

WOMEN'S SAFETY

A Content Analysis of Women's Safety Websites: Rape Myths and the Internet

By

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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A Content Analysis of Women’s Safety Websites: Rape Myths and the Internet

The undersigned certify that the student has presented [his/her] thesis, that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate through an oral examination. They recommend this thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies for acceptance.

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Abstract

Women's sexual victimization is perceived as a one sided problem that emphasizes women's choices and neglect men's accountability. Rape myths support an explanation of rape that allows women to remain fearful of sexual victimization. This thesis questions whether contemporary websites regarding women's safety reinforce rape myths. Components of rape myths include the idea that women's safety is her responsibility alone, echo traditional gender role expectations, perpetuate dependence on others and security products, and suggest that women's fear of victimization is normal. A content analysis of thirteen websites regarding women's safety is the subject of this study. Findings suggest that websites regarding women's safety are perpetuating components of rape myths through safety suggestions.

Key words: rape myth, gender roles, women's safety, sexual victimization, Internet

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A path is formed by laying one stone at a time- T.G

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Chapter One: Introduction

Violence against women warrants scholarly attention because it is both a social concern and a women's health issue. Violence against women is one social problem that transcends many boundaries such as cultures, ethnicity, and socioeconomic statuses (Karmen, 2007). Furthermore violence against women is one of the most pervasive yet least recognized violations of human rights (Morrison, 2005). Scholarly attention to violence against women, particularly rape was important in changing perceptions regarding the myths that surrounded rape. Although violence against women was not always at the fore front of social consciousness overtime extant academic research helped bring this social issue to light. In the context of sexual assault literature scholars teach us that rape myths not only exist but are a central concept in understanding the problematic social issue of violence against women (Morrison, 2005; Chapleau, Oswald & Russell, 2008; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; McMahon, 2010). Rape myths are understood as a collection of stereotypical beliefs that generates a culture supportive of rape (Schwartz & DeKeseredy 1997; Rozee & Koss, 2001; Watson-Franke, 2002; Chapleau, Oswald & Russell, 2008; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). Understanding the existence of rape myths is important but it is also key to identify the way rape myths have been institutionalized through a multitude of social venues.

Rape myths highlight the gendered power imbalance between men and women (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Belknap, 2010; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Lockwood-Harris, 2011; Wolitzky-Taylor et al, 2011). It is important to understand rape myths because individuals in society may accept these false beliefs as fact thus ultimately skewing the reality of sexual violence of women. Further if rape myths are accepted as fact this misinformation can be shared by individuals in society, news media, popular culture and other means of information sharing. It is possible that rape myths become institutionalized in society in ways that might not be fully

recognized. For example it may be possible that women's safety websites actually reinforce tenets of rape myths. Therefore I will explore whether rape myths are evident in women's safety websites online. Given the considerable influence fear of sexual victimization wields over women's lives, it is useful to identify the extent to which myths shape that fear. In other words, there may be a link between the perpetuation of rape myths online and women's fear of crime.

A link between rape myths online and women's safety may suggest that many people do not understand violence against women and often accept rape myths. Women's fear of sexual victimization influences their lives in a negative way (Warr, 1985; Stanko, 1998; Tulloch et al, 1998; Kitchen & Williams, 2010). Any general acceptance of rape myths which devalue women and their sexual freedom can have a negative impact on women's quality of life (Rozee & Koss, 2001; Watson-Franke, 2002; Chapleau, Oswald & Russell, 2008; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). Acceptance of rape myths reinforces a male dominant view of sexual violence towards women (Payne, Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1999; Foubert, Langhinrichsen, Brasfield & Hill, 2010; McMahon, 2010). Rape myths facilitate societal beliefs that sexual violence is one sided with respect to gender roles. Additionally, it perpetuates that notion that a women's safety is her own concern and responsibility. If websites provide safety tips grounded in rape myths, one could expect these myths to influence people's perceptions of violence against women and precautions taken by individuals to avoid becoming a victim of a crime.

Fear of crime and perception of safety are interconnected concepts that can impact a woman's quality of life in a negative way. Fear of crime can include the feelings, perceptions and influence of an individual's perceived risk of criminal victimization. Some fear of crime literature does not specify the type of crime individual's fear (Tulloch et al., 1998; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Hilinski, 2010). Gender differences have often been overlooked when addressing

fear of crime. Thus women's fear of crime varies significantly from that of men's (Fetchenhauer & Buunk, 2005; Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2006; Franklin & Franklin, 2009).

Although gender differences exist regarding fear of crime managing one's safety is a logical attempt to cope with feeling fearful. Women may seek out ways to maintain personal safety because fear of crime can impact an individual's life in a negative way (Madriz, 1997; Jennings, Gover & Pudrzynska, 2007; Rader, Cossman & Allison, 2009). Fear can influence a woman's life in a negative way because it can lead to both restrictive and avoidance behaviours (Lupton & Tulloch, 1999; Wilcox, Jordan & Pritchard, 2007; Sandberg & Tollefsen, 2010). Additionally stress can impact a woman's life negatively because of socially accepted expectations that women need to manage their own safety.

I investigate the prevalence of rape myths through a content analysis of women's safety websites because the Internet is a commonly used source to obtain information in western nations (Odell, Korgen, Schumacher & Delucchi, 2000; Griffiths & Brophy, 2005; Tabatabai & Shore, 2005; Nazim, 2008; Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier & Perez, 2009). Drawing from personal experience my desire to investigate online content regarding women's safety derived from my first trip travelling alone. In an attempt to be responsible for my own safety I looked up "*safety tips for women travelling alone*" online. From this point I realized that using the Internet to learn about safety tips could be an interesting component in a scholarly study. It should be noted that the content of this thesis focuses on women's safety in general rather than safety tips that are specific to travelling

In what follows, I examine the connection between rape myths and online sources of safety tips for women. Chapter Two provides a review of the extant literature, focusing on the rape myth and acceptance, definition and measurement, language, victim blaming, the social

construction of gender and victim offender relationships. A detailed discussion of content analysis as a methodological strategy and an interpretation of online sources are offered in Chapter Three. Chapter Four presents major themes and results in the data. Finally, in Chapter Five I discuss implications and directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

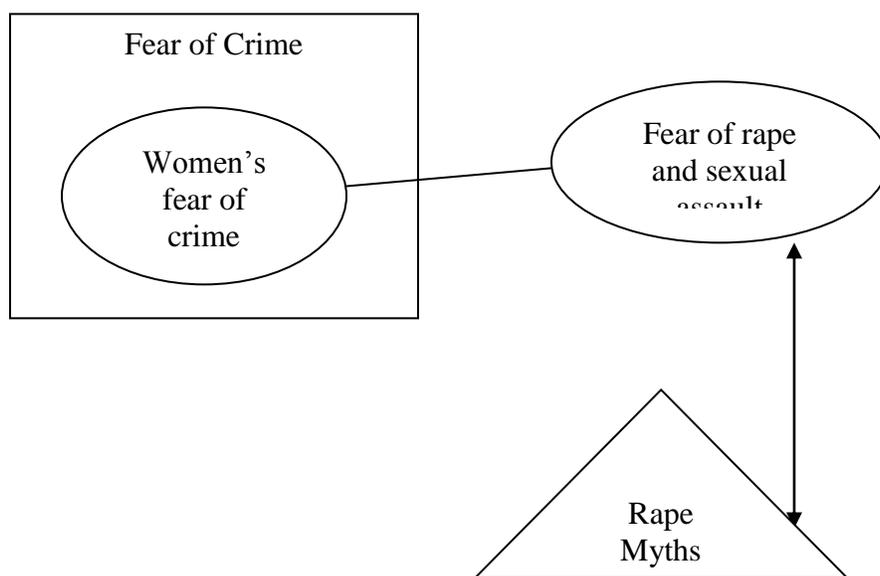
This chapter presents elements of the sexual assault literature that provide a thematic framework for this study. The major focus of this literature review is rape myths. An assessment of rape myths and sexual assault literature includes some of the following themes: rape myth acceptance, definitions and measurement, language of sexual assault, victim blaming, victim offender relationships, and the social construction of gender. This study will fill existing gaps in the extant literature by exploring the prevalence and usage of rape myth in websites that cater to women's safety.

Rape Myths and Fear of Crime

Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) argue that rape myths are a collection of beliefs, often stereotypical that create a culture supportive of rape. A considerable body of literature supports this assertion, contending that the sexual victimization of women occurs due to a culture condoning violence against women (Roze & Koss, 2001; Watson-Franke, 2002; Chapleau, Oswald & Russell, 2008; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). Some examples of rape myths include beliefs that victims deserve to be raped because of circumstances surrounding the incident, such as: (1) the time of the victimization, (2) if the victim was alone, (3) the victim's clothing and (4) whether the victim is under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Morrison, 2005; Chapleau, Oswald & Russell, 2008; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; McMahan, 2010). Those who accept rape myths may not directly blame on the victim, but assert the victim encouraged the assault (McMahan, 2010). Many rape myths include components that blame the victim and neglect the offender. Rape myth acceptance has social consequences, perhaps most important of which is the devaluing of women and their right to live without fear.

