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## What Support? Foucault, Power, and the Construction of Rape

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**Abstract** This paper is concerned with the social and cultural constructions of male rape in voluntary agencies, England. Using sociological, cultural, and post-structural theoretical frameworks, mainly the works of Foucault, I demonstrate the ways in which male rape is constructed and reconstructed in such agencies. Social and power relations, social structures, and time and place shape their discourses, cultures, and constructions pertaining to male rape. This means that constructions of male rape are neither fixed, determined, nor unchanging at any time and place, but rather negotiated and fluid. I theorize the data—which was collected through semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires—including male rape counselors, therapists, and voluntary agency caseworkers. The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings that frame and elucidate the data contribute to sociological understandings of male rape.

**Keywords** Voluntary Agencies; Surveillance; Subjectivity; Victim Blame; Stigma

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According to recent figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2013, approximately 75,000 men are victims of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault a year, while 9,000 men are victims of rape or attempted rape each year (Ministry of Justice 2014a). It is significant to critically examine the ways in which practitioners in voluntary agencies<sup>1</sup> construct male rape<sup>2</sup> because they are the first port of call for when

<sup>1</sup> These voluntary agencies are specialized sexual violence agencies, such as Rape Crisis, Survivors UK, MESMAC, et cetera, that provide services and support for both male and female rape victims.

<sup>2</sup> That is, men being raped by either men or women, anally and/or orally. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on adult male rape victims and adult male victims of sexual assault.

male rape victims seek support, counseling, and treatment. By researching voluntary agencies' attitudes towards and responses to male victims of rape, the aims of this paper can be fulfilled. It is important to consider how cultural myths relating to male rape, which I argue emerge from social relations and social structures, arrange the type of service delivery they provide to male rape victims. To elucidate and make sense of the data presented herein, I draw on sociological, cultural, and post-structural theoretical frameworks, notably the works of Foucault. Sociological and cultural studies are the most suitable areas of study to provide knowledge and understanding of how male rape is culturally and socially constructed in voluntary agencies within England. I do not claim to represent the culturally constructed realities of all voluntary agency practitioners in England, but rather provide a snapshot of some practitioners' attitudes towards and responses to male rape that are shaped and reshaped by cultures, discourses, and social and power relations. Therefore, this paper provides some knowledge and understanding of how male rape myths, which are culturally and socially constructed, inform the practitioners' attitudes towards and responses to male rape victims in a local and regional context. The specific research question being drawn on is "how do conceptions of male rape shape voluntary agencies' attitudes towards and responses to male victims of rape and sexual violence in England?", drawing on post-cultural theory to elucidate the data. In this paper, I argue that practitioners in voluntary agencies socially and culturally construct male rape dissimilarly depending on social and cultural forces, contexts, and cultural myths.

In terms of structure, this paper will first set out prior literature associated with male rape and the voluntary sector to map what is already known about male rape and identify the gap that the current work addresses, as well as introduce key concepts and empirical evidence that will later be applied to the analysis of the data. I then introduce the theoretical frameworks that will be drawn on to elucidate and make sense of the data. The empirical study that this paper is based on is then discussed in order to theorize the data using Foucauldian concepts of power and discourse. Then, I present the findings and discussion in three sections. First, I consider the ways in which the practitioners understand male rape through discourse, surveillance, and subjectivity. I come to argue that some practitioners construct male victims' experience of rape as "abnormal," "unnatural," and "deviant," while others attempt to normalize their experience of rape in order to provide empathy. Second, I critically examine the interconnection between male rape discourse and stigma, arguing that some practitioners find it difficult to take male rape seriously because of the stigma associated with it. Third, constructions of victim blame and (dis)belief in voluntary agencies are critically examined, where I argue that some practitioners circulate victim blaming attitudes and responses against male rape victims. The paper ends with some concluding remarks about the social and cultural constructions of male rape in voluntary agencies.

### **Voluntary Agencies' Attitudes Towards & Responses to Male Rape**

It is important to discuss some empirical studies on male sexual victimization, so we know what is

being constructed with regards to male rape and whether men's experiences of rape are similar and/or different in nature, circumstances, and outcomes. By doing so, the literature review will frame the qualitative analysis of male rape and the response of voluntary agencies using poststructuralist theory that will soon follow. It is also important to shed some light on the literature surrounding voluntary agencies for male rape victims to give an understanding of voluntary agencies' attitudes towards and responses to male rape. Voluntary agencies play an important role in producing, interpreting, and implementing policy, while having a vital duty to raise awareness, lobby for change, and deliver particular provisions. Voluntary agencies for male rape victims are, however, limited. The lack of empirical research and attention on male rape may make getting resources difficult. My research attempts to fill in these gaps by offering new empirical data on voluntary agencies that provide support for male rape victims.

The voluntary sector has an important role to play in supporting the statutory services, such as SARCs, in the response to and recovery of male rape victims. The value of involving the voluntary sector at every stage of the criminal justice process is to provide additional support to male rape victims. In the United Kingdom, the voluntary sector is large and diverse. The expertise and skills available from the voluntary sector vary from place to place. Research has shown that advance planning enables voluntary sector activity to be more integrated and effective (Cohen 2014), to liaise with SARCs where victims can go to in order to report their crime if they do not want to go directly to the police to report. The

UK Government has identified the need to "increase access to support and health services for victims of sexual violence and abuse" (Home Office 2007:2) over the last few decades and recently re-stated the need to "improve our response to sexual violence overall and how we support the provision of services to victims of sexual violence to ensure they have access to adequate support" (HM Government 2011:15). Therefore, the current situation for male rape victims is that the voluntary sector is prepared and dedicated to dealing with them. Male victims of rape, it appears, are seen as a priority for the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector does provide additional care and support to male victims of rape (Cohen 2014). However, there are some social issues that make it difficult for the voluntary sector to engage with male rape victims.

For example, for many male rape victims, notions of masculinity that stress that men ought to be self-reliant and independent lead many male rape victims isolated and alone, since expectations of masculinity make it difficult for men to reveal their sexual victimization, because doing so would admit defeat, powerlessness, and emasculation (Javaid 2017a). This highlights the importance of the need of voluntary agencies to be aware of the many issues associated with male rape, such as men's reluctance to engage with the voluntary sector due to the pressure to embody and perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. It is a form of masculinity that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities. O'Brien and colleagues (2015) argue that voluntary services often perpetuate the belief that "men cannot get raped," even years after the

victim's rape, when they eventually seek treatment. They found that men had reported fears about being disbelieved, founded on past experiences of rejection and disbelief when they revealed their rape to service providers. Turchik and Edwards (2012) demonstrate that male rape myths, which are false representations and misunderstandings of male rape, work to sustain and justify rape against men. The myths develop and manifest in various ways, such as through institutions like police forces, the military, law, medicine, prison, and the media, fuelling negative attitudes and responses to male rape victims at the individual, institutional, and societal levels (Abdullah-Khan 2008; Rumney, 2009; Turchik and Edwards 2012).

