible for the type and level of care that victims experience throughout the process of evidence gathering, case-building, and prosecution (Lonsway, Welch, & Fitzgerald, 2001). As such, their perceptions of victims, perpetrators, and the rape claim itself, are highly influential in dictating victim experience and case outcome. Some studies have provided limited insight into officers' general acceptance of rape myths, as well as their judgements of victim and/or perpetrator responsibility (e.g., level of victim intoxication, Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011; Schuller & Stewart, 2000), and a thorough review of such literature follows. However, at present further examination is needed of the judgments officers make regarding victim and perpetrator responsibility, as well as the perceived 'authenticity' of the claim, in scenarios that vary on specific factors associated with rape myths, the 'real rape' stereotype, and case attrition. This is crucial in understanding which specific case characteristics influence officers' perceptions of rape claims, and will help to provide an evidence-base upon which to design appropriate training and interventions targeting attitude change. Additionally, examining the influence of certain officer characteristics (such as officer sex and officer training) on responsibility judgments will undoubtedly provide a greater understanding of the importance of individual factors in case evaluation and investigation, again providing important insight into the current efficacy of officer training in the UK and potential future avenues of development. To that end, this study examined variations in police officers' judgements of victim

and perpetrator responsibility, as well as perceived case authenticity, towards hypothetical rape scenarios varying on key extra-legal factors related to prominent rape myths; *victim-perpetrator responsibility*, *victim reputation*, and *initial point of resistance* (i.e., the point in the encounter when the victims first resists).

### **Negative Attitudes Towards Rape in Police Officers**

Over 40 years ago, Galton (1975) noted that police officers often ‘hold rape complainants to a higher standard of conduct than the law requires’ (p.17), due to their pre-conceived beliefs regarding rape as a crime. Since then, a number of studies have investigated the negative attitudes towards rape held by police officers in both the United States and the UK. LeDoux and Hazelwood (1985) conducted the largest review of officer attitudes towards rape, examining the views of 2170 U.S. law enforcement officers, finding low levels of endorsement for rape myths. This is supported by studies conducted more recently with U.S. officers (Mennicke, Anderson, Oehme, & Kennedy, 2014), although slightly greater endorsement has been found for some myths compared to others (Page, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). For example, whilst 94% of officers agreed with the broad statement that any woman could be raped, 20% also agreed with more specific statements, such as ‘women who dress provocatively are inviting sex’ and that ‘women report rape to call attention to themselves’ (Page, 2010). Fewer studies on attitudes towards rape cases have been conducted in the UK; however, those that have find similar results. Sleath and Bull (2015) showed that police officers hold similar levels of rape myth acceptance to student populations, endorsing ‘she lied’ myths to a slightly greater extent, and ‘she asked for it’ and ‘he didn’t mean to’ myths to a slightly lesser extent. These studies all conclude that whilst levels of rape myth acceptance are generally low, a significant minority of officers agree with negative statements about the crime of rape.

Many researchers have commented on how police culture may help to perpetuate such attitudes. Holdaway (1983) describes police culture as an informal structure of norms and values that operate within the rigid hierarchy of the police organization. Some have highlighted that a key part of this culture is the expectation placed on officers to conform to ‘hegemonic masculinity’

(Fielding, 1994; Page, 2007), an idealized form of masculinity venerating dominance, aggression, heterosexuality and a lack of emotion (Connell, 2002). Importantly, Martin (1989) noted that negative sexist attitudes are often tied to this hyper-masculine occupational identity. This is coupled with a strong culture of scepticism that exists within police culture (Kelly, 2010), where disbelief of rape victims specifically is commonplace (Jordan, 2004; Kersetter, 1990; LaFree, 1989). Importantly, previous research has highlighted how officers' negative beliefs inform their understanding and classification of rape as a crime. For example, Campbell and Johnson (1997) found that 50% of U.S. officers in their sample gave 'mixed' definitions of rape, containing both legal and extra-legal elements. This is supported by more recent research highlighting the incomplete definitions of rape still provided by many U.S. officers (Mennicke et al., 2014). Hazelwood and Burgess (1995) lend further support for this phenomenon, and suggest that police officers evaluate reports of rape against their preconceived notions of what cases should look like, utilising both knowledge of the law and other factors (such as rape myths). In addition, research by Venema (2016b) confirms that officers identify and use a wide variety of case factors in establishing the legitimacy of rape claims, with many of these factors directly related to rape myths, such as whether the victim was intoxicated at the time of the assault. These observations are important considering the tremendous amount of discretion they have in rape cases (Page, 2008a).

Officers' negative attitudes also inform the level of belief they place in victims, as well as their associated judgments regarding responsibility. Considering the attributions of blame and responsibility extant in wider society (Buddie & Miller, 2001) it is no surprise that such attributions would also exist in professionals who interact with rape victims, such as police officers (Jackson, Witte, & Petretic-Jackson, 2001). For example, Page (2008a) found that officers with higher rape myth acceptance were less likely to believe a victim who did not match 'genuine' victim characteristics (as measured by the Non-Genuine Victim Scale, NGVS; Spohn & Horney, 1996). This is similar to findings from research conducted in South Korea assessing officers' evaluations of victims who did not match the 'real rape' stereotype (Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2012). Further support is provided

from UK studies. Sleath and Bull (2012) examined how officers' acceptance of rape myths impacted upon judgments made about the crime and those involved. Results showed that officers' overall rape myth acceptance significantly influenced judgments of both victim and perpetrator responsibility (i.e., higher rape myth acceptance corresponded to higher victim responsibility). Studies such as these demonstrate that, whilst further investigation is clearly required, police officers' negative attitudes regarding rape significantly influence how they perceive the victims and perpetrators of rape, as well as the crime itself.

### **Victim-Perpetrator Relationship**

A common misconception regarding rape, and a central tenant of the 'real rape' stereotype, is that the attacker is unknown to the victim (Horvath & Brown, 2009). This is despite significant evidence from both academia (Koss, 1990; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Koss et al., 1994) and crime statistics from both the UK and U.S. (Office for National Statistics, 2013; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) demonstrating that the majority of rape and serious sexual assault is perpetrated by someone known to the victim, such as an acquaintance or partner. It has therefore been suggested that different 'types' of rape exist in the public perception, and that these elicit different reactions based on their degree of congruency with the idea of a 'legitimate' or 'proper' rape (Tetreault & Barnett, 1987). For example, several studies using undergraduate populations have demonstrated that victims are allocated higher levels of responsibility in acquaintance versus marital or stranger scenarios (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Frese, Moya, & Megias, 2004; Grubb & Harrower, 2008, 2009; Johnson & Russ, 1989; L'Armand & Piepitone, 1982; Quackenbush, 1989; Sleath & Bull, 2010; Whatley, 1996; Yamawaki, 2009). These results suggest that whilst the idea of women having to fulfil 'marital duties' appears to no longer influence responsibility ratings in marital scenarios (Grubb & Harrower, 2008), victims are still judged as more responsible for their assault when the perpetrator is known to them casually. In addition, perpetrator responsibility, estimation of trauma, and seriousness are rated as lower in both marital and acquaintance versus stranger rape scenarios (Frese et al., 2004; Simonson & Subich, 1999), and rape occurring in dissolved marital relationships is

also evaluated as less serious than stranger rapes (Ewoldt, Monson, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000). Bell and colleagues (1994) speculate that these variations may arise from issues surrounding miscommunication, consent, and shared responsibility. Perhaps when study participants have knowledge of prior contact between individuals, they understand that these relationships often involve misunderstanding and that different interpretations of dialogue (particularly that concerning consent) may occur (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Bell and colleagues essentially reference participants' understanding of 'sexual scripts' (for example, how initially saying 'no', even when meaning 'yes', is considered a natural part of a women's consensual sexual communication; Frith, 2009), and the resulting confusion this may create in establishing consent when rape occurs in existing relationships.