Rape myths often distort the reality of sexual violence. Acceptance of rape myths leads to the serious negative consequence of discrediting victim accounts entirely or in part (Belknap, 2010; Kahlor & Eastin 2011; Lockwood-Harris, 2011). An individual's conceptualization of whether a sexual assault occurred or not reflects gender inequalities and impacts a victim's ability to report (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Belknap, 2010; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Lockwood-Harris, 2011; Wolitzky-Taylor et al, 2011). Furthermore, rape myths perpetuate the belief that a woman's safety from sexual assault is her responsibility alone and neglect men's accountability in perpetrating sexually victimizing behaviours.

Figure 1.1: Relationship between women's fear of crime and rape myths



Sexual assault and fear of crime are generally depicted as separate entities in academic research; but I maintain that there is a connection between these two bodies of literature. Figure 1.1 provides a visual representation of the connection between fear of crime, and rape myths. Some scholars suggest that women are irrationally fearful (Lupton & Tulloch, 1999; Reid &

Konrad, 2004), but this assumption may be grounded in the fact that many studies do not articulate the specific type of crime women fear. For example, women's fear of crime is more accurately stated as women's fear of rape (Softas-Nall, Bardos & Fakinos, 1995; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997). There is an influence of rape myths because myths shape perceptions of risk. Thus a woman's ability to stay safe is influenced by rape myths. The succeeding paragraphs will expand on important components which help frame the construction of rape myths. These include how rape is defined, the language which is used to discuss rape.

Operational Definitions, Measurement and Prevalence of Sexual Assault

How does society determine which actions and behaviours constitute a sexual assault? Sexual victimization is defined in a myriad of ways. Definitions are paramount to understanding sexual assault. If an assault is inconsistent with stereotypical concepts of rape, victims may not recognize their experience as an assault (Lockwood-Harris, 2011). Sexual assault is defined as "rape or any other unwanted sexual contacts and physical impositions" (Karmen, 2007, p.383). Sable et al., (2006) maintain that sexual assault and sexual abuse are "unwanted sexual acts—ranging from exhibitionism to penetrations—that involve threats of physical force, intimidation and deception" (p.157). Rape is also defined as "unwanted sexual intercourse, arising from the use of or threats of force and other unwanted sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) arising from the use of or threat of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol." (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997, p.9). Narrow definitions are criticized for not being representative of women's experiences of sexual assault by men. Contemporary definitions expand beyond penile-vaginal penetration, and include a host of other unwanted sexual acts (Cook, Gidycz, Koss & Murphy, 2011).

Research suggests that certain criteria are expected when labelling a woman's victimization as rape. Fisher et al. (2003) finds women describe their experience as rape if: (1) there is previous victimization of forced intercourse, (2) the victim used forceful and verbal resistance, (3) the incident is not recent, (4) the offender used physical force, (5) other injuries occur in addition to the rape, and (6) a weapon is utilized. Although this list is not exhaustive, it appears that several necessary components need to be present for women to acknowledge their experience as rape.

Scholars disagree on the accuracy of sexual assault prevalence (Morrison, 2005; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Some argue that the prevalence of sexual assault is exaggerated, and that expanding the definition of sexual assault leads to perceptions of inflated crime rates. Others argue variation in prevalence rates evokes a "dark figure of crime" explanation. The "dark figure of crime" is used to describe crimes that occur, but are not recorded in statistical crime databases (Young, 2001). For example, while self-report data suggests that approximately 23 women are raped every hour in the United States, official crime report statistics fall well below this figure (Lockwood-Harris, 2011). The inability to establish a concise operational definition creates challenges for those pursuing accurate measurements of sexual assault (Cook, Gidycz, Koss & Murphy, 2011). This ambiguity is particularly important if examining how information about rape is communicated, the way that victims are implicated in their own rapes and the role of gender in myth making.

The Language of Sexual Assault

The language used to describe sexual assaults, is an important part of the sexual assault literature. In my thesis, I am particularly interested in the words used to communicate information about sexual assault. In western worlds, sexually oriented violence has increasingly

been referred to as sexual assault rather than rape (Sparks, Girling & Loader, 2001; Coates & Wade, 2007; Kitzinger, 2009; Stanko & Williams, 2009). It appears there is a shift away from the word rape as it is more emotionally provocative whereas the term sexual assault appears cleansed and politically correct. Further, the term sexual assault encompasses a wider range of inappropriate sexually oriented behaviours as opposed to the word rape (McMillan, 2007; Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Jackson, 2009; Stanko & Williams, 2009). Although language may seem like a minor component in understanding sexual assault, the words used to communicate these concepts do carry important implications. For example, one study finds the label “rape” reduces victim self blame, marking a clear division of male rapists as evil, and allows women to contextualize their experience into a broader social understanding (Lockwood-Harris, 2011).

Language is not merely influential in definitions but gender neutral and gender specific language are a component of the sexual assault literature. The way victims and offenders are described and positioned is reflective of deep rooted gender inequalities. For example, it is common to discuss a sexual assault as “she was raped” or use other passive language (Seaton, 2008). Passive language does not include the gender of the offender. The absence of gender specific language neglects to recognize that in the majority of sexual assault cases, males are disproportionately the offender and females the victim. A passive description positions the rape as just occurring rather than forcefully made against a woman. This sentence would be more correct to say “the man raped her” because there is recognition of the offender, his gender and behaviours. Although it is a small difference, language does have deeper implications that align rape with rape myth acceptance.

In the analysis of women’s safety websites my interest is studying rape myths. Previously, the thesis has used both of the terms rape and sexual assault. The importance of

language regarding sexual assault transcends this thesis and from this point forward my language will focus on rape; not the term sexual assault. There are two reasons for my use of the word rape rather than sexual assault in this piece. First, the word sexual assault provides a wider range of behaviours and can distort the reality of the situation. Second, the term sexual assault has been found to not be an accurate reflection of women's experiences (Sparks, Girling & Loader, 2001; Coates & Wade, 2007; Kitzinger, 2009; Stanko & Williams, 2009). Regarding the type of crime women are most fearful of rape (Softas-Nall, Bardos & Fakinos, 1995; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997; Krahe, 2005) and find that describing an incident as a rape allows for reduced victim self blame (Sable, Danis, Mauzy & Gallagher, 2006; Lockwood-Harris, 2011; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011) and enhances the ability to report (Belknap, 2010; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Thus it is logical to refer to sexual violence against women as rape for the remainder of this piece.

Blaming Victims of Rape

Karmen (2007) defines victim blaming as “an approach that holds the injured party partly responsible for what happened” (p.383). Victim blaming also shifts accountability from the male offender to the female victim, in most cases of rape. The victim now becomes the central part of the argument despite the fact the offender should be. Furthermore, by centralizing the victim it allows for criticism of women's choices.

Female victims of rape are often shown through a dichotomous lens as either innocent victims or deserving targets. Women victims classified as either innocent or deserving tend to be categorized based on traditional gender role expectations. Traditional gender role expectations include women adhering to conservative dress, not going out alone at night, avoiding drugs or alcohol, and conforming to homemaker status (Holtzman, 2000). Thus, if a woman *chooses* to

break expected gender roles, she deserves negative consequences, such as being raped.

Furthermore, research suggests women who are considered innocent victims in the wrong place at the wrong time are believed more often and described as true victims (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Sanday, 2008). When analyzing how traditional gender roles influence rape myth acceptance, the notion of good and bad femininity emerges as a dominant theme.

Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008) maintain a dichotomy of good and bad femininity exists, leading to the demonization of women if they overstep expected passive womanhood traits. The dichotomy of women victims into these categories has measurable consequences for victims. For example, in a study of college-aged student athletes, many respondents did not directly blame the victim for the rape but suggested women have choice in where they place themselves for example in bad situations that could lead to rape (McMahon, 2010). Although it appears to be a subtle way of victim blaming, these results provide a contemporary context of rape acceptance among college-aged student athletes. While this study is limited in the ability to generalize findings due to its homogenous sample, the undertone of sexual inequality and rape myth is evident. Gender stereotypes and understanding gender expectations are an important key to understanding rape myths.

Gender and Rape

Although this thesis focuses specifically on women, understanding the differences that exist between men and women helps to contextualize the importance of gender. Scholars define “doing gender” as a complex understanding of perceptual, interactional and micro-political infrastructures that dichotomize actions and behaviours into masculine and feminine (West & Zimmerman, 2008). Masculine and feminine constructs are taught to children from a young age and are a normal part of socialization. Although ideals of masculine and feminine are socially

constructed this can allow gender roles to be understood as objective facts (West & Zimmerman, 2008). The influence of socially constructed gender roles is evident when analyzing rape.

Women's fear of crime and rape is intrinsically connected to traditional gender role expectations. Traditional ideas about gender include concepts that males are assertive, tough, and financial breadwinners, whereas females are described as being weak, pretty and nurturing (Holtzman, 2000; Gauntlett 2008). Other scholars propose stereotypical gender roles include: (1) women's dependence and men's independence; (2) women's incompetence and men's authority; (3) women as primary caregivers and men as primary breadwinners; and (4) women as victims and sex objects and men as aggressors." (Kendall, Nygaard & Thompson, 2008, p. 100). These stereotypical gender roles are important in illustrating a paradoxical impasse -- women are socialized to both fear and expect protection from men.