There is an absence of a specific type of intervention specifically for male rape victims. For example, Vearnal and Campbell (2001) argue that voluntary agencies deliver intervention that is frequently based on either literature surrounding childhood sexual abuse or female rape, or clinical experience. Therefore, therapeutic intervention is not designed to address male rape victims' idiosyncratic issues and concerns, so it is found to be insensitive to the victims' unique experiences (Washington 1999). Older research stresses the risk of employing intervention that has either female or children victims in mind for male rape victims because such intervention tends to emphasize to victims that they were powerless within the violent incident (Sepler 1990). However, it seems that there are a number of problems here. Is it really the case that support provision for women emphasizes powerlessness? This is contrary to the emphasis of feminist organizations on empowering victims and feminist work

on resistance. Indeed, feminist research and practice have largely advocated for the use of the term "survivor" rather than "victim," whereby the survivor is constructed as having survived their rape or sexual assault. Connell (2005) discusses that males are socialized to be powerful and independent, arguing that both powerlessness and helplessness are not an option for males because they prevent men from embodying hegemonic masculinity. For men, failing to achieve this social ideal of masculinity and the gender expectations of men means that they may get classified as not "real men." Voluntary agencies adapting such intervention that expresses powerlessness and helplessness may be harmful to male rape victims. In order to understand male rape victims' victimization, Carpenter (2009) suggests that voluntary agencies should deal with them with a use of a masculinity framework. This means that the agencies should be sensitive and understanding to men's masculinities through encouraging strength and independence when handling men as victims of rape. In the meantime,

[M]en are victimized at multiple levels: first they are victimized by their attackers, they are then subjected to rejection and stigmatization from friends and family and potentially humiliated at the hands of the law. These factors serve to reinforce the internalization of self-blame and denial of the need for help that inhibits recovery from the assault...The psychological consequences of male rape impact in the immediate & long-term and can be emotional, behavioral, and somatic. There have been few studies looking at the impact of male rape in comparison to female rape, but it is reasonable to assume that some features are common to both. [Carpenter 2009:n.p.]

It seems that hegemonic masculinity creates multiple barriers to men recognizing and naming their experiences of rape and seeking support, hence is it really helpful to reinforce hegemonic values of self-sufficiency, independence, and self-reliance in men's interventions? Arguably, there is a need for men to have safe spaces in which they can acknowledge their fears, feelings of vulnerability, and distress, as well as to find positive and empowering coping strategies. It is clear that male rape causes immense short- and long-term psychological pain. For those victims who do try to get help, however, they may not be able to get it. For example, Carpenter (2009) argues that service providers for male rape victims receive a lack of attention and, therefore, become limited. As a result, male rape victims are unlikely to report due to a scarcity of services accessible for them, facilitating rather than addressing the stigmatization of male rape. Because of the lack of attention on male rape, the issue of male sexual victimization is not drawing attention and so making it difficult to acquire resources (Carpenter 2009). Thus, when male rape victims do eventually build up the courage to seek support, they are often unaware of what service provisions are available specifically for male rape victims, which in turn increases their reluctance to look for services for male victims of rape. Additionally, it appears that there is a considerable lack of finance and resources put into providing services for men as victims of rape, while voluntary services specifically for female rape victims do not serve men. Neglecting men in this way implies that men do not want or need voluntary services to manage the after effects of their rape and implies that "male rape is not a serious issue" in the voluntary sector. King (1995) suggests that all types

of voluntary agencies are needed in order to provide male rape victims with counseling support, as most will benefit from it. However, most female rape victims do not approach a statutory/voluntary agency, so the uptake is most likely even lower for male victims. Arguably, data on this issue in England are lacking as the Crime Survey for England and Wales does not provide thorough analysis of male sexual victimization data.

Research has found that males who suffered penetration throughout their attack were more unlikely than other types of victims to look for assistance from voluntary agencies, suggesting that such males were potentially suffering from confusion and shame pertaining to their sexual identification (Monk-Turner and Light 2010). When the victims seek help, as Donnelly and Kenyon (1996)<sup>3</sup> argue, they are met with professionals, working in voluntary agencies, who possess male rape myths: if they were raped, it was because they "wanted to be"; and "men cannot be raped by other men," leaving the authors to conclude that many professionals in voluntary services do not consider male rape as a problem for men. More recent research supports this, in which Apperley (2015) argues that most health-care service providers, who offer support, only believe that sexual abuse is only applicable to girls and women. In Donnelly and Kenyon's study, the authors explored mental health and medical professionals' responses and attitudes to male rape victims. They also found that gaps in service provision,

<sup>3</sup> This evidence is very dated, so caution needs to be taken when considering such arguments as attitudes and responses may have changed in England to date; the current study examines whether or not they actually have.



dearth of responsiveness, and gender expectations of men contribute to the scarcity of help for male rape victims. Although this research was conducted over a decade ago, a dearth of research has explored whether these findings are still relevant today. My research attempts to explore if such findings are still relevant in England.

Voluntary agencies should attempt to address secondary victimization, which refers to attitudes and conducts of institutions/service providers that are insensitive and victim blaming, traumatizing rape victims, because research claims that such agencies tend to perpetrate it. For example, Abdullah-Khan (2008) and Washington (1999) suggest that male rape victims experience secondary victimization by informal and formal counseling services, and the medical profession. Washington's research, though, is based on interviews with six male victims of sexual assault from adulthood and childhood. Her results cannot be generalized to all male victims who undergo counseling services. Her results highlight that, as a small number of such victims were suffering from voluntary agencies' attitudes and responses, the fact that some victims were suffering warrants attention to see whether these issues are still present in England. This is particularly the case especially when Walker and colleagues (2005) found a link between male rape victims' reluctance to seek psychological help from voluntary agencies and attempted suicide. Likewise, the victims show high levels of health issues and psychological disturbances, even years after the rape. Further, the researchers found that the victims display anxiety, somatic symptoms, sleeplessness, depression, and social dysfunction, while lacking confidence per-

taining to their social lives, appearance, and general competence; hence, the victims' reluctance to seek psychological help from voluntary agencies. The male rape victims who do seek help from such agencies will often present other reasons for attending, for example, medical advice, in order to conceal the rape itself (Walker et al. 2005). Because of the hidden nature of male rape, studies such as Walker and colleagues' have to use small sample groups, which means their results cannot be generalized.

In spite of criticisms, some attention is being directed towards male rape victims. The impact of the legislative construction on policy includes male rape whereby the Stern Review (2010) incorporates male rape victims, stressing the need to incorporate the male in service provision, policy, and research. It is important to note that state and voluntary agencies did not consider the Stern Review findings. For example, in official government responses to Stern (2010) and the following voluntary sector reports, the initial commentary pertaining to male rape was excluded, so the voluntary sector in the provision of services (as the government directs and funds) for the male is small (Cohen 2014). An important conclusion drawn from the Stern Review (2010:8) is that "the policies are not the problem. The failures are in the implementation." The review goes on to say that, "Whilst treatment of victims has improved considerably, we heard of areas where victims' organizations struggle to have their concerns heard" (Stern 2010:8). This may suggest a number of viewpoints, such as voluntary agencies may be expressing genuine concerns, but policy- or lawmakers are refusing to adequately and whole-heartedly acknowledge them. Mean-

while, Cohen (2014) carried out content analysis on the Stern Review (2010) and found that it implicitly perpetuates male rape myths, such as “men cannot be raped by other men,” orienting rape as an issue of men against women, while conceptualizing male rape as an anomaly. The relevance of this critical discussion is that, collectively, these problems ingrained in the review may impact the way voluntary agencies respond to, and deal with, male rape victims, while influencing voluntary agency practitioners’ attitudes towards male rape.