The few studies that investigate such judgements in police officers suggest that their perceptions of sexual assault may be similarly influenced. For example, studies in the U.S. have found that officers often do not even perceive non-stranger assaults as rape (Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; LeDoux & Hazelwood, 1985). More recent evidence from Venema (2016b) highlighted that, in a sample of 10 U.S. officers, cases involving a prior relationship with the assailant were more likely to be identified as examples of 'false' or 'ambiguous' (as opposed to 'legitimate') cases. Officers outlined that this was largely due to the difficulties in establishing consent and, whilst insisting that they responded to all claims equally, officers also stated that they used differing, 'lighter' interrogation techniques in 'false' cases, as well as being less likely to pursue 'ambiguous' cases due to the unlikelihood of positive outcomes further along (Venema, 2016b). Page (2007) provides additional evidence regarding the strength of belief awarded by officers in cases involving certain types of victim. Results demonstrated that whilst the vast majority of 891 law enforcement officers agreed with the statement 'any woman can be raped' (94%), 19% of officers were unlikely to believe a married woman who had claimed she had been raped. A recent study conducted by Sleath and Bull (2012) provides the most direct examination of the specific responsibility judgments made by UK officers towards scenarios that vary by *victim-perpetrator relationship*. Results showed that



officers from two forces judged victims of acquaintance rape as more responsible than stranger rape victims.

Results from these studies suggest that police officers in both the U.S. and UK view rape through a distinctly narrow perspective (Jordan, 2004); one that emphasizes the idea that rape is only perpetrated by strangers (Golge, Yavuz, Mudderrisoglu, & Yavuz, 2003). Additionally, officers also appear to view victims in scenarios involving pre-existing relationships as more responsible for their victimization. These results are particularly worrying considering that the majority (71%) of rape offences reported to the police in the UK are committed by someone known to the victim (based on data from 2010-2011, Waterhouse, Reynolds, & Egan, 2016). Furthermore, women who are victims in these cases may be less inclined to report their victimization due to a belief that the existence of a prior relationship with their attacker undermines their claim of rape in the eyes of police officers. Indeed, if victims themselves subscribe to the 'real rape' stereotype and associated rape myths (e.g., that rape by a partner is 'less traumatic' than being raped by a stranger), they are also likely to believe that officers hold such beliefs, and may identify themselves as less of a victim (Office for National Statistics, 2015a). Exploration of police officers' judgments of rape scenarios involving perpetrators of a varying relationship to the victim is therefore vital in understanding whether officers evaluate victims, perpetrators and the crime itself differentially based on this information.

### **Victim Reputation**

Despite the existence of Rape Shield laws (section 41 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act, 1999), attitudes persist regarding the reputability of victims, both about their explicit sexual behaviour, but also in relation to their flirtatiousness, apparent sexual willingness, respectability and appearance. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated how manipulating victim reputation influences judgments about both the victims and perpetrators of rape, with greater victim responsibility attributions in low versus high respectability victims (Cohn, Dupuis, & Brown, 2009; Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981; McCaul, Veltum, Boyechko, & Crawford, 1990; Whatley, 1996). In

addition, L'Armand and Pepitone (1982) found that participants allocated lower perpetrator responsibility, higher victim responsibility, lower seriousness, lower damage, and a lower perpetrator sentence in cases where the information regarding the victim's sexual history was 'extensive' or even 'limited' as opposed to when no such information was given. These judgments may stem from historic notions of women as the 'moral guardians' and 'gatekeepers' of sexual contact (Byers, 1996; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980; Wiederman, 2005), prompting negative judgments towards women who violate these norms.

Work exploring similar judgments in police officer populations is sparse, however some insight is available. For example, a number of studies in the U.S. demonstrate that officers are less likely to believe victims who are sex workers (Page, 2007, 2008b, 2010), and are much more likely to perceive cases involving sex workers as false (Venema, 2016b), in part due to the negative reputational connotations that such work carries. In addition, when corroborating evidence is unavailable, officers frequently turn to extra-legal factors, such as a history of sex work, to determine victim credibility (B. A. Campbell, Menaker, & King, 2015). More broadly, LeDoux and Hazelwood (1985) found that officers were suspicious of victims who met certain criteria, one of which was 'provoking' their attacker with their appearance or behaviour. However, other studies suggest changes in the attitudes of officers. The research by Page outlined above more broadly suggested that officer's attitudes are no longer constructed around, or focused on, particular aspects of victims' experiences, including reputation (Page, 2007, 2008a, 2008b). This is supported by studies exploring specific elements of reputation or victim behaviour, for example results showing officer's judgments of responsibility unaffected by victim attire (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011).

A greater insight into current officer beliefs regarding reputation and victim behaviour can be found in research that explores representations of such attitudes in police records. Shaw and colleagues (2016) examined police records of 248 rape cases occurring in an urban area of the Midwestern United States. They coded reports for the presence of statements representative of rape myths, dividing examples into circumstantial (e.g., victim consented), characterological (e.g.,

victim is not credible) and investigatory blame statements (e.g., victim is uncooperative).

Interestingly, 17% of all cases involved at least one characterological statement, with some cases having up to three (25% and 41% of cases included at least one circumstantial and investigatory blame statement respectively; Shaw, Campbell, Cain & Feeney, 2016). Over half of all cases assessed included at least one statement of any kind. Furthermore, many of the characterological statements drew on beliefs regarding reputation, including; use of drugs and alcohol (present in 6% of cases), involvement in sex work (5%), history of previous rape allegations (4%), and a history of promiscuous behaviour (2%, Shaw et al., 2016). As the authors state, these results suggest that officers routinely invoke rape myths when constructing their reports, and express their concern regarding the transmission of these beliefs to the victim, as well as the impact of the process of the investigation (Shaw et al., 2016).

The above literature therefore demonstrates a distinct need for research directly exploring judgments made by officers towards victims with perceived 'good' versus 'bad' reputations. This is important as officers may treat women differently when reporting their victimization if their behaviour has violated any beliefs officers hold regarding appropriate female behaviour, or provide information congruent with their perceptions of a 'false' report (Venema, 2016b). In addition, women who view themselves as less reputable may consequently feel less inclined to report upon victimisation. Alternatively, if officers are unaffected by such information in their assessment of the victim, this is an important change in the historical patterns of police officer thinking; a change which, if highlighted, may help to encourage victim reporting rates. Exploring officers' allocation of responsibility and perceptions of the crime in cases of varying *victim reputation* is therefore essential.

### **Initial Point of Resistance**

Misconceptions about victim resistance in cases of rape are rife, with many believing that the 'natural' or 'only' reaction to rape is to resist fully and to do so with physical and verbal force (Kassing & Prieto, 2003). This is despite evidence that many victims provide only verbal resistance or

appear to offer no resistance at all (e.g., when victims exhibit protective freezing behaviour or mentally dissociate from the event; Davies, Rogers, and Bates, 2008; Walker, Archer, and Davies, 2005). As such, resistance to sexual advances is closely tied with ideas of consent and sexual willingness. These attitudes may explain why research participants allocate less responsibility to victims who resist to a greater extent (Cohn et al., 2009; Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984; Kruehwitz & Nash, 1979), and judge victims as more responsible in cases where attempted rape is completed (Kruehwitz & Nash, 1979). They may also explain why participants allocate lower penalties to perpetrators in cases where the victim offered no resistance (Scroggs, 2006). Ideas regarding resistance are further complicated by strong cultural norm regarding the role of men and women in consensual sexual interaction, otherwise known as sexual scripts (Frith, 2009). For example, norms regarding the dominant position taken by men and the duty to resist by women (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983) add significant impediment to assessing presence or absence of consent by suggesting that aggressive or dominant behaviour by men is a natural part of sexual interaction. Indeed, researchers have noted some alarming similarities between scripts for consensual and non-consensual sexual interactions (Frith, 2009; Littleton & Axsom, 2003; Ryan, 2010), with women sometimes using traditional scripts to explain incidences of sexual harassment or coercion (Hlavka, 2014).