The Social Construction of Gender and Fear of Crime in Rape

The goal of this thesis is to examine online content regarding women's safety. Despite discrepancies between reality and perception, rape is an intrinsic component of women's fear of crime (Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2006; O'Donovan, Devilly & Rapee, 2007; Hilinski, 2010). The inclusion of unwanted sexual acts, outside of penetration, is integral to understanding rape as research suggests many non-criminal behaviours incite fear of rape (Stanko, 1998; Tulloch et al, 1998; Lupton & Tulloch, 1999; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Scholars suggest inappropriate behaviours committed by strangers towards women contribute to fear of strangers (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). The fear of crime literature demonstrates a consistent focus on strangers as criminals, perpetrators, attackers, offenders etc. (Tulloch et al, 1998; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Hilinski, 2010).

Women's alleged vulnerability is reinforced by men's actions toward them through continual harassment (Stanko, 1998; Tulloch et al., 1998). Continual harassment can consist of behaviours that are fear inducing but not criminal such as leering, yelling, etc. (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Not acknowledging other harassing behaviours as criminal creates an air of acceptance of these behaviours. It reaffirms and teaches both women and men by legitimizing gender differences in appropriate and safe behaviours (Reid & Konrad, 2004; Franklin & Franklin, 2009). What, then, constitutes appropriate and safe behaviours for women?

Highlighting the role of intersectionality in conceptualizing rape allows women to understand their experience in a meaningfully representative way. The ability for women to recognize their experiences as rape may help to reduce feelings of responsibility and self blame (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003). Furthermore, the alleviation of feelings of shame can also enhance a victim's ability to disclose and report the event to authorities.

Victim and Offender Relationship: Stranger versus Acquaintance

Socialization of stranger danger continues to influence how women react to fearful experiences. Based on women's socialization to fear strangers, it is not surprising women fear stranger rape more than any other crime; including murder (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997). Fear of rape by strangers has important influence on women's lives (Warr, 1985; Stanko, 1998; Tulloch et al, 1998; Kitchen & Williams, 2010). Women are socialized to fear stranger rape more so than acquaintances, despite the reality that the majority of rapes are committed by acquaintances (Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton & Farrall, 1998; Mesch, 2000; Davies, 2008; Tiby, 2009). Socialization efforts in conjunction with news media send a message to women to fear strangers and public spaces (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997).

To understand acceptance of rape myths, it is essential to examine victim and offender relationships, as they indicate gender inequalities and pose tangible consequences. Much of the literature on rape differentiates offenders as strangers versus acquaintances. Media attention toward rape provides the illusion that strangers are the most common perpetrators (Mesch, 2000; Hilinski, 2010). Although women are socialized into fearing public spaces and strangers, intimates or acquaintances are more likely to harm and victimize them (Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton & Farrall, 1998; Mesch, 2000; Davies, 2008; Tiby, 2009). It is logical to presume women are more fearful of strangers than acquaintances because of their daily lived experiences

Stranger rape can be intimidating and thus can make women fearful. Establishing a dichotomy of men as the good guys or the bad guys, allows women to understand and fear one type of rape; stranger attacks. Demonizing the stranger helps to emphasize fear of others. An acceptance of this vision of rape is reinforced by rape myths and skews the reality of sexual violence. Thus women view rape by strangers and by acquaintances in a different manner. In many cases, research results show women do not acknowledge their experience as rape unless it meets the criteria of a stranger assault (Wilcox, Jordan & Pritchard, 2007; Tiby, 2009; Hilinski, 2010). Furthermore presenting rapists as strangers helps to omit acquaintances and their role in sexual violence. Even when an event aligns with legal definitions of rape, many women will not acknowledge their experience as such when the offender is known to the victim.

Women may use different safety techniques and precautions depending on whether their fear is based on interactions with a stranger or an acquaintance (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997). Thus, rape myths help to cultivate certain safety precautions women are expected to take.

The Current Study

This thesis examines if rape myths are found in online safety tip websites. Rape myth literature provides an important context for this study in regard to women's fear of sexual victimization. Rape myths will be discussed in some detail in the following chapter.

The study of language is also an important component of this study as I am investigating the written words in safety websites and whether they reflect gender neutral or gender specific language. Gender neutral language reflects a gendered power imbalance (Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2006; Seaton, 2008; Ullman, 2010) and is associated with victim blaming. It is necessary to establish that some victims of rape are blamed for the event (Masser, Lee & McKimmie, 2010; McMahon, 2010; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Blaming victims of rape is related directly to this study; as safety tips online subtly reinforce this concept by teaching women to take charge of their own safety measures. Furthermore understanding the role of victim and offender is a common component of rape myths which reinforces stranger danger rather than rape by acquaintances (Lockwood-Harris, 2011; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). The relationship between the victim and offender is important to understanding safety tips as most are geared towards staying safe against stranger rape. As this thesis is specifically looking at safety tips for women the social construction of gender and fear of crime helps to contextualize the issue of sexual victimization of women. This thesis will attempt to fill the gap in the literature on rape by examining online safety websites. Such a study has practical relevance for women and has important policy implications.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study examines whether women's safety websites reinforce rape myths. In what follows, I provide an overview of the methodology employed in this thesis: content analysis. I emphasize the rationale behind content analysis in this study with a specific focus on text analysis.

Content analysis is an ideal method of data collection for this study. First, content analysis allows for unobtrusive data collection. Internet information is publicly accessible and without any membership requirements to view website content. It therefore allows for uncomplicated, unobstructed data collection. Further, all websites in this sample are geared toward public consumption eliminating the need for permission to use any of the content for research. Second, websites provide a contemporary and relevant source of information about women's safety. Lastly, because the Internet is a commonly relied upon source of information, it is important to investigate what type of information is being presented to the public through specific websites.

In the following section I provide an outline of components associated with using the Internet including: (1) Internet users and online navigation, (2) gender and the Internet and (3) using search engines. It is important to understand how people use the Internet because women and men utilize this medium for different purposes. Furthermore the technology of the Internet allows individuals to use search engines to find information.

Internet Users and Online Navigation

The Internet as a tool for communication is in many ways an ideal context to analyze and understand social issues. The growth in sheer volume of Internet use suggests how considerable its implications are regarding integration and influence on daily life. Some scholars suggest that

Internet users are a diverse group that vary greatly based on factors such as age and level of expertise (Griffiths & Brophy, 2005; Canadian Internet Project, 2007; Nicholas, Rowlands, Clark & Williams, 2011).

Nearly 4 out of 5 Canadians are online, a percentage that has increased since 2004 (Canadian Internet Project, 2007). Furthermore, most Canadians using the Internet are classified as heavy Internet users – 40% of users spend 15 hours or more online per week (Canadian Internet Project, 2007). The use of the Internet goes beyond information seeking and includes using this particular type of technology for recreational and social interactions (Odell, Korgen, Schumacher & Delucchi, 2000; Griffiths & Brophy, 2005; Tabatabai & Shore, 2005; Nazim, 2008; Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier & Perez, 2009).

Research suggests many Internet users usually click on the first three to four results generated by a search engine (Cutrell & Guan, 2007). The number of sites a user selects is an important factor to consider when designing a research project using the Internet for data collection. Furthermore, the use of four websites per search term allows for a manageable approach to this data.

Gender and the Internet

Research indicates that female college students use the Internet for communicative and informational purposes (Odell, Korgen, Schumacher & Delucchi, 2000; Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier & Perez, 2009). If women use the Internet for communication and informational purposes, then it is important to analyze the content available to them. Exploring this realm becomes particularly relevant in the context of women's safety. Women may access the Internet to seek information about personal safety and such information may influence their perceptions of victimization. As suggested in Chapter Two, a number of myths exist around rape and

victimization of women. Therefore, it is important to concentrate on suggestions being offered to keep women safe. This content analysis contributes new information regarding the reinforcement of rape myths through safety tips found online.

Google and Search Engine Usage

Search engines act as a guide for users to navigate the Internet. Search engine technology is complex and can influence academic research design as well as data collection (Uyar, 2009). However, to the everyday Internet user, search engine technology is user friendly and provides quick, accessible information. The use of search engines such as Google provide individuals with results from which they can select websites to view (Wootton, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004; Caufield, 2005; Uyar, 2009). Research suggests that the desire for quick results prompts users to look at the first three or four results generated from search engines (Cutrell & Guan, 2007). If Internet users are selecting the top three or four sites that return, this helps to rationalize looking at the first four websites for safety tips for women.

The Internet offers a wide range of search engines. I selected Google because it is regarded as a popular and user-friendly search engine (Wootton, 2000; Griffiths & Brophy, 2005; Nazim, 2008; Roussinov & Robles-Flores, 2008; Nicholas, Rowlands, Clark & Williams, 2011). Although other search engines are available online, such as Yahoo and MSN, evidence suggests that Google dominates as first choice for many Internet users. In one study, 45 percent of students name Google as their first choice for searching (Griffiths & Brophy, 2005). Other studies show Google to be a number one choice for searching because of its ability to provide information quickly (Caufield, 2005; Wills, 2006; Nazim, 2008; Nicholas, Rowlands, Clark & Williams, 2011).