Similarly, the Interim Government Response to the Stern Review (Home Office 2010) largely neglects male rape, for example, in relation to risk management, protecting societies, and attrition. The focus is only on females as victims; males as offenders, which consequently ignores male rape victims by not considering them as a priority:

Government priorities in this important area are to: provide end-to-end support for all victims through the criminal justice system, from report to court; bring more offenders to justice by improving reporting and conviction rates; and rehabilitate offenders and manage the risk they present to *women and girls*. [Home Office 2010:21 (emphasis added)]

It appears that this passage completely neglects male rape victims. As a consequence, voluntary agencies that serve male rape victims may have a suspicion about male rape victims being excluded in state funding or government agendas. The voluntary agencies, then, may well disregard such victims or see them as unimportant in comparison to female rape victims, considering there is funding

in place for female rape whilst it is also prevalent in government agendas. If men are not seen as victims, arguably, they will not get the treatment needed and this may have an incidental affect on the victim and their family and society. Cohen (2014) argues that, by voluntary agencies, particularly rape crisis centers, neglecting male rape victims, limited data on male rape is being produced while inhibiting data collection. Consequently, this may possibly encourage voluntary agencies to see male rape as a low priority crime type and of little importance. The empirical part of this paper will explore whether voluntary agencies have a lack of understanding and awareness of male rape.

This section has critically discussed that voluntary agencies are possibly neglecting or excluding male rape victims, which may contribute to the “invisibility” of the male victim. In other words, male rape victims have a lack of recognition and service provisions that are available. There is also a lack of empirical literature to direct voluntary agencies on effective interventions for male rape victims. Although my research attempts to fill this gap, voluntary agencies may need training and support regarding male rape victims. There currently seems to be no change in voluntary agencies to improve their services for male rape victims (Cohen 2014). Despite this, the Government has committed £500,000 in the year 2014 to provide services, such as counseling and advice, to help male rape victims who previously have not been able to receive such support and to encourage them to come forward (Ministry of Justice 2014b). This fund will also support historic victims who were under 13 at the time of the attack.

## Foucault, Queer Theory, and Post-Structuralism

In the current paper, I draw on concepts from Foucault, queer theories, and post-structural theories informed by cultural studies and sociology. Post-structural and Foucauldian understandings of the body inform the analysis since the bodies of male rape victims are carefully analyzed through social and power relations and through social interactions between voluntary agencies and male rape victims. According to Foucault (1991), the body is an entity that is invested in meanings; the body is not neutral. The analysis, then, will focus on how the bodies of male rape victims challenge social and gender norms. Foucault (1977) illustrates that the soul is the prison of the body to suggest that, while bodies are fluid, symbolic, and material, they are under constant control and surveillance. Through social practices, social institutions, and social contexts, the body is vulnerable to power since power is omnipresent; however, despite power being everywhere, it can be contested and challenged (Foucault 1980). Power, for Foucault (1982), is relational in that it can control, shape, and reshape the body. The body, then, is always in a process of becoming, it is socially and culturally constructed, and the meanings “marked” on the body can change through social interactions. As the body is a mere “docile” subject, it is:

...directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic

use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination. [Foucault 1977:55]

Interactions between voluntary agencies and male rape victims are shaped by power. Through culture and social relations, voluntary agencies construct male rape in certain ways. Discourse, a body of knowledge and ways of thinking about constructed knowledge, can also construct male rape in particular ways. For example, voluntary agency practitioners’ discourses inscribe or mark the bodies of male rape victims in a corporeal fashion; male rape victims’ bodies, then, become culturally “made” (Foucault 1982) comprehensible as certain types of subjects. Queer theories inform my analysis to better comprehend the ways in which gender and sexual norms shape voluntary agencies’ interactions with male rape victims. I draw on heteronormativity, the normalization of heterosexuality, and the exclusion of other sexualities (Jackson 2005). Stevi Jackson’s work helped to make sense of the bodies of male rape victims as non-conforming and as non-heteronormative, failing to embody heteronormative notions of gender and/or sexuality. As a result, some voluntary agency practitioners construct male rape victims as “deviant” and/or “abnormal” since their sexual victimization challenges expectations of heterosexual masculine practices and the institutionalization of heterosexuality.

## Goffman, Stigma, and Rape: The Shame of Sexual Victimization

The work of Erving Goffman (1959) is relevant in this paper to argue that male rape is embedded in



stigma, operating to shame others, such as practitioners, who come close to the stigmatized entity; in this case, male rape victims. Goffman calls this “stigma by association.” Stigma is a social process: Goffman (1963) argues that stigma is defined in and enacted through social interaction. It is, or the anticipation of stigma, present in most people (Goffman 1959). Goffman (1959:243) wrote, “there is no interaction in which participants do not take an appreciable chance of being slightly embarrassed or a slight chance of being deeply humiliated.” In other words, the anticipation of stigma or stigma itself is insidious, lurking in the background of all social interactions, including the ones that male rape victims find themselves in post rape. When socially interacting with practitioners, the victims may be extending their stigma, both metaphorically and symbolically, onto practitioners. We are all susceptible to running into stigma in every social encounter. Weiss (2010) argues that, because men are expected to be powerful, strong, and invulnerable, the act of male rape demonstrates vulnerability and weakness to others, which in turn contributes to men’s risk of stigma and, subsequently, to their reluctance to disclose unwanted sexual experiences to others. The notion that only women are or can be victims of rape can also contribute to men’s risk of encountering stigma. Others, such as practitioners, can induce feelings of stigma in male rape victims for “publicly admitting that they were not interested in sex, were unable to control situations, and were not able to take care of matters themselves—all statements that run counter to hegemonic constructs of masculinity” (Weiss 2010:293). Stigmatized individuals do not have full social acceptance and are constantly striving to adjust their social identities in order to prevent stigma

from manifesting (Goffman 1963). Male rape victims prevent stigma by, though not limited to, remaining silent or by not defining “themselves as victims because masculinity impedes them from becoming victims of rape” (Javaid 2015:286). There is a strong link between constructs of masculinity and notions of stigma. Further research ought to consider these interconnections.

Further, when a negative label is attached to a person, such as a rape victim, the very label itself has the power to produce their “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963). In a social and interactional process, the social stigma arises from a labeling process, which derives from societal responses that can create actual discriminatory experiences (Becker 1963). Becker (1963:9) argues that, “The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior people so label.” Deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender.” Thus, in the context of rape, it can be concluded that male rape victims *become* stigmatized through labels and discourses. As a result of stigmatizing labels, filled with negative connotations such as “dirt,” “tainted,” or “polluted,” some male rape victims are blamed for their assault (Abdullah-Khan 2008). Through social and power relations, Rumney (2009) argues that male rape victims are marginal because of their identification, emasculation, and stigmatization. Labels that induce stigma are powerful, and they can often “mark” a rape victim for life. Labels and stigma, however, operate in a social process; so they are neither unchanging nor fixed. They do not always “stick” to a person as such, but they can contribute

to developing their “master status.” Whether ascribed or achieved, the master status overshadows all other social positions of the status set in most or all situations. Often shaping an individual’s entire life, a master status has exceptional importance for social identity.