The idea that women should offer refusal of some kind during consensual sexual interactions in order to appear virtuous has been labelled by some authors as 'token resistance' (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988; Sims, Noel, & Maisto, 2007), and is said to be proffered by women to avoid appearing 'easy' (Osman, 2003). Many men who experience what they believe to be 'token resistance', may therefore believe that refusal actually signifies consent, or a desire by the woman to be 'persuaded to say yes' while maintaining their own virtue (Abbey, Buck, Zawacki, & Saenz, 2003). The timing of resistance also appears to be highly important, with women expected to resist 'early' in a sexual encounter even though they may be responsive to advances and ultimately consent to sexual relations (Weis & Borges, 1973). This is supported by research suggesting that both men and

women believe that 'having led a man on' or having 'gone too far' means that a woman has forfeited her right to say no (Quinn, Sanchez-Hucles, Coates, & Gillen, 1991), with half the men in one study believing that it was acceptable to hold a girl down and force her to have sexual intercourse if she had initially consented and then changed her mind (Goodchilds, Zellman, Johnson, & Giarrusso, 1988). Additionally, several studies have demonstrated that participants judge non-consensual hypothetical sexual encounters differently based on the timing of victim resistance. Victims are judged as more responsible and accountable for their victimization when they are described as offering resistance later in an encounter, and perpetrators are held less responsible in these scenarios (Kopper, 1996; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983; Yescavage, 1999). This is especially exaggerated in studies that present a 'seduction rape' scenario, where women engage in particularly 'forward' and passionate behaviour before refusal (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). In addition, participants are less likely to perceive the encounter as rape when a victim is described as resisting 'late' (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983) and are less likely to believe that the sexual assault could have been avoided (Yescavage, 1999).

Considering the strong association between resistance and sexual willingness outlined above, the lack of current research exploring officers' perceptions of victims who resist to varying degrees, or at varying time points within the incident, is surprising. Some studies give an initial indication of the beliefs officers have regarding the obligation of victims to resist. For example, a substantial minority of U.S. police officers agreed with the statement that 'any victim can resist a rapist if s/he really wants to' (Page, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). Research also suggests that officers place considerable importance on the presence of physical signs of resistance in determining the validity of rape claims (Venema, 2016b). Indeed 8% of reports analysed by Shaw and colleagues (2016) contained statements made by officers related to the lack of injury sustained by victims as a reason to disbelief the victim. These results suggest that officers appear to be more believing of victims who have resisted, and show physical evidence of that resistance. However, it is also important to specifically explore variations in officers' judgments in 'early' versus 'late' resistance

scenarios, rather than just the presence or absence of resistance. This is due to the importance officers attach to establishing the presence of consent, as required and outlined by law, and how they may look to do so by examining the timing of resistance. In addition, victims who resist 'late' in their encounter, for whatever reason, may feel that their position is undermined within the eyes of officers due to societal beliefs about women as the gatekeepers of sexual activity and what constitutes refusal of consent versus 'token resistance'.

### **Officer Characteristics**

In addition to victim characteristics, several studies have focused on the influence of officer characteristics on rape myth acceptance and the associated judgments towards both victims and perpetrators. For example, several studies have demonstrated differences between male and female officer's perceptions of rape victims and their acceptance of rape myths (Brown & King, 1998; R. Campbell, 1995; Feldman-Summers & Norris, 1984; Jordan, 2002; Page, 2007; Schuller & Stewart, 2000; Sleath & Bull, 2012, 2015; Wentz & Archbold, 2011). Specifically, results from Page (2007) showed that male officers in the U.S. endorsed rape myths to a greater extent than female officers, and that female officers were more likely to believe victims regardless of any defining characteristics (such as engagement in sex work, Page, 2007). This reflects patterns found in the general population that suggest men show greater acceptance of rape myth than women (see Suarez & Gadalla, 2010 for review). However, recent studies demonstrate a more mixed pattern, with some finding no differences between male and female officers (Sleath & Bull, 2015), and some finding greater acceptance in female officers (Wentz & Archbold, 2011). The few studies examining police officer judgments of victim responsibility provide similarly mixed results. Wentz and Archbold (2011) found that, even though female officers in the U.S. showed a greater acceptance of rape myths, male and female officers were uniform in their judgments of victim responsibility. Furthermore, Sleath and Bull (2012) found that male officers in the UK held victims as more responsible, but only when victim characteristics representative of rape myths were present. Taken together, these results largely suggest that further investigation of the relationship between officer gender and judgments of

responsibility, for both victim and perpetrator, as well as the authenticity of the crime, is desperately needed.

Some investigation into the effect of specialist training on judgments of victim responsibility has also been conducted, again with mixed results. One of the few evaluations of specialist officer training in the United States found that training was ineffective in changing cognitive or attitudinal outcomes in officers, such as acceptance of rape myths (Lonsway et al., 2001). Other studies that assess specific interventions find similar results, suggesting negligible impact of specialist training on the prevalence of negative attitudes in officers (Muram, Hellman, & Cassinello, 1995). This is supported by research investigating the impact of specialized prosecution units in the U.S., demonstrating that prosecutors' charging decisions and predictors of charging are similar in areas with and without such units, with victim credibility being the focal concern for officers in both jurisdictions (Beichner & Spohn, 2005). This is mirrored by research conducted in the United Kingdom evaluating differences between 'Specially Trained Officers' (STOS)/'Sexual Offences Investigative Techniques' (SOIT) officers and non-specialist officers (Sleath & Bull, 2012). No differences were found in judgments of victim responsibility made by these groups, suggesting a distinct lack of impact of specialist training on officer's attitudes (Sleath & Bull, 2012). Some studies find more positive outcomes, such as a recent evaluation of the 4-week specialist training delivered to officers from Victoria Police Service in Australia (Darwinkel, Powell, & Tidmarsh, 2013), however, existing research currently suggests that specialist training delivered to officers is largely ineffective. As with research on the influence of officer gender, further research into the impact of specialist training on officer's judgments of victim and perpetrator responsibility, as well as the severity of the crime itself, is therefore required to identify specific officer needs in this area, and provide an important evidence base to inform future training.

### **The Present Study**

Variations in victim-perpetrator relationship, the reputation of the victim, and initial point of resistance have all been shown to significantly influence judgments regarding responsibility and

authenticity in cases of rape when using non-specialist populations. However, whilst a limited number of similar studies have been conducted with police officers, further examination of judgments towards hypothetical rape scenarios in this population is crucial. Such research is vital in improving understanding of how officers may evaluate cases of rape in real life, and in establishing which rape-myth-related elements of cases are likely to create variations in said judgments. This is particularly important considering the strong evidence in support of the detrimental effect of negative attitudes on officers' decision making during the investigative process (O'Keeffe, Brown, & Lyons, 2009; Venema, 2016a) and on their evaluations of victim and rape legitimacy (Venema, 2016b). Furthermore, victims' opinions and beliefs about how they *feel* officers will approach their case has a substantial impact on their decision to report (Jordan, 2001, 2004); for example, between 11% and 26% of victims chose not to report because they believed officers: would not believe them, would not act upon the information, and would not be sympathetic (Office for National Statistics, 2015a; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Victims are also particularly susceptible to negative and traumatising experiences with the criminal justice system, specifically related to victim blaming attitudes and behaviour, described as *secondary victimization* (Alderden & Ullman, 2012; R. Campbell, 1998; R. Campbell & Raja, 1999; R. Campbell et al., 1999; R. Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001; Madigan & Gamble, 1991; P. Y. Martin & Powell, 1994). Therefore, in gaining a greater understanding of the evaluations made by officers, as well as which specific case factors invoke said judgments, it may be possible to create more targeted training or interventions challenging such beliefs, in turn improving victim experiences.