Furthermore, it is important to understand the dynamics of Google and its rank order. As the Internet is in constant flux, it can be challenging to ensure a quality research design. To overcome these obstacles for this content analysis, I monitored the first page of results that were produced from my search terms over a four month period. Search result monitoring has been used by other researchers to assess whether results remain consistent overtime (Uyar, 2009). This method allows me to be confident in asserting that individuals seeking out information on safety tips for women have had access to the same information over the time in which data was collected. While information online is constantly changing, I have been able to determine that there is longitudinal consistency in the information captured in my sampling frame.

After the initial search using “*safety tips for women*” other recommended search terms provided by Google included: “*personal safety tips women, safety tips for kids, safety tips for women living alone, safety tips for women traveling alone, travel safety tips women, safety tips for single women and safety tips of the day*”(see Appendix A). To ensure the sites accessed primarily addressed women, only search terms that contain the word “*women*” were selected. “*Safety tips of the day*” and “*safety tips for kids*” were excluded. Further “*travel safety tips women*” were also excluded because these tips specify safety measures that only cater to women who can afford to travel.

Analytical Technique

Content Analysis

Content analysis is useful to critically evaluate information provided by Internet websites. Content analysis is defined as a research technique that applies a systematic evaluation of “texts, images and symbolic matter” and establishes contextual inferences about the topic of study (Krippendorff, 2004, p.3). It is important to understand the variability in using content analysis

as a research method, as data is interpreted through the lens of the researcher. Thus, issues of reliability and validity exist when using this method. However, there are ways to ensure the research design meets traditional expectations of other social science research. These include ensuring the study is replicable, valid and there is an equal application of structure applied to all units of analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). Ensuring a well-defined structure for data collection allows for control of the research trajectory.

Furthermore, the material under analysis - whether it is text, images or symbolic matter - rarely achieves an understood consensus about information found through content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Consensus may be difficult to attain when each individual researcher may interpret content in their own unique way. Therefore one obvious flaw of analyzing content is variation of interpretation.

Text Analysis

This analysis of safety tips for women online is primarily based on text. In the current inquiry I analyze content from a feminist perspective. In addition an analysis of verbatim text is documented because language is a consistent theme in gender literature (Marcus, 1992; Nelson & Robinson, 2002; Southerland & Southerland, 2006; Ullman, 2010). It is essential to analyze language in these websites. Directing attention to the absence of gender specific language provides concrete examples that reinforce traditional gender norms placed on women that also align with rape myths. For text analysis, it is imperative to evaluate both what is present and absent in a gendered approach (Marcus 1992; Nelson & Robinson, 2002).

In addition to language, thematic concepts emerge that provide examples of how these websites reinforce rape myths by disseminating information about women's safety. These themes

include victim blaming, the neglect of men’s behaviours and adherence to traditional gender norms (Nelson & Robinson, 2002; Karmen, 2007; Gotell, 2007; Ullman, 2010).

Sample

In this thesis I utilize purposive sampling. Purposive sampling provides researchers with flexibility in determining samples after special knowledge or expertise about a subject is established (Berg, 2007). The sampling interval uses the first four website results provided by Google after entering the search term “*safety tips for women*”, as was discussed in Chapter Two. Four websites from each search term results list were selected for each recommended search term as shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Search Terms Used and Websites Provided

| Search Term Used for Google | Websites Selected in Rank Order |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Safety Tips for Women | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Non Profits.com: Safety tips for women 2) Personal Safety Tips for Women- ABC News 3) Women Travel Tips- Serious Safety Tips for Women 4) Power to Change: Life- The Top Ten Things Every Woman Should Know about Personal Safety |
| Personal Safety Tips Women | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Non Profits.com: Safety tips for women 2) Power to Change: Life- The Top Ten Things Every Woman Should Know about Personal Safety 3) All That Women Want- Personal Safety Tips- That Women Want 4) Women Corp- Save YOUR Life! Personal Safety & Security Tips |
| Safety Tips for Women Living Alone | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Non Profits.com: Safety tips for women 2) Apartment Safety Tips for Women Living Alone: Oh My Apartment 3) Self Defense With An Attitude: Empowered Women Take Charge- Ladies Living Alone- Be Proactive and Protect Yourself with a Home Security System 4) Articles Collections Boston.com- Women can |

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | be safe living on their own |
| Safety Tips Single Women | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Rediff.com- Safety Tips for Single Women 2) 4 Safety Tips for Single Girls- IVillage.com 3) About.com: Women Home Buyers Safety Tips- Home Buying Advice for Women With Security in Mind 4) Single Minded Women: The online destination for single women- What Women Can Do to Stay Safe When Alone |

The selected recommended search terms from Google include “*personal safety tips for women, safety tips for women living alone, and safety tips for single women*”.

Data Collection

The sampling frame of this research design is justified by certain trends and patterns of Internet users. For example, if Internet users only select the first three to four results, it is logical to follow the same structure for this research. After entering the search term “*safety tips for women,*” the first four search results are included. This content analysis aims to be representative of the average Internet users’ access to online information. A large body of literature suggests the experiences of women in day to day life vary significantly from men (Softas-Nall, Bardos & Fakinos, 1995; Rozee & Koss, 2001; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; West & Zimmerman, 2008; Yavuz & Welch, 2010). To obtain a more accurate reflection of women’s experiences, safety tips specified only for women are included. A structured table presents the data from the selected websites to ensure consistent measurement. This table includes information pertaining to the website’s name, URL, Google rank, search term used, name and depth of links, author, date, verbatim written information and images available (see Appendix B).

To truly comprehend rape, it is paramount to allow women and their experiences to frame this discourse. Investigating women’s experiences of rape is significant because intersectionality can contribute to distinct variations in women’s experiences. Intersectionality is described as

individuals who experience multiple forms of oppression “(i.e. sexism plus racism plus homophobia)” (Kendall, Nygaard & Thompson, 2008, p. 42). It is imperative to emphasize that women face diverse experiences because they are diverse individuals. For example, some scholars suggest women from lower socioeconomic statuses may endure different experiences than women from more affluent socioeconomic statuses (Belknap, 2010; Popkin, Leventhal & Weismann, 2010; Cook, Gidycz, Koss & Murphy, 2011). Important classifications that can contribute to a woman’s life experience are not limited to, but can include: age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and immigration status (Cook, Gidycz, Koss & Murphy, 2011; Wolitzky-Taylor et al, 2011). The examination of women’s experiences demonstrates a step in the right direction; however it is presumptuous to assume women as a group have homogenous experiences. Therefore to provide a more holistic research approach, women from all facets of life, whenever possible, should be included.

Even when research designs account for obstacles facing researchers, other issues present themselves. It is necessary to identify ethical implications when conducting academic research online, such as: whether content is public or private (Hookway, 2008; Leung, 2010). A benefit of content analysis regarding Internet information is the ability to collect data without participant interaction, ultimately reducing ethical concerns (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012). The main difference between other online data such as blogs or e-journals in comparison to website information is the former may include personal context, where the latter may be written intentionally for the public domain. Hookway (2008) provides recommendations about authorship and trustworthiness of content while contextualizing the use of online qualitative research. While the intentions of Hookway’s research differ from my own, the piece offers important concepts one should be aware of when conducting qualitative research online.

In the following chapter I will analyze and discuss the emergent themes which arose from my analysis. These themes include ownership of personal safety, gender role expectations, women's assumed dependence, gender neutral and specific language and last, that women's fear of rape is a societal norm. I will discuss how thematic components are evident in rape myths and in the data collected from women's safety websites.

Chapter Four: Results

Many safety tips present the world as an unsafe place for women, a concept that can impact quality of life and mobility. By generating a world that is scary and frightening, whether it is an accurate reflection or not, does impact women's lives and warrants academic inquiry. The following chapter will review several safety sites found through searching "*safety tips for women*" online and as discussed in the previous chapter a content analysis of the text used to communicate safety information is the focus of this current chapter.

Several major themes in the data emerge: ownership over one's safety, gender role expectations, dependence on others and products for security, gender neutral versus specific language, and normative emphasis of women's fear of victimization. These themes align with rape myths. All text from the websites have had minimal changes made and are presented verbatim. Bolding, capitalization, punctuation, emphasis added and spelling errors are included and unchanged. Some duplicate quotes are used because they include examples of multiple themes. The purpose for maintaining a verbatim collection is to provide an accurate representation of what general Internet users see and to maintain the integrity of the information by the website author. In addition website authorship follows American Psychological Association citations for this chapter however it is important to recognize that these website authors are not academic scholars.

Rape Myth: "Why didn't she do something to keep herself safe?"