## The Study

The current study, which is theoretically and conceptually informed, is concerned with exploring voluntary agency practitioners’ responses to, and interactions with, male rape victims. Data for this study were collected as part of a larger project that set out to evaluate a series of state and voluntary interventions aimed at male rape victims (see: Javaid 2017a). In this paper, I focus only on the voluntary interventions. The larger study employed qualitative interviewing, each interview lasting around 1 hour, with a sample of 25 police officers, male rape counselors, therapists, and voluntary agency case-workers who live in England, and it also gathered 45 qualitative questionnaires with individuals of the same occupation. The main focus of this paper, however, is on the voluntary agency practitioners’ constructions of male rape. The participants were asked for their stance of their agency and for their individual perspective. A University Research Ethics Review Board granted ethical approval for this research, which adapted a qualitative approach. There was a commitment to seek to comprehend the views of those being researched in England. The focus on England is because there is a notable gap in relation to research investigating, or even including, voluntary agencies’ treatment of male rape victims, despite the growing research and policy interest in

addressing and preventing sexual violence against women in England. Data have been collected from victims/survivors separately (see: Javaid 2017b).

I employed purposive and snowball sampling methods because they were the most appropriate sampling methods to select state and voluntary agencies that specifically deal with male rape cases, and that then accordingly gave information required to locate other state and voluntary agencies that have had experience of dealing with male rape cases or are dealing with such cases. This means that I selected specific people working in state and voluntary agencies because I believed they would provide me with the most appropriate information, since they work very closely with male rape victims on a one-to-one basis. It is impossible to formulate a random sample of state and voluntary agencies that deal with male rape because the population is not only difficult to reach but also there are not many agencies that specifically deal with male rape in England.

I approached the state and voluntary agencies myself through email, describing my research and the benefits of participating to help increase my sample size. I approached 13 police forces and 10 voluntary agencies in Britain. Ultimately, five police forces and four voluntary service provisions participated in the research. In respect of how many police forces and voluntary agencies declined to take part in this study, eight police forces and six voluntary agencies refused. For the interviews, 15 police officers and 10 practitioners from voluntary agencies took part. For the questionnaires, 38 police officers and 7 practitioners from voluntary agencies filled out, completed, and returned them.

The research participants are diverse in regards to amount of experience handling male rape cases, educational level, ethnic background, and training of rape cases. The type of participants include the following: specialist police officers working in CID (4); police detectives (4); police constables (34); detective sergeants (9); police response officers (2); male rape counselors (7); male rape therapists (3); and voluntary agency caseworkers (7). Due to the lack of male rape counselors, therapists, and caseworkers who specifically deal with male rape victims across England, this made it difficult to get an equal representation across various stakeholder groups. The gender of the participants comprises of 33 males and 37 females. The sample is predominately White and most of the participants are under 40 years of age and are mostly from highly educated and middle-class backgrounds. The respondents provide services for many male rape victims, although they often serve more female rape victims due to the higher number of female rape victims who come forward. On average, the respondents have had around 7 years of experience of working with male rape victims and male victims of sexual assault. Most of their clients are middle-class men. Some of my participants had no training on male rape and sexual assault against men, but most had training on female rape and sexual assault against women.

The qualitative findings were transcribed and reviewed by the researcher, drawing on thematic analysis. Thematic analysis requires the researcher to recognize themes or patterns appearing out of qualitative data. There was a concern to recognize differences and commonalities in the views and experiences of the participants. The research-

er followed thematic analysis with thematic coding where codes/labels were placed onto segments of the data that looked important. Each transcript was read and reread by the researcher while noting down some initial codes and labels on the transcripts before transcripts were imported into the data analysis software NVivo 10 for final coding. A stage of coding involved the analysis of sentences and words for common themes, concepts, and patterns across the data set. Analyzing the data focused around organizing the dissimilar concepts, conceptions, and themes that developed from the data, not just on putting masses of data into order. Thematic analysis was adapted because it helped to understand the participants' lived experiences of handling male rape cases in a detailed way, which this type of qualitative analytical approach accommodates. Therefore, verbatim transcripts were read, usually line by line, and key phrases and words were highlighted within the procedure of "open coding," whereby the researcher drew out key concepts, conceptions, and themes using real examples from the text. Verbatim quotes are used to illustrate the points made. Braun and Clarke (2006) express that thematic analysis provides a flexible, useful, and an accessible way in which to analyze qualitative data, so it can possibly give a detailed and rich account of data.

### **(Mis)Understanding Male Rape Victims in the Voluntary Sector**

Over half of the voluntary agency practitioners in my sample suggested that either themselves or other practitioners lack understanding with regards to male rape. As examples, consider the following passages of text:

[W]e don't really know the facts about male rape, so we would be a bit naive...I do know that [male rape victims] who have had sort of counseling with people who haven't had any training working with trauma and things, the survivor often feels that the counselor didn't really "get them." [Male Rape Counselor 1, Male]

Voluntary agency practitioners don't want to understand anything, do they? With anything that they feel uncomfortable with, they don't want to talk about rape; anything that is sort of out of the public's main focus. When you have got things on male rape, they don't want to hear that, but they will because it is part of the job...It is just one of those issues that [they] overlook. To them, [male rape] just doesn't exist. They don't want to talk about it. [Male Rape Counselor 3, Female]

[T]he way voluntary agency practitioners respond in the UK to the possibility of men being raped is different to other places. For many of them, it's difficult to understand that a man can be raped...it's a lot to do with ignorance. Also, for men, there is an underlying fear of rape. So it's almost like, "That couldn't happen to me, I'm so macho," but also the mechanics of rape...the stuff around penetration is quite hard for men. It's quite hard for a lot of men to understand how a man is raped, a lot of men are very threatened. [Male Rape Therapist 2, Male]

These passages of text reflect a heteronormative understanding of male rape, suggesting that most practitioners lack understanding of the "facts" associated with male rape. For instance, some counselors do not connect with the victims; without

empathy, then, the practitioners can circulate the discursive idea that "male rape does not really exist." By not constructing discourse of male rape, as some practitioners "don't want to talk about it" (MRC3, Female), they can regulate and control the bodies of male rape victims (e.g., by silencing them, by overlooking them, and by "invisibilizing" them) through the rules governing sexuality which Foucault (1978:139) calls "anatomo-politics." Disciplining bodies of male rape victims in this way can also be seen as controlling the lives of male rape victims. Anatomo-politics of the bodies of male rape victims operate to silence and subjugate their bodies because "With anything that they [voluntary agency practitioners] feel uncomfortable with, they don't want to talk about rape" (MRC3, Female) and because "For many of them, it's difficult to understand that a man can be raped" (MRT2, Male). Foucault (1978:139) writes that:

[P]ower over life evolved in two basic forms...One of these poles—the first to be formed, it seems—centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*.