To this end, 16 hypothetical vignettes were created to investigate the impact of *victim-perpetrator relationship*, *victim reputation* and *initial point of resistance* on police officer's judgments of victim responsibility, perpetrator responsibility, and the degree to which the scenario presented was considered a case of rape. These scenarios were highly representative of initial statements given to police officers by victims of rape, and included both standardized information regarding the crime that had taken place, as well as specific sentences containing information



related to the extra-legal factors outlined above. Providing accurate predictions on any differences in judgments made by police officers is difficult, as research into judgments made by officers is sparse. In addition, police officers have a more thorough knowledge of legislation to aid and inform the judgments they make that members of the general public do not. However, in line with previous research, some hypotheses were made:

**H1:** Officers' judgments of responsibility will vary significantly based on *victim-perpetrator relationship*. Specifically, cases of stranger, partner, and ex-partner rape, will receive lower ratings of victim responsibility than cases of acquaintance rape. Conversely, cases of stranger rape will receive higher ratings of perpetrator responsibility, and higher perceived rape 'authenticity' ratings, compared to cases of acquaintance, partner, or ex-partner rape.

**H2:** Officers' judgments will also vary significantly based on *victim reputation*. Cases involving a victim purported to have 'good' reputation will receive lower ratings of victim responsibility than cases involving a victim purported to have 'bad' reputation. In addition, 'bad' reputation scenarios will receive lower ratings of perpetrator responsibility and perceived rape 'authenticity'.

**H3:** Similarly, officers' judgments will vary based on the *initial point of resistance*, with cases involving a victim who resists 'early' receiving lower ratings of victim responsibility, higher ratings of perpetrator responsibility, and higher rape 'authenticity' ratings than in cases where victims resist 'late'.

**H4:** Finally, it is hypothesized that *Officer Sex* and *officer training* will affect responsibility and 'authenticity' judgments. Namely, male officers, and officers without specialist training, will judge victims as more responsible, perpetrators as less responsible, and cases as less 'authentic' than female officers and those with specialist training. The analysis will test both for main effects and interactions among factors.

## Methods

### Design

This study adopted a between-subjects design with four factors: *Victim-perpetrator relationship* (with four levels: stranger, acquaintance, partner, or ex-Partner), *victim reputation* (with two levels: 'good' versus 'bad'), *initial point of resistance* (with two levels: 'early' versus 'late') and *officer sex* (with two levels: male or female). An alternative factor, *officer training* (with two levels: no Sexual Offences Investigative Techniques (SOIT) training versus Sexual Offences Investigative Techniques (SOIT) trained), was included in later analyses in place of *officer sex*. These factors constituted the independent variables in this study. The dependent variables were officers' ratings of: victim responsibility, perpetrator responsibility, and the extent to which they considered the scenario to be rape (rape authenticity rating).

### Participants

Participants were 808 police officers (min = 19 yrs, max = 63 yrs, M = 38.12 yrs, SD = 9.52, 513 men) from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in London, United Kingdom. Officers had a wide range of service length (min = 3 months, max = 35 yrs, M = 11.7 yrs, SD = 8.33) and were from a variety of ranks (63.4% Constables, 15.1% Sergeants, and 5.9% Police Community Support Officers, with the remaining percentage accounted for by ranks ranging from Recruit to Chief Superintendent). Participants were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds although most were White (84%). Finally, just over half of the participants (423, 52%) occupied a specialist role (e.g., Safer Neighbourhood Team, Counter Terrorism Unit) and, notably for this study, 11% of all officers had received specialist Sexual Offences Investigation Training (SOIT) at some point in their career. This constitutes a sample that is largely representative of both the Metropolitan Police Service, as well as the general police population nationwide (Office for National Statistics, 2015b).

### Materials

A series of written scenarios were created which included variations of three of the factors outlined above – *Victim-perpetrator relationship*, *victim reputation*, and the *initial point of*

*resistance*. This resulted in 16 vignettes, constructed to be representative of typical initial statements given to police officers following a serious sexual assault in terms of length, structure and level of detail (although from 3<sup>rd</sup> rather than 1<sup>st</sup> person), and were validated through discussion with senior officers within the MPS and peer reviewed for their representation of the variation in relationship, reputation, and point of resistance. All scenarios met the legal definition of rape as outlined in the Sexual Offences Act (2003) and were around 230 words in length. The ‘Stranger Perpetrator, ‘Bad’ Reputation, ‘Late’ Initial Point of Resistance’ scenario is given below as an example:

‘Maggie was at a Christmas celebration in her place of work, among those attending were colleagues, friends, and people from other departments she had never met. After some brief introductions Maggie decided she had to go back to her own office, at the other side of the building to take care of some final emails before returning to the party. A man from the party had been ‘checking her out’ during the course of the evening, and had been told by some of Maggie’s colleagues that she was an “up for it” kind of girl. He followed her to her office where Maggie was working on her emails. She said, “Can I help you?” and he replied “Yes you can, it’s Christmas, and I have some mistletoe here”. Maggie laughed calling the stranger a ‘cheeky one’ and she stopped her work and kissed the man under the mistletoe. Maggie continued to kiss the man and things became increasingly physical with him placing his hands on her breasts. After several minutes of kissing and physical petting she removed her blouse and pulled him in close. Maggie then said “I am at work, I am meant to be at a party... I have to stop sorry!” At this point the man became more forceful, pushing her hand onto his crotch. He then pushed her to her desk, forcibly held her and went on to have sex with Maggie.’

After the scenario participants were presented with five questions. The first three questions came from a similar vignette study (Grubb & Harrower, 2009) and assessed victim responsibility, asking participants ‘To what extent did the woman act carelessly?’, ‘To what extent did the woman lead the man on?’ and ‘To what extent was the woman’s behaviour responsible for her sexual encounter with

the man?'. Internal consistency for these three questions was high ( $\alpha = .90$ ), and participants' mean scores across these questions was utilized. The fourth question (from the same study; Grubb and Harrower, 2009) assessed perpetrator responsibility by asking 'Overall, to what extent was the man responsible for what happened to the victim?'. Participants answered these questions using a sliding scale, ranging from 'Not at All' to 'Completely', with no numerical values assigned. Finally, a fifth question was developed to measure officers' overall evaluation of the scenario as a rape.

Participants were asked 'On a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Absolutely) do you consider the scenario to constitute rape?' and answered using a sliding scale. The starting position of the sliders was in the middle of the scale for all questions. This study was approved by the School of Human and Social Sciences ethics committee at the University of West London.

### **Procedure**

Participants were invited to take part in the study via an online link, with vignettes and questions presented using the survey software Qualtrics. The link to the questionnaire was emailed to the professional email accounts of all police officers and police community support officers in the MPS (approx. 33,600 in total). Officers could only complete the questionnaire whilst on an MPS computer, ensuring participation occurred in a semi-controlled work environment. 1750 officers (approx. 5.05% of total force) opened the link to the questionnaire and answered at least one question. The final sample of 808 officers (46.17%, approx. 2.4% of total force) consisted of those who completed the questionnaire in full.

Upon opening the link, participants were first presented with an information and consent form. Participation was voluntary, and was stressed as such in their initial email. Considering the sensitive nature of the study, it was also strongly emphasized that participating in this study would not affect their career in any way, that results were completely anonymous and confidential, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. It was also stressed that nobody in the police force, including senior officers, had access to the data. Following this, participants were presented with an information screen describing the format of the rape vignette and accompanying question. Officers

were then presented at random with one of the sixteen vignettes, asked to read this carefully, and then asked to provide answers to the five questions below the scenario. Finally, a debriefing screen was provided, including the contact details of the researchers.