The majority of safety suggestions propose that women's behaviour or actions must change to ensure safety. Many of these suggestions mirror avoidance and restrictive behaviours which women use as a means of coping with risk of victimization (Warr, 1985; Stanko, 1998; Tulloch et al., 1998). For example, one website states:

“Women’s safety necessitates an awareness of dangerous situations and strategies to keep yourself safe.” (Bernstein, 2009)

This safety tip suggests a woman’s safety is an issue that requires her to maintain her awareness. Further, *“keep yourself safe”* suggests to the reader that the individual is responsible for her own safety. Another website presents a more challenging suggestion:

“Develop a safety and security awareness about things around you, the people around you, and any gut feelings about social situations you may be in. You will want to develop a more heightened sense of security and common sense about situations you may have ignored before,” (Watterson, 2008)

Again the objective in this safety tip is to change and develop a woman’s individual sense of awareness. Further, while the statement suggests women need safety and security, it does not articulate from whom or from what. The absence of what women should fear aligns with fear of crime literature which neglects to name what people are fearful of (Reid & Konrad, 2004; Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2006; Hilinski, 2010). Fear of crime literature and rape myths also neglect men’s roles in relation to women’s safety (Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton & Farrall, 1998; Fetchenhauer & Buunk, 2005; Hilinski, 2010). Contextualizing women’s safety in reference to men is complex and often over simplified.

Statistically, men are more likely to be offenders in cases of rape than women (Watson-Franke, 2002; Popkin, Leventhal & Weismann, 2010; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). The power imbalance that exists between men and women is essential to understanding women’s safety. The website data demonstrates a lack of attention to men’s roles. This information encourages women’s need for personal awareness for her safety and self-preservation. Thus women’s need

for awareness serves a purpose in her safety but also can impact her quality of life in a negative way.

The idea of personal responsibility has important consequences on how women feel and position themselves in cases of rape. For example if a female victim believes her actions led to the rape, it could result in self blame and a neglect to disclose the event (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Belknap, 2010; Ullman, 2010). Placing the responsibility of rape on the victim is a component of rape myths (Morrison, 2005; Masser, Lee & McKimmie, 2010; McMahon, 2010; Lockwood-Harris, 2011). More specifically the issue of victim blaming is associated with the onus of safety falling exclusively to the victim. When the onus of safety is presented as a woman's responsibility it makes it more difficult to change acceptance of rape myths. As noted earlier, evidence suggests men are more or less always the perpetrators of the rape of women (Roze & Koss, 2001; Morrison, 2005; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). If men are the primary perpetrators of rape *and* they are not considered to be part of the solution, I believe this reinforces women's need to maintain their own safety. Because a disconnect exists between men's behaviours and women's need for protection, it can be very challenging to change social expectations about rape.

Women's fear of rape illustrates that fear can impact women's lives in negative ways, including but not limited to avoidance and restrictive behaviours (Tulloch et al., 1998; Krahe, 2005; Popkin, Leventhal, & Weismann, 2010). A common theme evident in the data suggests women need to maintain awareness at all times to ensure their safety. Vigilance and awareness in any and all environments creates stress, thus negatively impacting quality of life. Many of the websites present information about safety that insists women must be aware of all surroundings, persons, and items in nearby areas. For example, one site suggests that:

*“**Awareness:** Your first line of defence. Most people think of kicks to the groin and blocking punches when they hear the term “self-defence.” However, true self-defence begins long before any actual physical contact. **The first, and probably most important, component in self-defence is awareness:** awareness of yourself, your surroundings, and your potential attacker’s likely strategies.” (Laur & Laur, 1999)*

Another site recommends that women should:

“Keep Eyes and Ears Open, Hands Free. It is important to be alert to who and what is around you. Talking on a cell phone or listening to headphones makes you easy prey for a predator. The only reason you should be using your mobile phone is notify a friend of your whereabouts or to call for help.” (Cohen, 2006)

The authors of this information maintain that women should be on guard and vigilant at all times. Expectations regarding awareness can prompt the assumption that a victimized woman is not sufficiently vigilant; providing a justification for blaming the victim. It is problematic to suggest women are solely responsible for their safety.

Thus, some safety sites do perpetuate a key rape myth namely that in order to maintain personal safety women need to take ownership for their own safety. They do this by reinforcing that women need to develop an enhanced awareness. Furthermore the onus of responsibility for safety is directed to women only as men’s accountability is neglected. Another rape myth that is reinforced is gender role expectations. These expectations align with gender roles that emphasize women’s choices; often which reflect stereotypical femininity. It is to this discussion that this paper will now turn.

Rape Myth: “What did she expect when she dresses like that and walks home from the bar alone?”

Online safety tips for women tend to emphasize the importance of appropriate behaviour, including a gendered expectation of women’s passivity. The following website proposes:

“Fight Your Inner Woman. Experts say that women tend to be sympathetic — don't be! History has shown that serial killers and other criminals often play on the sympathies of unsuspecting women to lure them into dangerous situations. If someone asks for the time, directions, or help in or around their car, be as courteous as possible but keep moving. You can always assist the stranger by making a phone call to police from a safe location, or by finding others to go back and help with you. (Cohen, 2006)

Traits such as sympathy, courteousness and being helpful align with gendered expectations of women’s femininity (Madriz, 1997; Lupton & Tulloch, 1999; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). These traits are presented as a contributing factor to why women are victimized. Another website provides this suggestion:

“Women are always very sympathetic. Do not help a handicapped man or someone asking for an address on a lonely street. It sounds rude, but you never know. Continuous eve-teasing by locals should be notified to the police.” (Nanda, 2006)

These safety tips suggest women who overstep their expected gender roles are often blamed for negative consequences. For example, women who socialize in public spaces are expected to maintain awareness and vigilance regarding their own safety. Another website suggests:

“Be a practical party girl. Every year, thousands of emergency room incidents are attributed to women being secretly drugged with substances generally known as "club drugs," like Rohypnol, also known as roofies or the date rape drug, and Ecstasy, a

synthetic drug with mild hallucinogenic properties. The purpose of the drug is to make unsuspecting women uninhibited or even unconscious -- easy targets for rape or other harmful acts. To prevent being drugged, you absolutely must never leave your drink unattended.” (N.A., 2004)

This tip states women who are “*unsuspecting*” are likely to become victims of being drugged, reinforcing the importance of personal awareness and responsibility. Suggestions that depict public places as a risk for rape, (i.e. a party that has alcohol); contribute to keeping women oppressed by encouraging traditional feminine traits of not drinking and staying home. Another website also alludes to date rape drugs:

“At social events Young women in dating situations should never leave drinks unattended. A 'date rape' drug can be easily slipped into a glass. When returning from the dance floor or restroom, get a new drink from the bartender.” (Nanda, 2006)

Though proper gendered behaviour is an important theme in rape myths, there are also latent undertones of women’s safety being compromised based on location. This theme will be discussed in the following section. As is evident in much of the rape literature the notion of private and public spaces become integral to contextualizing risk of rape in a tangible way.

Rape Myth: “Don’t you know how dangerous it is for a woman to be alone in a parking garage after dark”

Location is a recurring theme in online women’s safety information. Public versus private space is commonly discussed in both women’s safety and rape myths. Some rape myths suggest if women are walking alone in a dark alley they are responsible for victimization (Belknap, 2010; McMahon, 2010; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Many websites have examples of places

assumed to be “hot spots” for victimization. The most common places include parking lots/garages, stairwells, elevators and personal vehicles.

“Parking lots and garages can conceal someone who is lurking. Avoid parking areas at night, especially when alone. Regard anyone standing near the cars with suspicion. Before getting into your car, check the back seat to see if anyone has entered your car in your absence. Never let your guard down when a stranger smiles or greets you. Criminals try to appear friendly to catch you by surprise.” (Bernstein, 2009)

Interestingly, this information has been presented as factual without any evidence to support these claims. Further, many sites claim that most attacks happen at night, for example:

“Be Aware When Out After Dark. You don’t need to be a shut-in, just be aware that most attacks occur at night. If you go out, carry a bright flashlight, a cell phone, your trusty pepper spray, and a loud whistle. Keep these items close at hand. If you have to walk to your car in a dark lot, keep your keys in your hand at the ready to slash someone if you have to...If you’ve been targeted you could have someone waiting for you to get in your car, so that’s why it’s better to pull over further down the road than to be ambushed in your parking space” (Brown, 2011)

Another example proposes criminals want to catch women by surprise. Positing that criminals lie in wait to catch women by surprise alludes to stranger danger, an important component of rape myths. For example:

“Never let your guard down when a stranger smiles or greets you. Criminals try to appear friendly to catch you by surprise.” (Bernstein, 2009)

Although this suggestion may be accepted as fact, without evidence, these are merely statements. Furthermore safety tips that encourage stranger danger are misrepresenting the risk of rape by acquaintances which are statistically more likely (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). However; the general Internet user may not question the credibility of such statements.

What is particularly interesting about these suggestions is the idea that specific places and times lead to victimization. Emphasizing the location of victimization fails to prioritize offender accountability. For example one website suggests:

“If the parking lot is particularly dark or deserted, it may be wise to go back and find a friend or guard who can walk you to your car.” (Cohen, 2006)

Rather, it highlights an environment or location considered risky to women’s safety. However it is not dark alleys, parking garages or elevators that are actually raping women.