As some practitioners, mainly male practitioners, find it difficult to understand that a man's body can be raped, since mechanically men's body is seen as impenetrable, a form of knowledge is likely to be circulated. This form of knowledge, or version of reality of what is false or true about sexual violence,

relates to the idea that men cannot be raped and so creates and shapes some practitioners' cultures and responses towards male rape victims. Such responses are likely to be based on new forms of knowledge that help construct realities pertaining to male rape. Foucault (1978:141) had recognized that in "*institutions of power...techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions...They also [act] as factors of segregation and social hierarchization...guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony.*" Male rape victims who seek help and support from voluntary agencies are susceptible to power and techniques of surveillance. This is because male rape victims are under constant surveillance not only by themselves but also by other men to ensure that they are constantly conducting themselves in a heterosexual and masculine fashion—otherwise they are deemed as deviant and an anomaly (Javaid 2015; 2017a). For Foucault (1977; 1991), the interrelation of internal self-surveillance and self-policing with external enforcing of surveillance and policing provides discourses with power. In relation to their cultural and discursive knowledge and understanding regarding sexual violence, some practitioners' discourses apply normalcy while controlling and disciplining deviancy. To reassert the dominant ideal of sexual violence victims, that is, female rape victims, some practitioners construct male rape victims' bodies as dysfunctional, contaminated, abnormal, or unnatural. I argue, therefore, that some practitioners construct male rape victims as embodying a deviant sexuality, and, by asking for help, they are seen as "not being able to cope" shaped by the practitioners' discourses such as "That couldn't happen to me, I'm so macho" (MRT2, Male).

Some practitioners can, therefore, either implicitly or explicitly, circulate discursive knowledge to male rape victims pertaining to worthlessness and failure; at the same time, disbelieving attitudes and responses can circulate against the victims. Their bodies become subjected to the practitioners' examination, surveillance, and control; and to the regime in voluntary agencies, such as making an appointment, attending the agency, and undergoing treatment/counseling/therapy. During this procedure, the bodies of male rape victims are under the strict control of the voluntary agency practitioners. It could be argued that voluntary agencies' needs take precedence over male rape victims' needs, with some practitioners circulating a depersonalized and rational approach, since "When you have got things on male rape, they don't want to hear that, but they will because it is part of the job" (MRC3, Female). It is fundamentally my argument that the practitioners' versions of reality and discourses are *relative*. Although most practitioners expressed male rape in ways that could be interpreted as "negative," there were other practitioners who constructed male rape in a more "positive" light, which means that practitioners construct and conceptualize male rape differently. Therefore, we can only understand male rape in the context of practitioners' culture for their unique and individualized culture contains its own discourses, languages, and peculiarities that shape their attitudes and responses towards male rape victims. For example:

You have to understand [male rape victims'] particular story and then you have to situate yourself in the environment they find themselves. [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 4, Male]



We are trained counselors and offer unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence to our clients. From the outset we explain what we can offer and listen to what [our] clients need. Normalizing the client's thoughts and feelings often helps to challenge stigma. [Male Rape Counselor 4, Female]

[V]oluntary agencies might hold similar views as the police, but they might try not to. They might be a bit more empathetic, but society lacks the awareness and the depth of knowledge to be able to manage male rape situations effectively and this can reflect in the voluntary agencies. [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 3, Male]

From these passages of text, we can see the disparities between practitioners in terms of constructing male rape as either "positively" or "negatively," some of whom circulate discursive knowledge of male rape victims as either impenetrable or penetrable. In other words, some practitioners believe that men can be raped, while some believe that they cannot as such. For some, the impenetrable becomes constructed as deviant, while for others, the penetrable becomes constructed as normalized equating male rape victims to female victims. Weeks (2016) suggests that we cannot divorce ourselves from our own cultures, meaning that we can never really understand anything with any great certainty; but, through discourse and language, we construct, add meaning to, and try to make sense of "things." The three respondents strongly suggest that they attempt to offer empathy to male rape victims because for them, male rape is constructed as a salient issue that warrants attention and understanding. In line with Foucault's (1972) work on the archeology of

knowledge, these respondents' forms of knowledge relating to male rape construct different responses to male rape victims, mainly of empathy and understanding. New forms of knowledge and discourse about male rape, that is, it is normalized, non-deviant, and non-abnormal, define modern life for some practitioners. Foucault (1972) articulates that, in order for people to know and understand a version of reality, acquiring a discourse is a necessity. While discourses are omnipresent, practitioners are constantly drawing on different discourses to make sense of male rape in voluntary agencies. The issue with this is that practitioners are likely to respond to male rape victims in an unpredictable, haphazard, and inconsistent fashion. The many discourses that practitioners draw upon maintain power over them, shaping what practitioners know and understand, what practitioners contemplate, and what practitioners discuss as "truths" (Foucault 1972). Discourses, therefore, create practitioners' identity and subjectivity through a relational and dynamic process, influencing the ways in which they respond to male (and female) victims of rape. It is clear that voluntary agency practitioners view and understand male rape through multiple lenses, which change over time and in contexts, and change according to social and cultural developments. It could be argued that the practitioners' discourse with regards to male rape is also shaped by legal, religious, political, and social knowledges that construct comprehensions of male rape while cultivating actions and thoughts regarding male rape. The concept of the "gaze," developed by Foucault (1977), refers to the ways in which individuals are objectified and constituted. Founded on certain powerful disciplinary discourses, the "gaze" demonstrates the act of exam-

ining and exercising surveillance (Foucault 1977). Foucault explained that surveillance worked to (ab)normalize certain practices according to a particular societal ideal. For some voluntary agency practitioners, through their “gaze” of male rape victims, they come to construct male rape as “normal.” This “gaze” concept and the conception of discourse run alongside each other to construct male rape in particular ways. Some practitioners come to normalize male rape by offering “unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence to [their] clients... [and they] listen to what [their] clients need. Normalizing the client’s thoughts and feelings” (MRC4, Female). Then, through discursive practices, voluntary agency practitioners respond to and deal with male rape victims in a way that is accepting of them as victims. The discursive knowledge of male rape as “normal” by some practitioners can alter through space and time for discourses are neither fixed nor stable. While discourses can “restrain” us, they can also “free” us (Foucault 1972).

Although some practitioners are more accepting of male rape than others, some work has shown that voluntary agency practitioners generally support and perpetuate male rape myths (Donnelly and Kenyon 1996; Kassing and Prieto 2003; Lowe and Balfour 2015; Javaid 2016a; 2016b; 2017c), contradicting some of my findings. These studies found that voluntary agency practitioners, on the whole, maintain stereotypes that shape and construct the ways in which they think about, discuss, and respond to male rape; as such, they are less accepting of male rape victims in voluntary agencies. While I also found that some voluntary agency practitioners could be hostile towards male rape victims, constructing male rape as

“abnormal” and “deviant,” it is unwise to generalize the findings to all practitioners.