## Results

Significant correlations were found between the dependent variables ( $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, a four (*victim-perpetrator relationship*) x two (*victim reputation*) x two (*initial point of resistance*) x two (*officer sex*) MANOVA was conducted on participants' scores for victim responsibility, perpetrator responsibility, and evaluation of the scenario as rape. Descriptive statistics for the main effects of each independent variable on all dependent variables are shown in Table 1. All post-hoc analyses were conducted using Tukey's HSD. Bonferroni corrections were applied when multiple tests were conducted.

### Victim-Perpetrator Relationship

Analyses revealed a main effect for *victim-perpetrator relationship* on judgments of perpetrator responsibility,  $F(3, 776) = 8.32, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.03$ . As shown in Table 1, post-hoc analyses showed that officers judged partners as significantly less responsible than any other group. A main effect for *victim-perpetrator relationship* was also found for rape authenticity rating,  $F(3, 776) = 28.99, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.10$ . Post-hoc analyses revealed that officers gave significantly lower ratings of authenticity to partner rape scenarios than all other scenarios. No main effect was found on ratings of victim responsibility.

### Victim Reputation

The analysis revealed a main effect for *victim reputation* on ratings of victim responsibility,  $F(1, 776) = 25.19, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.03$ , showing that women who have a 'bad' reputation were judged as more responsible for their rape than those who have a 'good' reputation. No main effect was found for ratings of perpetrator responsibility or rape authenticity. In addition, interactions were found between *victim reputation* and *victim-perpetrator relationship* both for ratings of perpetrator responsibility,  $F(3, 776) = 2.90, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.01$ , and rape authenticity  $F(3, 776) = 3.90, p < 0.01$ ,

$\eta^2 = 0.02$  (mean values are presented in Table 2). Four one-way ANOVAs were conducted to further explore these effects. For perpetrator responsibility, results revealed differing patterns in officers' judgments of perpetrators in 'good' versus 'bad' reputation conditions. In conditions where victims had a 'good' reputation, *victim-perpetrator relationship* had no significant effect on judgments. However, in 'bad' *victim reputation* conditions, significant differences were found,  $F(3, 384) = 7.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ . Post-hoc tests revealed that partner perpetrators were judged as significantly less responsible than in stranger, acquaintance and ex-partner perpetrators. For authenticity judgments, in both 'good',  $F(3, 416) = 8.77$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ , and 'bad' reputation conditions,  $F(3, 384) = 21.70$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.16$ , scenarios involving a partner as the perpetrator were judged as less authentic than those with stranger, acquaintance, and ex-partner perpetrators. Four additional t-tests were conducted to assess differences in authenticity judgments across 'good' versus 'bad' reputation conditions for each perpetrator type. Interestingly, only ratings for partner scenarios were significantly different,  $t(159) = 2.26$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , with 'bad' reputation scenarios garnering lower ratings of authenticity.

### **Initial Point of Resistance**

A significant main effect was found for *Initial point of resistance* on ratings of victim responsibility,  $F(1, 776) = 141.33$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.15$ , with officers judging women who resisted later as more responsible for their sexual assault than those who resisted 'early'. A main effect was found for *Initial point of resistance* on ratings of perpetrator responsibility,  $F(1, 776) = 13.16$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ , showing that officers judged men as significantly less responsible for the assault if the woman in the scenario had resisted 'late' as opposed to 'early' in the assault. *Initial point of resistance* also significantly influenced officers' ratings of rape authenticity,  $F(1, 776) = 8.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ , with results suggesting that officers judged scenarios where the victim resisted 'late' as significantly less of a rape than those where the victim resisted 'early'. Means and standard deviations for these effects are found in Table 1.

*Initial point of resistance* also interacted with two of the other factors. A two-way interaction was found between *initial point of resistance* and *victim-perpetrator relationship* for rape authenticity rating,  $F(3, 776) = 6.64, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.03$ . Mean values are presented in Table 3. To further investigate, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted, revealing a similar pattern of authenticity judgments in both ‘early’,  $F(3, 392) = 6.10, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.05$ , and ‘late’ resistance conditions,  $F(3, 408) = 26.32, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.19$ . Post hoc tests revealed that in both resistance conditions, scenarios involving a partner as the perpetrator were judged as less authentic than those with stranger, acquaintance, and ex-partner perpetrators. Four additional t-tests were conducted to assess differences across ‘early’ versus ‘late’ resistance conditions for each perpetrator type. Interestingly, only ratings for partner scenarios were significantly different,  $t(178) = 2.81, p < 0.005$ , with ‘late’ resistance scenarios garnering lower ratings of authenticity. These results suggest that in across both conditions, partner rapes are judged as less authentic, and that this effect is more pronounced in ‘late’ resistance conditions.

A further two-way interaction effect was found between *initial point of resistance* and *victim reputation* for ratings of victim responsibility,  $F(1, 776) = 10.75, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.01$ . Mean values are presented in Table 4, suggesting an ordinal interaction, with participants judging the woman in the scenario as more responsible in the ‘late’ versus ‘early’ resistance condition across both reputation conditions, and as more responsible in the ‘bad’ versus ‘good’ reputation condition, with this having a stronger effect in the ‘late’ resistance condition. Four additional t-tests confirmed this pattern. Results revealed that victims who resisted ‘late’ were judged as more responsible in both ‘good’,  $t(387) = 7.29, p < 0.001$ , and ‘bad’ reputation conditions,  $t(366) = 10.28, p < 0.001$ . In addition, victims with a ‘bad’ reputation were judged as significantly more responsible in ‘late’ resistance conditions,  $t(392) = 5.49, p < 0.001$ .

Finally, a three-way interaction was found between *initial point of resistance*, *victim-perpetrator relationship*, and *victim reputation* for rape authenticity rating,  $F(3, 776) = 2.87, p = 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.01$ . Mean values are displayed in Table 5. To further explore this, four one-way ANOVAs

were conducted to assess differences in authenticity ratings between perpetrator groups for good-early, good-late, bad-early, and bad-late factor combinations. Results revealed no significant differences for *victim-perpetrator relationship* in both good-early and bad-early factor combinations, suggesting that, when a victim resists 'early', the type of perpetrator makes no difference to authenticity ratings. Differences did emerge in good-late,  $F(3, 213) = 7.84, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.11$ , and bad-late conditions,  $F(3, 197) = 24.79, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.38$ . In the scenarios where the victim has a 'good' reputation and resists 'late', authenticity ratings for conditions involving a partner as perpetrator are significantly lower than those involving stranger and ex-partner perpetrators, with acquaintance ratings falling in-between. These results suggest that officers appear to draw distinctions between scenarios involving perpetrators involved versus not-involved in victims' day-to-day lives. In scenarios where the victim has a 'bad' reputation and resists 'late', the clearest patterns are observed. Put simply, when a partner perpetrator is involved in these scenarios, officers' ratings of authenticity are significantly lower than scenarios involving all other types of perpetrator. Overall these results suggest that 'late' resistance by victims has a significant impact on all types of officer judgments, and that these differences are exaggerated in scenarios where victims also resist 'late', have a 'bad' reputation, or both.