Problematic locations allow women to believe they are safer in private spaces, such as the home. Encouraging women to remain in private spaces reinforces tenets of traditional femininity (Lupton & Tulloch, 1999; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). Further, public spaces are presented to women in online safety tips as dangerous places compared to private spheres. This is evident through the repetitive theme of danger in parking garages/lots, elevators, or dark neighbourhood alleys. These are all presented as fear inducing places that increase a woman’s risk of victimization. One website highlights the dangers that exist when in public places.

“If someone is following you on the street or in a garage or with you in an elevator or stairwell and if you feel they are suspicious, look them in the face and ask them a question, like what time is it, or make general small talk: "I can't believe it is so cold out

here, we're in for a bad winter." Now you've seen their face and could identify them in a line up, so you lose appeal as a target." (Bond, N.D.)

Other sites reinforce the notion of potential risk of victimization in public spaces.

"Park your vehicle in lighted areas and near cameras if possible. If you feel uncomfortable walking out to your vehicle, ask someone to escort you. Listen to your gut. It is better to be safe, than to be in an uncomfortable situation that may be unsafe."
(Bazin, 2011)

The data from these women's safety websites highlight differences in the public versus private sphere. This theme affirms gender role expectations for women as traditional female gender roles emphasizes domesticity (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Coltrane, 2008; Gerson & Peiss, 2008; West & Zimmerman, 2008). Presenting public spaces as places of victimization encourages women to stay at home, potentially limiting their mobility. If women believe there is a higher risk of victimization outside the home, this fear may lead women to stay in more private spaces which is problematic because research suggest many assaults occur in private spaces (Mesch, 2001; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Davies, 2008) . There are socioeconomic elements linked to safety suggestions. The websites present public places, including vehicles, parking lots/garages and elevators. Although public places can evoke fear due to compromised safety, the emphasis on personal vehicles is significant. Many sites provide tips on how women can stay safe in their cars.

"If you have to walk to your car in a dark lot, keep your keys in your hand at the ready to slash someone if you have to. Also, don't get in your car and dally with checking voicemails, playing with the radio etc. Survey the scene before you get into the car, look

around you and in the cars near you, get in your car, put the keys in right away and go. If you need to stop, pull out and drive down a few blocks. If you've been targeted you could have someone waiting for you to get in your car, so that's why it's better to pull over further down the road than to be ambushed in your parking space” (Brown, 2011)

Car ownership is costly, and women who cannot afford personal transportation often resort to using public transit. A total of nine out of thirteen websites analysed provide information about safety in cars, suggesting women from lower socioeconomic classes are being neglected.

Another website suggests to women who own cars to:

“Park your vehicle in lighted areas and near cameras if possible. If you feel uncomfortable walking out to your vehicle, ask someone to escort you. Listen to your gut. It is better to be safe, than to be in an uncomfortable situation that may be unsafe.”

(Bazin, 2011)

There are many safety issues for women who require transportation. However, I found it surprising that there are not more examples of safety tips for women using public transit. Some research suggests fear of victimization is often present when using public transit (Yavez & Welsh, 2010). One website suggests women should:

“Avoid travelling by train after normal working hours.” (Nanda, 2006)

Comparatively, there are far less safety tips associated with the use of public transportation. This specific example, encouraging avoidance behaviours, may not always be feasible. Thus, it appears that safety suggestions are not directed towards all women, but primarily to those who can afford vehicles and other safety products.

There is a dual purpose to establishing public spaces as dangerous places for women. First, women may be deterred from leaving their private spaces because it appears public spaces require women to think about personal safety (Softas-Nall, Bardos & Fakinos, 1995; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997; Rozee & Koss, 2001; Krahe, 2005; Popkin, Leventhal & Weismann, 2010). Second, a car lends power to a woman's independence, moving outside traditional gender norm expectations of staying in the home. The safety suggestions imply that women who have control of their mobility are more likely to be victimized. Safety suggestions are laden with concepts of stereotypical gender roles.

The argument of private versus public spaces is intrinsically linked to stranger versus acquaintance victimization. The theme of strangers was evident in many of the safety websites and often found in rape scholarly literature. It is to this topic that this paper will now turn.

Rape Myth: “If it wasn’t a stranger jumping out of the bushes in a blitz attack it wasn’t rape”

Empirical evidence from the rape literature suggests women are more likely to be raped by a man they know than a stranger (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Wolitzsky-Taylor, et al, 2011).

The data shows many suggestions that strive to reduce stranger victimization. All thirteen websites make references to stranger danger. One suggests that:

“By staying alert to your surroundings, avoiding rigid routines and strangers, you can maximize your safety in an apartment community” (Bernstein, 2009)

If women rely on safety websites, it is important for women to know victimization occurs more often from an intimate than a stranger. Another website also alludes to stranger danger:

“Be cautious when strangers enter your home. Use a peephole or look through a window to check. If you must talk to a stranger, never open the door wide. If you have a security chain attached, only open as far as it will allow” (Nanda, 2006)

The data suggests women’s fear of rape and subsequent safety tips are geared towards strangers despite empirical evidence to suggest otherwise (Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton & Farrall, 1998; Franklin & Franklin, 2009; Hilinski, 2010). Stranger danger reflects an important concept in women’s risk of rape. The relationship between the rape victim and rapist can lead women to believe misinformation about the reality of risk. Women may rely on certain men for protection while fearing rape from others. This next section will focus on women’s dependence on men in their attempts to stay safe from rape.

Rape Myth: “She should have just asked someone to walk her to her car.”

Women’s fear of crime is related to a fear of being victimized while alone (Sparks, Girling & Loader, 2001; Davies, 2008; Tiby, 2009), as evident in both fear of crime literature and women’s safety websites. Safety suggestions often imply that women need to depend on others for safety, typically men. This theme of reliance represents underlying notions of gender inequality. The perceived inability for a woman to be safe when she is alone is based on gender stereotypes that women are passive and weak (Madriz, 1997; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Masser, Lee, McKimmie, 2010). Many websites highlight safety precautions for women living alone:

“If you are a young lady who lives alone, consider your security and safety as a top priority. There are too many predators who will take advantage of young women thinking they are easy prey. The first step to your protection is knowing you may

be vulnerable and that you are going to do whatever it takes to reduce your vulnerability and avoid becoming a victim of a home invasion or burglary crime.” (Watterson, 2008)

There are suggestions that vulnerability is an assumed trait for women. Vulnerability aligns with gender role expectations and reiterates the acceptance of women’s risk of victimization. Further, other websites highlight the notion of living alone to be an unsafe choice as many suggestions are geared towards women who live alone. For example:

“Create the impression that you are not living alone. Use your first initial and last name on your mailbox. Add another name to the mailbox, if permitted, to make it look as if someone else is living with you. Use “we” instead of “I” when recording your home voicemail greeting to make the number of occupants unknown.” (Bernstein, 2009)

Online information suggests women living alone are perceived to have a higher risk of victimization. Maintaining women’s fear of victimization may influence women to seek safety through reliance on others. It is unrealistic for a woman to rely on others in all circumstances. One website creates another reason for fearing strangers suggesting offenders can pose as neighbours. For example:

“Apartment laundry rooms can be dangerous because people come and go and the noise of the machines makes it difficult to hear what is happening in the room. Criminals may pose as friendly neighbors, striking up a conversation to learn more about you. Never give out personal information or stay in the laundry room with a stranger. Instead, do your laundry with a neighbor.” (Bernstein, 2009)

Conversely, another safety tip suggests that safety might be enhanced by relying on neighbours.

“Befriend neighbors who can look out for you and help you in an emergency. Take your cell phone with you at all times; and never leave your door unlocked, even if you are just running out for a minute. During that time, someone might sneak into your apartment and attack you when you return.” (Bernstein, 2009)

Both examples lack gender specific language when suggesting women seek help from neighbours. Should women be relying on female or male neighbours for their safety? It is difficult to determine whether these safety suggestions articulate whether women should prefer the safety of a male or female companion. However, gender stereotypes suggest women need men for protection (Warr, 1985; Tulloch et al., 1998; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2006).

Suggesting neighbours should be in alliance for women’s protection fails to acknowledge risks associated with this decision. Empirical evidence suggests women are at a higher risk of rape by intimates or acquaintances (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Wolitzky-Taylor, et al, 2011). Thus, fear of stranger victimization in the safety suggestion provides evidence of a disconnect between myth and reality regarding women’s victimization.

It appears living as a woman requires the presence of another person to stay safe. An overwhelming twelve out of thirteen websites suggest women depend on a variety of people and products in an attempt to stay safe. If women believe they are not safe unless accompanied by someone else, they are likely to restrict daily behaviour, potentially affecting quality of life. In the following section I highlight how women are not just dependent on other people but rely on safety products as well.

Rape Myth: “If she had a cell phone with her why didn’t she call the police for help?”

The marketing of women's safety is a way to sell security products. A lucrative industry exists that markets, produces and sells items geared towards safety and security.