## Responding to Shame: Cultural Ideologies of Honor, Stigma, and Respect

In this study, at least a third of voluntary agency practitioners stipulate that male rape victims are reluctant to engage with them to seek help because of stigma, which means that they are unable to offer their support and services to the victims. For instance:

[B]ecause of the underreporting, and because of males not seeking help, it means that we cannot adequately provide services for them. [Male Rape Counselor 3, Female]

Men can be difficult to engage with anything to do with their health; we tried a “Male Drop In for Men” and found it was difficult to get them to attend. Men at times do not make their health a priority and are not sure what therapy is. They find it difficult to know how counseling will help; it feels a bit wooly to them. They prefer to have a “Haynes Manual” guide of what it will be like. [Male Rape Therapist 1, Female]

While the respondents in the sample declared that many male rape victims do not come forward for help and support, it is unclear what the practitioners are doing to tackle the under-reporting and to draw in the victims. By not creating and constructing discourse relating to male rape, the victims of this crime are likely to be silenced. These victims become the “unspoken,” the “unknown,” transforming them into objects of taboo since truth claims about male rape as the “invisible” can be seen as discourses and

taken-for-granted truth claims that “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972:49). These discourses that some practitioners circulate “means that [they] cannot adequately provide services for them” (MRC3, Female). Another explanation why some practitioners are reluctant to create discourses about male rape, to speak about the unspoken, pertains to stigma. Most practitioners in my sample stated that stigma is heavily embedded in male rape discourse, making it difficult to construct it as a problem and to take it seriously. The term stigma refers to an attribute that is deeply discrediting (Goffman 1963). Goffman (1963:3) points out that, “An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another,” meaning that raped victims are positioned in “other” categories to denote their abnormality; in turn, this produces normality for others who are not raped and not vulnerable. Men who are not raped are constructed as “real men,” in contrast to those who are raped who are often constructed as stigmatized, tainted, and impure. Consider the following passages of text, as examples:

There are both similarities and differences between male/female rape. Both genders experience powerlessness and feelings of shame, believe it is in some way their own fault and self blame. Added dynamics for males are usually greater taboo/stigma (although stigma affects both genders) and public [and some practitioners'] attitudes/perceptions that “men cannot be raped” or “why is it a problem, just enjoy it.” [Male Rape Counselor 4, Female]

[S]ome people actually don't want to say the word[s]; don't want to be as graphic...because they find it em-

barrassing [and] because that is something that is not spoken about...[the] more that we speak about [it], [the] more open and more graphic we can be...we should be saying as it is, “Hey, look, this can happen to you.” [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 5, Female]

Male rape seems to contain a higher level of stigma than female rape, serving to normalize the acceptance of female rape while abnormalizing male rape. Drawing on the sociological perspective of labeling theory (Becker 1963), it becomes clear that male rape becomes stigmatized through the labels and discourses of male rape as deviant, taboo, and fuelled by male rape myths, such as “‘men cannot be raped’ or ‘why is it a problem, just enjoy it’” (MRC4, Female). As a result, some male rape victims are blamed for their assault (Abdullah-Khan 2008). The stigma embedded in male rape, arguably, arises from social control since the act of male rape challenges gender, social, moral, and sexual norms. To reaffirm and reinforce such norms, male rape is stigmatized, ignored, relegated, and it “is something that is not spoken about” (VAC5, Female) so as to maintain the status quo of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. VAC5 (Female) suggests that, when we construct discourses about male rape, the more we speak about it, societies will have less grounds to deny its existence, potentially encouraging male rape victims to engage with the voluntary sector. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, Kenneth Plummer (1975) argues that identity becomes stigmatized according to the interactional and social responses to it. Cultural codes or “scripts” constructs people's responses to the stigmatized entity, and regulation manifests itself through the stigma (Plummer 1975). Therefore, practitioners attach dif-

ferent meanings to male rape, some of which induce them to stigmatize male rape, while others are less likely to stigmatize it. Those who stigmatize male rape are likely to regulate it by not speaking about it, discouraging a discourse that raises awareness of it, so it cannot come to the attention of voluntary agency practitioners. Other practitioners were keen to develop discourse relating to male rape in order to challenge the stigma attached to male rape. For example:

[M]ale rape is such a difficult thing for a man to get to the phone and talk about...these sort of things. I mean, I had [a] case where the guy's sister rang in, he was being a victim of rape, but it took him two or three weeks later to actually pick up the phone to someone and to talk to someone and, then, when he was on the phone, it was probably 45 minutes before he actually got the words out. This particular incident was a gang rape, and he actually rang up saying that he felt like he had something physically wrong with him...It seems shame, fear, anxiety, you know, and he had all of those things, he couldn't even get [the] words out to me. Took him so long, he [kept] saying, "Oh my God" and "I don't know how to say this," and this went on for a good forty minutes, and that all he kept saying was, "Oh my God"...he just didn't want to use the words, he didn't want to say those words, he felt so shameful, so fearful, and it took a lot of, you know, time, really. I just kept saying to him, "It's OK, I'm not going anywhere"...It's hard, but [it's] not about me. It's about them and when you are on that phone, you're just focusing on them, and you can't, you want to say "bastards," you know, basically, but you can't, you just have to concentrate on that person that they are getting support and making sure that they are

supported emotionally and practically. [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 5, Female]

In interaction between the victim and this particular practitioner, the latter is constructing and making sense of the victim's stigma through a social and interactional process. By attempting to challenge the discourse of stigma, she reassures the victim that she is "not going anywhere" and puts the victim before herself since it "is not about me. It's about them and when you are on that phone, you're just focusing on them." This interactional process normalizes the male victim's experience of rape through the acceptance of the victim's victimization and story, which suggests that, while stigma can be present at certain times, it can also be non-present at other times. This is because, as Plummer (1975) notes, stigma is fluid, fragile, and always negotiated through social and interactional relations. One is not born stigmatized, then, but rather becomes it dependent upon social structures, social practices, and social and power relations. Male rape victims are likely to be heavily stigmatized for not embodying patterns of sexual and gender relations and for undermining notions of compulsive heterosexuality, hetero(masculinity), and heteronormativity (Javaid 2017a). Although hegemony functions to assert, reproduce, and maintain unequal power and gender relations (Javaid 2018), in this particular extract, there are no clear patterns of hegemonic masculinities since unequal gender relations are not being legitimated. This is not to argue that, at other times, places, and contexts, hegemony cannot be present given it is situational (Javaid 2018). Not only are male rape victims often stigmatized through a dialectical relationship with other people, but also homosexuality,

which is often attached to male rape (Javaid 2015), is also deeply stigmatized. For example:

I supported a gay man who was raped and that was [a] difficult story, because he wasn't an open gay person, he did used to go to gay clubs, and had come back with somebody and he got basically raped. But, you know, that was one of the reasons why he didn't want to go to court because his family finding out. He was of Asian [Islamic] culture, so obviously that makes the difference as well, what kind of culture and beliefs people have...He basically said, "You know, I don't want to bring shame on my family, I never wanted my family to know that I was gay," but I obviously couldn't guarantee him that that wasn't coming out in court. [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 5, Female]