### **Officer Sex**

Analyses revealed a main effect for *officer sex* on judgments of victim responsibility,  $F(1, 776) = 7.76, p < 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.01$ . Male officers held women in the scenario as more responsible than their female colleagues. There was no main effect of *officer sex* on either perpetrator responsibility, or rape authenticity rating. However, an interaction was found between *officer sex* and *victim-perpetrator relationship* for judgments of perpetrator responsibility,  $F(3, 776) = 4.89, p < 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.02$ . Two one-way ANOVAs revealed different patterns of judgment by male,  $F(3, 512) = 5.34, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.03$ , and female officers,  $F(3, 294) = 6.13, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.06$  (mean values are presented in Table 6). Post-hoc tests revealed that male officers judged acquaintance and ex-partner perpetrators as significantly more responsible than partner perpetrators. Stranger perpetrators fell



between those two groups and were not judged as significantly different. Female officers on the other hand judged ex-partner and stranger perpetrators as significantly more responsible than partner and acquaintance perpetrators. In addition, four t-tests were conducted to assess differences between male and female officers' judgments in each perpetrator group. Significant differences were found in the responsibility judgments for stranger perpetrators,  $t(196) = 3.03, p < 0.005$ , with female officers judging strangers as more responsible than male officers. Significant differences were also found in ratings for acquaintance perpetrators,  $t(77) = 2.04, p < 0.05$ , with male officers' responsibility ratings found to be significantly higher than female officers. Taken together, these results suggest that female officers draw a much clearer distinction between perpetrators who are active participants in victim's lives (i.e., partners and acquaintances) and those who are not, judging those in the former grouping as less responsible.

### **Specialist Training**

An additional two (*officer training*) x four (*victim-perpetrator relationship*) x two (*victim reputation*) x two (*initial point of resistance*) MANOVA was conducted to assess the interaction of officer training on the other independent variables. It must be noted that officers who had received specialist sexual offences investigative techniques (SOIT) training only constituted 11% of the sample. Therefore, cell sizes were drastically unequal, and results should be taken with extreme caution. However, a three-way interaction did emerge from the analysis between *officer training*, *victim-perpetrator relationship*, and *initial point of resistance* on ratings of perpetrator responsibility,  $F(3, 776) = 4.89, p < 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.02$ . Eight additional t-tests were conducted to assess the differences between specialist and non-specialist officers in each *victim-perpetrator* condition whilst also varying the *initial point of resistance*, with appropriate post-hoc adjustments. Results revealed no effect of training in any of the differing perpetrator conditions when the point of resistance was 'early'. However, when resistance by the victim was 'late', interesting patterns emerged. In acquaintance conditions, officers with specialist training ( $M = 98.50, SD = 4.74$ ) held the man in the scenario as more responsible than officers with no specialist training ( $M = 89.31, SD = 22.28$ ).

However, in partner conditions, specially trained officers ( $M = 62.29$ ,  $SD = 34.83$ ) judged perpetrators as less responsible than officers with no training ( $M = 86.88$ ,  $SD = 21.51$ ). These results suggest that, in scenarios that involve 'late' resistance by the victim, the effects of specialist sexual offences training are beneficial when the perpetrator is an acquaintance, but may be detrimental in scenarios involved a prolonged intimate relationship prior to the incident.

### Discussion

This study investigated police officers' judgments of victim and perpetrator responsibility, as well as rape authenticity, in response to hypothetical rape scenarios. This study is the first to systematically investigate the influence *victim-perpetrator relationship*, *victim reputation*, and *initial point of resistance* on such judgments in police officers, and to do so with a sample of officers of this size. In addition, results from this study add important new findings to existing literature on the influence of *officer sex* and *officer training* on judgments of this type. Each of these case and officer characteristics had a significant impact on at least one of the judgments made by officers, and sometimes operated in combination. These results suggest that police officers' initial judgments regarding responsibility and authenticity in rape cases may be influenced by salient case characteristics related to rape myths, which are unrelated to the factual, legal details of the crime. Understanding variation in officers' initial evaluative judgments in rape cases is vital in avoiding 'premature or inappropriate assumptions about the validity of a rape complaint' and taking significant steps towards ensuring 'that the investigation of rape is approached with an open mind' as recommended by the Dame Elish Angiolini review (2015, p.153).

#### Victim-Perpetrator Relationship

The first hypothesis was only partially supported. Officer's judgments of victim responsibility were unaffected by *victim-perpetrator relationship*. This is in contrast to previous literature suggesting that officers judge victims in acquaintance scenarios as more responsible for their victimization than those assaulted by strangers (Sleath & Bull, 2012). The reasons for these contrasting results are unclear. The most likely explanation is that this is related to an increased

emphasis on belief in the victim across police forces in the UK, regardless of case or victim characteristics (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2014). This could also be representative of a wider cultural shift in attitudes towards the victims of rape, possibly due to an increased focus on 'date' and acquaintance rapes in awareness campaigns that have served to downplay the importance of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. These results are encouraging, as they suggest that officers believe that no relationship type can account for, or be suggestive of, increased responsibility on behalf of the victim.

Officers' judgments of perpetrator responsibility and rape authenticity do however provide some support for hypothesis one, as officers gave significantly lower ratings for both these variables in partner scenarios compared to stranger, ex-partner and acquaintance scenarios. These patterns of judgment indicate that officers are similarly influenced by *victim-perpetrator relationship* in their evaluations of marital rape as are undergraduates (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014) but not in their evaluations of acquaintance rape. These judgments also seem to suggest a slightly more nuanced perception of cases than outlined in previous research with officers. Specifically, rather than perceiving any prior relationship as reason to doubt the authenticity of the case (Venema, 2016b), officers in this study only questioned the validity of the claim in cases where the perpetrator and victim know each other extremely well (i.e., when married; Page, 2007). Again, the explanation for this specific distinction is unclear. This effect could be due to the existence of prior physical evidence in marital cases that serves to complicate the establishment of consent. However, beliefs regarding misunderstanding through miscommunication and the difficulty in ascertaining true consent in close relationships could also influence these judgments (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Regardless of the cause, overall results from this study suggest that whilst officers do not hold victims in partner cases as more responsible, they do hold a less negative view of perpetrators, and may still devalue these cases (Simonson & Subich, 1999). The presence of attitudes or judgments that may serve to trivialise rape cases of this type is particularly worrying considering the high proportion of cases that involve a current partner (Office for National Statistics, 2015a; Waterhouse et al., 2016).

### **Victim Reputation**

Police officers judged victims with a ‘bad’ reputation as significantly more responsible for their victimization than those with ‘good’ reputations, providing support for hypothesis two. These results are similar to those found in studies using undergraduate students, in which higher levels of victim responsibility were assigned to women who are perceived as less respectable (Cohn et al., 2009). This is also the first study to assess officers’ reputation-based judgments directly, and supports previous work suggesting that officers draw on negative reputation related beliefs when processing reports of rape (Shaw et al., 2016). Overall, results from this study suggest that police officers may still believe that women act as the gatekeepers of sexual interaction (Byers, 1996; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; LaPlante et al., 1980; Wiederman, 2005), and that women should adhere to strongly held societal beliefs regarding femininity and ‘appropriate’ female behaviour (Frith, 2009). The interaction between *victim reputation* and *victim-perpetrator relationship* for judgments of perpetrator responsibility and rape authenticity is particularly intriguing. These results suggested that when cases involve a partner and the victim has a ‘bad’ reputation, effects on officers’ judgments are compounded. This suggests that police may believe that when a precedent is set in terms of sexual interaction with a partner (i.e., a willingness to have sex in public places or outside), it becomes harder to judge when an incident is non-consensual. This is again worrying, as women involved in sexual practices with their partner that are deemed congruent with a ‘bad’ or ‘unfeminine’ reputation may feel less able to report to the police because of these attitudes.