“When you are alone at night, you can set your alarm while watching late night TV or right before you go to bed. If there is a burglary or home invasion your alarm will alert you, make a tremendous amount of noise - also alerting the intruder, and will automatically notify your alarm company to immediately send the police” (Watterson, 2008)

This next example names specific types of personal protection items. It also includes hyper links (subsequently removed from text) to web pages making these items available for purchase. For example:

“Have a Safety Plan of Action on specifics you will do to maintain your safety and any family members' safety. The plan should include your taking a self-defense class to learn techniques and tactics to defend and protect yourself and carrying some kind of personal protection products like pepper spray, mace spray Taser C2, Stun Gun or Pepper Gun that can be used to fend off an intruder. These are all non-lethal devices only meant to throw off an attacker giving you a chance to escape to safety and call the police. Many women who have been stalked or previously attacked are resorting to firearms for personal protection. Lethal or non-lethal - make sure you follow the legal requirements and that you are properly trained in how to use the device.” (Watterson, 2008)

These products are marketed towards reducing fear of crime by presenting a way to control potential victimization. Many of the safety products suggested are similarly found in literature

about women's fear of crime and rape, such as pepper spray (Bryden & Fletcher, 2007; Hilinski, 2010).

“Ladies, if you are living alone and don't have a security system for protection you are being very naive. In today's world and in today's economy it only makes sense to have a security system that protects your home, your family, and you” (Watterson, 2008)

In analysing these suggestions, I found that home security systems dominate most websites. What is interesting about the home security system, compared to other items, is its reliance on continued costs. For example, you may only need to purchase pepper spray once, but purchasing a home security system requires ongoing fees to maintain security. Marketing home security systems suggests that women's safety can be bought. As indicated previously regarding car ownership, it appears many online safety suggestions have a monetary price which suggests safety tips are geared towards women who can afford these costs.

“Buy Homes With Security Systems Find out if the security system is leased or owned and how much it costs per month. Ask for an explanation about how the home is wired, and whether all the doors and windows are monitored on the system. Determine who answers breaches -- whether it's the police or the security alarm staff.” (Weintraub, 2011)

Although the cost of safety measures varies considerably, there are socioeconomic elements to consider. Another website also provides suggestions all which come with a price.

“Put in a home security system. It's the best deterrent to a break-in, and the cost is usually reasonable. Think about getting a dog, preferably one with a big bark. Beagles

for instance, are small but sound huge. Just remember though, it's important to get an animal that fits your lifestyle. Obedience training for your dog will allow it to react when you need it to the most" (Brown, 2011)

Continuing the theme of safety products, the use of cell phones is a common suggestion. Although cell phones have multiple purposes, many websites suggest having a cell phone with you as a preventative safety measure.

"Take your cell phone with you at all times; and never leave your door unlocked, even if you are just running out for a minute. During that time, someone might sneak into your apartment and attack you when you return." (Bernstein, 2009)

Society is inundated with mobile technology, and this is evident in the number of websites that recommend cell phone reliance. Cell phones are mentioned in nine out of thirteen websites and are a recognizable component in online safety tips for women.

It is interesting to note that cell phones are presented as both a positive and negative attribute to women's safety. For example, one single website has contradictory advice. The first suggestion affirms cell phones as a necessity for safety in order to call for help, for example:

"Your cell phone is one of the most important things you can have on you, if you need assistance or are having an emergency. There is nothing worse than a cell phone with no charge! Spend the money and get several chargers; one for your home, one for work, and a charger for your vehicle. Also, program an emergency contact in your phone so that he or she can be notified in the event of an emergency. Many people are using the acronym "ICE" "In Case of Emergency" in their phone" (Bazin, 2011)

While in another section in the same website, suggests cell phones act as a distraction for women. For example:

“When walking, are you using your cell phone? Cell phones are a distraction and will make you less aware of your surroundings. Keep aware when walking; look over your shoulder to see if someone is following you.” (Bazin, 2011)

Whether or not cell phones are an attribute or detriment to women’s safety, the discussion presents the variety of complex issues regarding women’s safety rendering this analysis relevant and significant. As with other security products, the use of cell phones suggests to readers one must be able to afford these means in order to stay safe. For example, one website provides an overt illustration regarding costs.

“GET A CELL PHONE: *There are packages for \$19.95 a month that allow you to program only 911 into the dialling out program. (This is an alternative for parents who say it is too expensive for their kids to have a cell phone.)* (N.A., 2001)

Although a cell phone may be a relatively affordable means of “ensuring” safety according to this website, the tips still suggest there is a cost associated with staying safe. This tip also highlights the parental responsibility for keeping children safe.

Reliance on cell phones as a tool for women’s safety can be linked to rape myths that encourage victim blaming. For example, if a woman does not have a cell phone with her, she could be blamed for not taking appropriate safety precautions. A victim may be asked why she did not use a cell phone to call for help. Information from these websites fails to articulate that having a cell phone during victimization may not be helpful if it is not within reach.

The commodifying of women’s safety has two important implications. First, it reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes of women’s passivity and men’s dominance (Reid &

Konrad, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Gerson & Peiss, 2008). Second, it capitalizes financially on women's fear. Evidence from this data suggests women's safety is not valued because the onus of safety is on women alone and a lucrative industry exists that profit from keeping women fearful. Furthermore it is problematic to neglect the difference in women's experiences based on socioeconomic status. Many safety suggestions have a monetary cost. Thus, women are dichotomized into those who can afford safety products and those who cannot. It is important to understand the differences between women's experiences because it relates to differences in risk of victimization. Scholars find that marginalized individuals are more likely to be at risk for victimization (Fisher et al, 2003; Belknap, 2010; Popkin, Leventhal & Weismann, 2010). These women would benefit most from safety information however not all suggestions are specified to that group. The data reaffirms this dichotomy because many safety tips are centered on purchasing items to lower risk of victimization.

It is not merely tangible items, such as home security systems or pepper spray, that warrant attention when it comes to women's safety. Although language may appear to be a small component of understanding rape its importance is evident because we use language to communicate with one another. The next section will show how both the absence and presence gender neutral and gender specific language are important to understanding rape myths.

Rape Myth: "She was raped"

There are examples in online websites of both gender neutral and gender specific language; however, gender neutral language is much more evident in safety tips for women. The context of words has significant implications. I argue that the use of ambiguous language aligns with Katz (2006) suggestion that neglecting to articulate gendered issues contributes to reduced

offender accountability. In this suggestion, the words criminals and victims are used without specifying gender.

“Begin by recognizing that certain areas of an apartment building are used by criminals to target victims.” (Bernstein, 2009)

The analysis of online websites about women’s safety finds gender neutral language is more commonly used. For example one website suggests

“If someone is following you on the street or in a garage or with you in an elevator or stairwell and if you feel they are suspicious, look them in the face and ask them a question, like what time is it, or make general small talk: “I can't believe it is so cold out here, we're in for a bad winter.” Now you've seen their face and could identify them in a line up, so you lose appeal as a target,” (Bond, N.D.)

A different website also uses gender neutral language when referring to intruders.

“Upon approaching your vehicle, prior to getting in, look inside the vehicle for any potential intruders.” (Bazin, 2011)

The information refers to intruders, criminals, and someone; it does not directly mention the gender of these individuals. Empirical evidence suggests women are victimized disproportionately by men (Roze & Koss, 2001; Hilinski, 2010); thus, the websites failure to articulate gender implies a lack of attention focused on men.

Contrary to most safety suggestions in this study, there are instances where gender specific language is used. For example:

“Of course the advice we always hear still applies. Always be aware of your surroundings, take someone with you if you can and if you see any odd behavior, don't dismiss it, go with your instincts. You may feel a little silly at the time, but you'd feel much worse if the guy really was trouble.” (Bond, N.D.)

The person who may potentially victimize someone is referred to as a “guy”. It is important to highlight the distinction of using gender specific language. It allows for the reader to envision a more accurate representation of males as the offenders.

“If you are walking alone in the dark (which you shouldn't be) and you find him following/ chasing you: A. Scream "FIRE!", and not "help". People don't want to get involved when people yell "help", but "fire" draws attention because people are nosy, and concerned if they or their belongings are in danger of the "fire.” (N.A., 2011).

The website data suggests women should be prioritizing their safety yet, as in fear of crime literature seldom articulate what women need to be kept safe from (Tulloch et al., 1998; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Hilinski, 2010). In many cases places such as parking lots, cars, or dark alleys are suggested to be what women should fear. However it is not a physical place that victimize women, but men who rape and victimize them in such places.

“Apartment safety can be a matter of life and death for women living alone. Consequently, it is important to evaluate the safety of your apartment building or complex and make a plan to increase your personal safety. Women's safety necessitates an awareness of dangerous situations and strategies to keep yourself safe.” (Bernstein, 2009)

The absence or presence of gender specific language reinforces that women's safety tips present some misconceptions regarding gender power imbalances. This safety tip can be misinterpreted because of the gender neutral language.

“Apartment laundry rooms can be dangerous because people come and go and the noise of the machines makes it difficult to hear what is happening in the room. Criminals may pose as friendly neighbors, striking up a conversation to learn more about you. Never give out personal information or stay in the laundry room with a stranger. Instead, do your laundry with a neighbor.” (Bernstein, 2009)

Failure to specify gender (specifically women should fear men), creates confusion in the issue of women's victimization. Rape myths tend to place the onus of safety on women, which encourages neglecting the gender of the offender (Morrison, 2005; Sable, Danis, Mauzy & Gallagher, 2006; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Without classifying the offender as male, it continues to position rape as a one-sided problem that can only be managed by women making changes to their lives. Discounting the accountability of men helps to reinforce rape myth acceptance which contributes to women's oppression. Furthermore gender specific language, in the context of violence against women is important because language is the key to communication. Therefore it is imperative to analyze the language found in safety websites for women. Moreover, the context of language may be something the general public would not consider. In the next section there are additional themes that are important as they reflect rape myths in women's safety tips. The shift from using the word rape to sexual assault is an important component to rape myths and this next section will illustrate that.