VAC5 (Female) suggests that particular forms of culture and religious ideology, such as Asian and Islamic cultures, make it difficult for male rape victims to engage with the voluntary sector and the criminal justice system. Male victims of rape, who come from particular religious or cultural backgrounds, remain silent in order to prevent their stigma or expected stigma from metaphorically and symbolically transposing itself onto their family members. This makes it difficult for some practitioners to support these types of victims, who are constructed as the "other" since, as Jeffrey Weeks (2016:107) notes, "[Islam] firmly emphasizes the ideal of monogamous, heterosexual relationships ordained by the Koran." Kenneth Plummer (2015:114) states that, "For Muslim cultures, religion defines gender and sexuality."<sup>4</sup> Any person who divorces

from engaging with religious ideology and cultural expectations may be deemed as not quite human and potentially treated as perverse by the wider society, making it difficult for some practitioners to deal with such victims. As such male rape victims challenge the ideal of heterosexual monogamy and the expectation of the heterosexual nuclear family, they may be stigmatized not only by the same members of their culture and religion in which they belong but also by their family members, since homosexual practices are frequently forbidden in such cultures and religions. For these types of victims, as with any other victim, they each embody many strands of identities at the same time: racial, ethnic, sexual, gendered, and other, each of which is in constant flux (Butler 1990). The stigma of homosexuality in religious and minority ethnic families is so powerful that it serves to exclude the homosexual in order to preserve heterosexuality (Jackson 2005). In agreement, Plummer (2015:114) writes that, "Today, Muslim cultures in general treat homosexuality with little tolerance," which creates a stubborn barrier for such male rape victims to seek out help, support, and treatment from the voluntary sector, potentially making it difficult for some practitioners to reach out to such victims.

In sum, this section focused on stigma and how it makes it difficult for some practitioners to serve male rape victims. While male rape may be culturally "made" as "deviant," a taboo, and as stigmatized in some voluntary agencies, some practitioners strongly challenge the discourse of stigma when dealing with male rape victims in order to put the victims' needs first. However, in particular religions and cultures, homosexuality and male rape

<sup>4</sup> This also applies to other religions, such as Christianity.



are deeply stigmatized to the extent that the victims of male rape become stigmatized, making it difficult for the practitioners to engage with them. As a result, due to the stigma embedded in male rape discourse, some practitioners are likely to circulate victim blaming attitudes and responses.

### **Constructions of Victim Blame and (Dis)Belief in Voluntary Agencies**

Over half of the voluntary agency practitioners in the sample reflected on the issue of some practitioners disbelieving male rape victims, either implicitly or explicitly, in voluntary agencies. Some practitioners in the following quotes also expressed victim-blaming attitudes themselves:

[W]e know that [male rape victims] don't report or talk about it. They are too ashamed to come forward or they don't think they'll be believed...a lot of people won't come forward because they feel that they have had consensual sex or that is how it will be viewed, and their word against their offender's. And actually, if there's just two of you, then how do you prove that? [Male Rape Counselor 1, Male]

[A] guy that I worked with, his dad and his dad's friends had raped him...that's what he had claimed and he had gone right through the legal system at the time, and nobody would believe him because of who his dad was...because of his experiences, I didn't know whether I should believe him or not...and I was like, well, "I don't know what to believe about you and what not"...a lot of people come from more deprived backgrounds, not as intelligent or whatever, [and] will be sexually abused...they allow themselves

to be abused...in the first male rape case that I dealt with, I used to question, "Is he telling the truth, is he not, is he making it up, is he exaggerating," but that was part of his persona...There is always an element of doubt. [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 3, Male]

[V]ictims think they won't be taken seriously...There is strong evidence of re-victimization. [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 7, Male]

The reason as to why some male victims of rape are reluctant to engage with voluntary agency practitioners, according to the practitioners, is that they think that the practitioners will disbelieve and re-victimize them. They suggest that victims will see their claim of rape as something that will be constructed and viewed as consensual sex, hence disbelieving the victims' claim of rape. Against some male rape victims, VAC3 (Male) suggests that he is unlikely to believe them because of their family background and circumstances that shape his construction of a valid and legitimate rape victim. When dealing with male rape victims in voluntary agencies, some practitioners may maintain views such as, "they allow themselves to be abused" and "There is always an element of doubt" (VAC3, Male). It is appropriate, thus, to argue that some victims may very well think that they "won't be taken seriously" (VAC7, Male), since some practitioners may disbelieve male rape victims through secondary victimization, where the victims are made to feel more of an offender rather than a victim. The victims are "put on trial." Voluntary agency practitioners will be drawing on their cultures, discourses, and historical and social constructions of rape to make sense of the narratives of male rape

victims, which will help them determine whether a male rape victim is “telling the truth.” Male rape victims’ narratives or “storytelling” of their sexual experience (Plummer 1995) will also help the practitioners to construct the victims’ credibility, validity, and “ideal” or “non-ideal” victim status.

The sociologist, Nils Christie (1986), developed the notion of the “ideal victim.” His original formulation of the concept was based around the “little old lady,” who was referred to as, while out committing acceptable deeds, an innocent and youthful female attacked by a stranger who was unknown. He devised this notion to suggest that this typology is what society classifies as an “ideal” victim given the circumstance and context. In reference to sexual violence, Turchik and Edwards (2012) suggest that societies often classify a “real” (or “ideal”) rape victim as being a female rape victim who is attacked by an unknown stranger (“stranger rape”). This common-sense thinking and persistent stereotype in societies ignore the fact that men can also be “legitimate” victims of rape, but my data, as well as other work (Abdullah-Khan 2008; Rumney 2009; Clark 2014; Cohen 2014), suggest that they are unlikely to be constructed as the “ideal” victim. Drawing on Christie’s work, it can be argued that male rape victims are not easily and readily given the victim label and status, some may never achieve such a label and status, because they do not fit Christie’s typology. Therefore, some members of society, such as voluntary agency practitioners, will not construct male rape victims as “ideal” and “legitimate” rape victims. In turn, disbelieving attitudes and responses are likely to unfold and reflect in the type of treatment that male victims of rape receive. Disbelieving

attitudes and responses can manifest into secondary victimization, where the victims are made to relive their rape experience, to be “put on trial,” and suffer the feelings and pains they endured during their rape; they experience what I call “secondary rape” by the responses of some voluntary agency practitioners. Male rape victims’ experience of rape needs to be readily and easily acknowledged by practitioners in order to be constructed as “ideal” victims and to acquire the victim label and status. This is negotiated through social and power relations between the practitioners and the victims. This social process, then, is not fixed, determined, nor static, but rather dynamic, fluid, and changeable. Social factors will help construct practitioners’ acknowledgement of male rape victims as “ideal” and “legitimate” rape victims.