### **Initial Point of Resistance**

Judgments by officers were strongly influenced by *Initial point of resistance*, with higher victim responsibility, lower perpetrator responsibility, and lower ratings of rape authenticity allocated in scenarios where the victim resisted ‘late’ compared to ‘early’, providing support for hypothesis three. Effect sizes for many of the results related to this variable were also the largest found in this study, further emphasizing the strength of differences found. This study is the first to directly examine the impact of this specific case characteristic on officer judgments, and results are

in line with judgments made in previous studies using non-specialist populations (Kopper, 1996; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983; Yescavage, 1999). Importantly, these results suggest that officers' evaluations are substantially influenced by the *timing* of resistance, possibly due to the perceived associations between resistance and consent. In other words, officers may find it easier to allocate higher victim responsibility, and lower perpetrator responsibility, when scenarios evoke culturally reinforced beliefs that if a woman does not offer immediate refusal of consent, she has forfeited her right to say no. Resisting 'late' also appears to undermine a woman's position as a legitimate victim in the eyes of police officers, making it harder for officers to judge these scenarios as authentic cases of rape. In the extreme, evaluations such as these from officers may help to perpetuate the belief that when women resist 'late' they have effectively already consented, and may discourage women from reporting in cases of sexual assault where they have resisted 'late' for fear of not being taken seriously or being judged as more responsible for their victimization.

Officers gave particularly high ratings of victim responsibility in scenarios where the victim resisted 'late' and had a 'bad' reputation, and gave significantly lower rape authenticity ratings in scenarios involving a partner and 'late' resistance by the victim. These results suggest that beliefs regarding the behaviour of men and women in sexual situations may operate simultaneously and in combination to influence officers' judgments. For example, in partner scenarios involving 'late' resistance, ideas regarding sexual miscommunication are compounded, as not only may the woman have 'led the man on', but it is also harder to tell whether her later refusal of consent is legitimate because of the existent close relationship between victim and perpetrator. Similarly, officers may particularly question the legitimacy of a 'late' refusal when the victim has a 'bad' reputation, and has been sexually willing in the past on a frequent basis.

Establishing the exact beliefs of officers regarding a victim's behaviour is beyond the scope of this study. However, what is clear is that variations in key characteristics extraneous to legal facts have an important and significant influence on officers' initial judgments of responsibility and authenticity of the claim. Taken together, results suggest that the three case characteristics

examined in this study, particularly the *initial point of resistance*, have a significant effect on the responsibility and authenticity judgments of officers, both individually and in combination. This suggests that there is an urgent need not only for the provision of officer training targeting the deconstruction and critique of these and other rape myths, but also the widely-held beliefs regarding consent and sexual communication, particularly in established relationships. Most importantly, training should not necessarily seek to enact attitude change, although this is beneficial. Instead, future officer training should focus on correctly and critically identifying the existence of negative attitudes in officers as part of a broader societal issue in the blaming of rape victims (Horvath & Brown, 2009), and encourage officers to suspend such attitudes whilst conducting case investigations.

#### **Officer Characteristics**

Support was found for hypothesis four, as both officer sex and officer training influenced officers' judgments. Across all conditions, male officers judged victims as more responsible for their victimization than female officers. This is in contrast to the limited research that currently exists, suggesting that male and female officers show no difference in their judgment of victim responsibility (Wentz & Archbold, 2011). The reasons for these results are unclear, however, considering the gendered composition of most UK and U.S. police forces (i.e., more male officers than female), results from this study suggest individual factors such as gender must be taken into consideration when assessing future directions for rape investigation in the UK. Interactions between variables provide further considerations, as male and female officers appeared to draw different distinctions in the responsibility of differing perpetrators. Specifically, when judging perpetrator responsibility, female officers appear to draw a much clearer distinction between those involved in victims' lives (such as partners and acquaintances), and those who are not (strangers and ex-partners), judging the latter as more responsible. Male officers only held partners as less responsible than other groups. These results therefore suggest that both male and female officers are affected by the existence of a prior relationship between victim and perpetrator, but that *any*

prior relationship affects judgments by female officers more. However, further research into this topic is required to fully disentangle these findings.

Effects for officer training were also found; however, as stated previously, these must be taken with extreme caution due to assumption violations. Nevertheless, one particularly interesting result emerged, demonstrating a specific effect of training on judgments of perpetrator responsibility, but only in conditions where the victim resisted 'late' and involving a perpetrator known to the victim. Results suggested that training had a beneficial effect on judgments in acquaintance scenarios with 'late' resistance, possibly reflecting again the increased emphasis in acknowledging acquaintance rape as a legitimate crime during specialist training and in broader police campaigns. However, specialist officers appeared to judge the perpetrator in partner scenarios involving 'late' resistance as less responsible than non-specialist officers. This may be due to the exposure that specialist officers have to cases of this type (Waterhouse et al., 2016), and how the challenges involved in these cases shape their expectancies regarding responsibility (Venema, 2016b). This specific results aside, results broadly support previous research demonstrating no differences in judgments of responsibility made by specialist and non-specialist officers (Sleath & Bull, 2012). This is alarming, as it suggests no current protective benefit for specialist officers when presented with scenarios evoking commonly held rape myths. Therefore, urgent examination of the content and delivery of specialist officer training is needed to establish opportunities for the improvement in the efficacy of this training.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, all participants were officers from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), representing only 1 of the UK's 43 forces. In addition, there are several unique challenges the MPS faces, such as greater ethnic diversity and demographic variation within London, sheer population size and volume of reported cases. Indeed, it is recognised that some variation significant regional variation in the incidence and reporting rates for rape does exist (Horvath & Brown, 2009), and these may have an impact on the preparedness, awareness, and

subsequent judgements made by officers towards cases. Nevertheless, whilst future research should seek to provide support for the generalisability of these results by including officers from other forces, as the largest force in the UK (with approximately 34,000 total staff) it can be assumed with some confidence that results from this representative MPS sample can be applied nationally. This is further supported by the fact that the MPS deal with 23% of all rape cases in the UK (ONS, 2015), suggesting that investigating variations in judgments in this sample of the broader police population has significant utility. Above the specific force-related limitations, general police populations also suffer from significant demographic restraints, as they are often largely white, male samples. However, as stated previously, this is representative of most UK police forces (Office for National Statistics, 2015b), and is therefore an unavoidable constraint in studies of this type. One final limitation relating to the use of officers is the increased risk of social desirability effects. Despite numerous assurances regarding confidentiality and anonymity, officers may have been suspicious about the use of their data, and therefore modified their judgments to represent answers expected by their superiors. This may have been further exacerbated by the fact that the questionnaire had to be answered on an MPS computer. However, social desirability effects are present in many studies of this type due to the sensitive nature of the study topic. In addition, the results of this study suggest that officers did answer questions openly and honestly, as many variations in judgments were found.

A further limitation is that the vignettes in this study varied by only three factors. In reality, a wealth of other information, sometimes closely tied with other rape myths and commonly held beliefs about rape, is often present and could influence officers' judgments in either positive or negative ways. For example, much research has examined the influence of intoxication by alcohol on variations in judgments of victim responsibility (Grubb & Turner, 2012) and on attrition of cases in the criminal justice system (Hohl & Stanko, 2015). In addition, in this study the timing of resistance was investigated, however, in many cases resistance is absent altogether, or may manifest in different ways (e.g., verbal versus physical, weak versus strong etc.). Future research might consider



investigating other factors, such as voluntary consumption of alcohol and presence/absence of consent, and their impact on officer judgments.

Finally, from the results of this study, it is not possible to tell if the judgments made by officers influence their interactions with victims, or the outcomes of cases that include these characteristics. However, evidence by Hohl and Stanko (2015) suggests that at least in some cases this may occur, as victims have over a 300% greater chance of their case receiving a 'no crime' or 'no further action' decision when a 'police officer notes doubts' regarding the case. Some of these doubts may stem from judgments made about the victim upon reporting, and future research should seek to support preliminary work by Venema (2016a, 2016b) examining the link between beliefs officers hold regarding rape as a crime, their judgment of victims and perpetrators, and their behaviour during case building and reporting. Even small reactions that officers may present to victims based on their initial judgments (such as a sigh, or a raised eyebrow) can have a significant impact on victim experience, and ultimately, the progression of the case through police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), to trial in court. Additionally, in considering future areas of research development, the extent of these variations in judgment could and should be extended to the CPS to examine the role of subjective variation throughout the structures involved in the criminal justice process.