For example, the media and the different forms of technology that portray images of sexual violence and victims of rape are likely to shape how practitioners think about and respond to male rape victims (Cohen 2014). They can help shape whether or not practitioners provide male rape victims with a victim status (Pitfield 2013) or with a victim identity (Rock 2002). One could argue that a “culture of victimhood” or a “hierarchy of victimization” regarding rape victims emerges that positions male rape victims most commonly at the bottom tier. Christie’s work is useful to understand the ways in which constructions of “victimhood,” “illegitimacy,” “undeserving,” and “non-innocence” manifest in service delivery in respect of male rape victims. His work, in turn, helps to make sense of the disbelieving attitudes and responses that can unfold in practice. However, his typology gives no room for social change, so it could

be argued that his theoretical argument is socially deterministic on some level. Moreover, his original formulation did not have an empirical foundation. Nonetheless, his work has allowed one to argue that some practitioners will deem male rape victims' status and label as a "real" and "ideal" victim as "illegitimate"; it is difficult, then, for these victims to be taken seriously by some practitioners at the local, regional, and global levels. Through social interactions, some practitioners will construct these victims as illegitimate, undeserving, and as the non-innocent, hence the development of disbelieving attitudes and responses. However, for a third of practitioners in my sample, male rape victims are positioned at the top of the tier on the "hierarchy of victimization" by the acknowledgment of male rape victims and by believing them. For example:

[R]ape victims can claim for criminal injuries compensation as well, but if they don't report it to the police, they miss out on that, so, I know that financial benefit are nowhere, you know, compensating for what happened to them, but sometime it is *acknowledgment*. They acknowledge them and, of course, you know, *we believe you that this happened to you*. [Voluntary Agency Caseworker 5, Female (emphasis from author)]

It is important to stipulate that the "hierarchy of victimization" to which I refer is not a static hierarchy, but, instead, open to continual change. It is historically, culturally, and socially constructed, changing over time. To put it simply, it means different "things" for different voluntary agency practitioners at different times. Therefore, male rape victims can lose their victim status and label. Recognizing and accepting male rape victims as "real" and "ideal" victims is an

intricate process that is always negotiated, shaped, and reshaped through social and power relations, and through a variety of processes and interactions. On balance, for some practitioners, it is readily easy to grant male rape victims with a victim status and label; for others, it is more difficult and, sometimes, they may never grant victim status and label to the victims, fuelling victim-blaming attitudes and responses. This is because, I argue, some practitioners will construct male rape victims as the "other," the stigmatized, and the abhorrent. For some practitioners, the victims embody characteristics associated with "folk devils" (Cohen 2002) for they are constructed as "deviant" and as "outsiders," who are blamed for their rape. They are symbolized as the "other" who threaten the status quo, bringing about a "moral panic" (Cohen 2002). This moral panic is likely to provoke some practitioners to react distastefully to male rape victims through the rejection, condemnation, and disapproval of their rape. Social disapproval and condemnation are aspects of this "moral panic" that work to conceal the act of male rape by either providing poor treatment or disbelieving the victims. While some of my findings agree with Stanley Cohen's work, especially with some practitioners suggesting that male rape victims embody "folk devils" producing a "moral panic," not all of the practitioners constructed male rape victims in this way. Thus, the responses and reactions to male rape will be inconsistent and dissimilar, which suggests that the victims could receive unpredictable and variable treatment in voluntary agencies. However, because some practitioners will construct the victims as personifying "folk devils," hence "moral panic," "some very serious, significant and horrible events [such as, male rape]...can be denied, ignored, or played down" (Cohen 2002:26).

The act of male rape, then, will be “denied, ignored, or played down” by some practitioners through disbelieving attitudes and responses that are never fixed, but rather contextual, situational, and negotiated through social relations and interactions with male rape victims. It could be argued that the embodiment of “folk devils” can be contested since it is based on power, but power can be challenged (Foucault 1978). Therefore, male rape victims can contest the characteristics associated with “folk devils” and “moral panic” by claiming for criminal injuries compensation and reporting to the police (see: Voluntary Agency Caseworker 5, Female, above). By doing so, the victims are acknowledging their sexual victimization and rendering others to acknowledge it with them. Arguably, this could prevent the embodiment of “folk devils” and, thus, make it difficult for the moral panic to take place or lessen its severity.

## Conclusion

The aims of this research have been to critically examine voluntary agencies’ attitudes towards and responses to male rape victims in England. Moreover, how constructions of male rape shape the ways in which voluntary agencies think about and respond to male rape victims were also important to consider in this project. It was, furthermore, significant to critically explore the social and cultural constructions of male rape myths since they can influence and shape how police officers, male rape therapists, counselors, and voluntary agency caseworkers deal with male rape victims in practice.

In this research, I have argued that cultures, discursive ideas, and knowledges create and shape how

voluntary agencies understand male rape and deal with male rape victims. Their discourses, constructions, and cultures are negotiated through social relations and interactions with male rape victims. This means that their perceptions and views of male rape are never fixed, but always in constant negotiation with, for instance, other workers and with interactions with male (and female) rape victims to make sense of male rape. It is through discourse about sexual violence that voluntary agencies come to learn about and understand male rape, which in turn influences and shapes the ways in which they think about and respond to male rape victims in practice. To give some level of understanding of male sexual victimization, the responses to it, and the discourses that surround male rape, the project drew on sociological, cultural, and post-structural theories and conceptions.

For example, my data show that some voluntary agency practitioners construct male rape victims as “queer,” so the bodies of male rape victims are “marked” as unmasculine and as non-heterosexual. This, in turn, shapes and reshapes discourse relating to male rape, conceptualizing it as non-heteronormative challenging heteronormativity (Jackson 2005). Furthermore, Foucault’s work on power and knowledge, the conception of discourse, and the “subject” and the body were heavily drawn upon to shed some light on the ways in which male rape is understood and responded to in voluntary agencies. Voluntary agencies, in a certain historical moment, draw on discourses to create knowledge about male rape. This leads them to carry out social practices (i.e., responses to male rape victims) that entail meaning with regards to male rape and sexual violence more broadly.

Discourses influence and shape how they deal with male (and female) victims of rape since all social practices have a discursive element attached to them. The existence of discourse/language about male rape guides their conducts/practices when serving male rape victims. Through discourse, therefore, voluntary agencies construct and reconstruct the topic of male rape because it creates and conceptualizes knowledge of male rape, which in turn shapes and reshapes male rape counselors, therapists, and voluntary agency caseworkers' practices and responses towards male victims of rape. Their discourse produces the different ways in which male rape is thought about, discussed, and responded to, influencing how their notions of male rape are pragmatically carried out in practice to circulate power and control over others' conduct, notably the conduct of male (and female) rape victims.

An idea relating to sexuality that is present across some of the respondents is the myth that "male rape is solely a homosexual problem," potentially excluding heterosexual and bisexual male rape vic-

tims. Treating male rape solely as a gay problem is problematic because a segment of the population that has suffered rape may be ignored, overlooked, disbelieved, or refused help. Drawing on hegemonic masculinity, some practitioners frown upon and question male vulnerability, as they expect men to be able to ward off potential threats of rape or, if threatened, should be able to physically and violently protect their bodies. This view, as a consequence, could increase male rape victims' trauma that results in a "crisis of masculinity" whilst drawing in victim-blaming attitudes and responses. My data support such arguments, contributing to knowledge and attempting to fill a gap in the literature on victimology, sociology, social policy, and unacknowledged rape by providing an improved understanding of the intricate issues of male rape with the help of research from gender and sexuality, and of sociological, cultural, and post-structural studies. It is time we pay attention to the sociology of male rape because, as I have shown, it offers insights that other disciplines overlook: that our "reality" may not be the same.

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