## **Conclusion**

Police officers, having been drawn from the general population, are likely to hold some negative beliefs regarding victims of rape and serious sexual assault, as well as make associated judgments of responsibility. This is, at present, arguably unavoidable due to the continued existence and perpetuation of 'rape culture' (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005) that facilitates the germination and propagation of such attitudes. However, if specific case characteristics related to rape myths cause variation in the evaluation of victims, perpetrators and the crime itself, this may present a substantial barrier to providing an objective, fair and compassionate experience for victims. This is a significant and pressing problem when set in the broader context of continuingly

poor reporting rates for rape and sexual assault (Wykes & Welsh, 2009), and the frequent identification of negative officer attitudes among victims as powerful motivations for not reporting their victimization, and avoiding 'secondary victimization' (R. Campbell et al., 2001). Therefore, a significant review and revision of existing specialist and non-specialist training programmes for officers in the UK is clearly required, particularly to allow for concerted efforts in highlighting the influence of broader negative beliefs related to consent and sexual communication, especially in established couples, on the judgments of officers. This training should focus on raising a critical awareness in officers regarding the influence of the beliefs they hold on the judgments they make towards victims of sexual crimes, and encourage officers to suspend such attitudes when operating in an occupational capacity. In addition, future research should further investigate the relationship between negative attributions of responsibility by officers and the actions taken by officers during case building and evidence gathering (Venema, 2016a) to provide further support for the importance of challenging and nullifying such beliefs within the police population.

Tables

Table 1.

Means (and standard deviations) for participants' ratings for each dependent variable across *Victim-Perpetrator Relationship*, *Victim Reputation*, *Initial Point of Resistance* and *Officer Sex* conditions

	Victim-Perpetrator Relationship				Victim Reputation		Initial Point of Resistance		Officer Sex	
	Stranger	Acquaintance	Partner	Ex-Partner	'Good'	'Bad'	'Early'	'Late'	Male	Female
Victim responsibility	21.87 (24.16)	19.50 (22.49)	20.18 (24.79)	22.49 (26.66)	16.89 <sub>c</sub> (21.57)	25.49 <sub>d</sub> (26.72)	11.17 <sub>e</sub> (18.51)	30.49 <sub>f</sub> (25.89)	22.41 <sub>g</sub> (25.06)	18.62 <sub>h</sub> (23.46)
Perpetrator responsibility	93.73 <sub>a</sub> (15.76)	92.87 <sub>a</sub> (18.63)	87.04 <sub>b</sub> (23.11)	95.14 <sub>a</sub> (13.84)	92.24 (19.32)	92.33 (17.15)	94.12 <sub>e</sub> (16.96)	90.52 <sub>f</sub> (19.36)	92.28 (18.52)	92.29 (18.57)
Rape authenticity rating	95.34 <sub>a</sub> (15.91)	93.44 <sub>a</sub> (19.88)	79.57 <sub>b</sub> (32.21)	96.92 <sub>a</sub> (11.94)	92.41 (20.51)	90.56 (23.81)	93.03 <sub>e</sub> (20.08)	90.08 <sub>f</sub> (23.93)	92.38 (20.83)	90.04 (24.25)

Note: Significantly different values ( $p < .001$ ) are marked with different letters (i.e., in victim-perpetrator relationship, for perpetrator responsibility, strangers are significantly less responsible than partners, but not significantly different from acquaintances.) New letters are used for each independent variable (i.e., a and b indicate differences for victim-perpetrator relationship; c and d indicate differences for victim reputation etc.).

Table 2.

Means (standard deviations) for participants' ratings of perpetrator responsibility and rape authenticity across *Reputation* and *Victim-Perpetrator Relationship* conditions

	Reputation	Relationship			
		Stranger	Acquaintance	Partner	Ex-Partner
Perpetrator responsibility	'Good'	92.55 (17.23)	91.50 (21.18)	88.94 (23.01)	96.06 (14.21)
	'Bad'	95.02 <sub>a</sub> (13.95)	94.32 <sub>a</sub> (15.49)	84.76 <sub>b</sub> (23.16)	94.22 <sub>a</sub> (13.47)
Rape authenticity	'Good'	94.85 <sub>a</sub> (16.22)	92.34 <sub>a</sub> (21.49)	84.43 <sub>b</sub> (27.66)	98.05 <sub>a</sub> (10.05)
	'Bad'	95.88 <sub>a</sub> (15.62)	94.59 <sub>a</sub> (18.05)	73.75 <sub>b</sub> (36.24)	95.79 <sub>a</sub> (13.53)

Note: Significantly different values ( $p < .001$ ) are marked with different letters

Table 3.

Means (standard deviations) for participants' ratings of rape authenticity across *Initial Point of Resistance* and *Victim-Perpetrator Relationship* conditions

Initial Point of Resistance	Relationship			
	Stranger	Acquaintance	Partner	Ex-Partner
'Early'	93.36 <sub>a</sub> (19.18)	95.96 <sub>a</sub> (15.81)	85.93 <sub>b</sub> (28.13)	96.73 <sub>a</sub> (12.19)
'Late'	97.17 <sub>a</sub> (11.91)	90.99 <sub>a</sub> (22.96)	73.00 <sub>b</sub> (34.89)	97.10 <sub>a</sub> (11.76)

Note: Significantly different values ( $p < .05$ ) are marked with different letters

Table 4.

Means (standard deviations) for participants' ratings of victim responsibility across *Reputation* and *Initial Point of Resistance* conditions

Initial Point of Initial Resistance	Reputation	
	'Good'	'Bad'
'Early'	9.56 (16.72)	12.93 (20.16)
'Late'	23.95 (23.31)	30.49 (25.89)

Table 5.

Means (standard deviations) for participants' ratings of rape authenticity rating across all three independent variables

Condition	Relationship			
	Stranger	Acquaintance	Partner	Ex-Partner
Good Reputation/Early IPOR	94.04 (16.53)	95.83 (17.34)	87.51 (25.95)	96.42 (14.37)
Good Reputation/Late IPOR	95.65 <sub>a</sub> (16.01)	88.92 <sub>a,b</sub> (24.61)	81.47 <sub>a</sub> (29.16)	99.53 <sub>b</sub> (01.75)
Bad Reputation/Early IPOR	92.54 (22.11)	96.10 (14.19)	84.17 (30.57)	97.04 (09.75)
Bad Reputation/Late IPOR	98.72 <sub>a</sub> (04.78)	93.14 <sub>a,b</sub> (21.16)	62.05 <sub>b</sub> (38.82)	94.62 <sub>a</sub> (16.32)

Note: Significantly different values ( $p < .05$ ) are marked with different letters

Table 6.

Means (standard deviations) for male and female officers' ratings of perpetrator responsibility across *Victim-Perpetrator Relationship* conditions

Officer Sex	Relationship			
	Stranger	Acquaintance	Partner	Ex-Partner
Male	91.71 <sub>a,b</sub> (18.55)	95.02 <sub>a</sub> (14.02)	86.86 <sub>b</sub> (23.11)	94.69 <sub>a</sub> (15.72)
Female	97.29 <sub>a</sub> (07.89)	87.92 <sub>b</sub> (25.83)	87.29 <sub>b</sub> (23.37)	95.84 <sub>a</sub> (10.31)

Note: Values with different letters indicate significant differences to  $p < 0.05$  (e.g., values with the letter <sub>a</sub> are significantly different to any values with the letter <sub>b</sub>).

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