Rape Myth: “Don't call it rape, it's better to say sexual assault”

The major focus of this analysis is to present themes that emerge from the data. It is equally important to discuss some unexpected but apparent themes. One prediction assumes the term sexual assault would be found more often than the word rape. This assumption aligns with literature that recognizes the shift to use sexual assault rather than rape (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Sable, Danis, Mauzy & Gallagher, 2006; Cook, Gidycz, Koss & Murphy, 2011). However the data shows the word “*rape*” being mentioned in nine out of the thirteen websites. The words “*sexual assault*” is evident in only two websites. It is interesting websites publish the word rape more often, as sexual assault replaced this word in many contemporary explanations. Further, the word assault is mentioned in five of the websites which is an interesting finding. The word “*assault*” does not articulate the specifics of the crime. The ambiguity of the word assault allows for women to interpret assault differently. Since language has been shown to be an integral component to understanding rape and women’s safety the subsequent section will highlight the use of the words rape and sexual assault. As reflected in academic literature there are differing interpretations of using these terms which warrants a closer look.

Rape Myth X: “If she got raped, who’s doing the raping?”

The neglect of men and their behaviour is an interesting component of the information found. The words “*men*” or “*man*” only appear in three of the thirteen websites. The word “*him*” appears in five websites, and the words “*male*” and “*he*” appears in six of the websites. Although there are instances where gendered words do appear, these are found in six out of the thirteen websites. However if women are disproportionately victims, based on both unofficial and official reports, and men as offenders (Roze & Koss, 2001; Karmen, 2007; Hilinski, 2010), it is unfortunate gender specification is neglected.

Despite the disproportionate use of gender neutral language, there are instances where websites do provide gender specific language. The use of gender specific language regarding women's safety is a positive example of gendering the offender. Websites are a contemporary way to share information. Thus, finding gender specific language highlights the shift, albeit a slight one, to encompass a more realistic description of women's victimization by men. Although women's experiences should frame this discourse it is often accepted that being a woman one should expect to be raped. In the following section I address the societal norms of women's risk of rape.

Rape Myth: "What do you expect? You are a woman!"

Many safety websites suggest avoidance and restrictive behaviours are a normal part of women's existence. One website suggests to readers:

"If you are walking alone in the dark (which you shouldn't be) and you find him following/ chasing you: A. Scream "FIRE!", and not "help". People don't want to get involved when people yell "help", but "fire" draws attention because people are nosy, and concerned if they or their belongings are in danger of the "fire." (N.A., 2011).

Rape myth acceptance helps to guide society into accepting that women's victimization by men is a standard social component, and that being rape is a "normal" fear that all women should harbour (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Belknap, 2010; McMahon, 2010).

Power imbalances between men and women are a foundation to understanding sexual victimization of women. Men control women through oppressive means such as preying on their fear of rape. In a male dominant society, women are not valued equally and the undervaluing of women is evident in safety suggestions that reaffirm women's fear.

“I didn't mean to scare you with any of this, but honestly, I hope it did. It should. Our world is not as safe as we pretend that it is, and living in our fantasy worlds WILL get us in trouble, sooner or later. "It won't happen to me" doesn't cut it, and is a bogus expectation anyway.” (N.A., 2011)

When contextualizing the rape of women, men’s accountability is neglected. In addition presenting this issue as a woman’s problem encourages others to accept rape myths because the onus of safety is the woman’s alone.

“Finally, remember: Assuming that none of this will ever happen to you is ridiculous. No one expects it, but we must be aware and prepared.” (Nanda, 2006)

It is unrealistic to expect a society to exist without violence; however gender inequality leaves women with an unjust set of options. Perceptions of how women stay safe and necessary precautions they take are misguiding society into accepting this social problem and solution as commonplace. For example some websites highlight women’s fear as normal.

“I didn't mean to scare you with any of this, but honestly, I hope it did. It should. Our world is not as safe as we pretend that it is, and living in our fantasy worlds WILL get us in trouble, sooner or later. "It won't happen to me" doesn't cut it, and is a bogus expectation anyway” (N.A., 2011)

According to rape myths, a woman is perceived as responsible for her own victimization if she does not take socially expected safety precautions (Masser, Lee & McKimmie, 2010; McMahon, 2010; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). Although online website information reinforces women’s responsibility for their safety, the role of men continues to be ignored. The presentation of safety tips suggests women’s choices are the primary determinant of victimization. The suggestion that

women should expect victimization at some point in their lives presents women's fear as an ongoing lifelong problem.

“If you worry about being safe, you're not paranoid, you're just proactive. This is a crazy world we live in and as a single woman, you need to protect yourself. So, pay extra special attention to these must-do safety tips every single woman should know” (Brown, 2011)

Women are socialized to learn it is better to be safe than sorry (Softas, Bardos & Fakinos, 1995; Rozee & Koss, 2001; Morrison, 2005; Ullman, 2010). If women do take such precautions in an effort to avoid rape, it may not appear to be asking for much. Although some safety suggestions may be perceived as small changes for women, it is the principle of women accommodating for men's violence that is problematic. Along with many components of rape myths, women are expected to alter their lives in order to maintain a sense of safety.

*“The sad reality is that we live in an increasingly violent society in which the fear of crime is ever-present. **Personal safety has become an issue of importance for everyone, but especially for women.**”* (Laur & Laur, 1999)

Another premise with online safety tips is women abide by suggested precautionary behaviours believing it reduces their risk of victimization. Presenting these suggestions in a causal manner is problematic because victimization of women can occur whether or not these safety measures are used. Suggestions of this nature take a complex issue and reduce it to an oversimplified explanation of women's accountability in her victimization.

This chapter provided the results from a content analysis of women's safety websites. The emergent themes found in the online data shows support that rape myths do exist in women's safety tips found online. These themes include women's ownership over her personal

safety, gender role expectations, public versus private spaces, victim and offender relationship, dependence on other people and safety products, the language of rape and that fear of rape is considered a normal part of a women's life experience.

The final chapter will articulate my contribution to the rape academic literature by providing an analysis of online websites suggestions for women's safety. It is important to explore contemporary avenues, such as the Internet, to contextualize rape and women's safety that reflects relevance to women in modern times. If women seek out safety information online it is imperative to know what information is being communicated regarding rape myths. The following chapter will address limitations of the study, policy implications and future directions of this research.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Discussion

Scholarly research was instrumental in bringing rape myths to public attention.

Understanding rape myths is of key importance in developing a deeper understanding of sexual violence against women. Though the public may have some broad notion of what rape myths are it is unlikely that they realize that rape myths continue to exist and are reinforced in subtle ways. This thesis attempted to reveal the way internet sites disseminate information about women's safety by reinforcing rape myths. Furthermore the investigation of Internet content about women's safety provides a relevant and contemporary contribution to literature about rape.

Several important findings arose from this investigation. For example the main findings include:

- Women are responsible for their own safety
- Gender roles influence safety tips
- In order to be safe women should not be alone
- Suggestions are structured around safety from strangers
- Women can purchase products to control their safety
- Rape is an expected event in the life of a female

There is an abundance of evidence from the safety websites that were analyzed that women are responsible for ownership of their safety. The finding that responsibility falls to women alone is important because it highlights the fact that gender inequality persists. In regards to rape myths women are suggested to maintain awareness and vigilance as a means to control risk of rape.

The role of gender is paramount in understanding rape myths as rape is not an equal opportunity crime. Traditional gender roles for women include passivity and domesticity that

reinforce feminine traits. Thus women are often blamed for being raped when they dress a certain way or engage in behaviours in public spaces. Gender roles demonstrate the importance of rape myths as they incorrectly reinforce the idea that women should adhere to traditional roles of femininity in an attempt to avoid being raped.

In alignment with other traditional gender roles for women the implication is that being alone can be detrimental to a woman's safety. Safety websites encourage women to rely on other people as a means to maintain their safety. This is an important finding because empirical research suggests that women are more likely to be raped by someone they know. A safety tip that suggests depending on a neighbour to help does not take into consideration the important facet of acquaintance rape.

One of the most important findings is the promotion of safety tips against stranger attacks. There are misperceived beliefs that rapes are committed by strangers; however this has been empirically proven otherwise. Rape myths help to support this incorrect notion of stranger danger which detracts from men and their accountability. It is important to understand the relationship between rapists and the women they rape. As these websites demonstrate safety tips geared towards strangers it is an important finding because women are given misinformation about who is more likely to rape them.

Misinformation about women's safety can have tangible consequences such as restrictive or avoidance behaviours. Furthermore the recurring theme of safety products is found across safety websites for women. The alleged solution to cope with a potential rape is to purchase a host of security products disguised as a means of controlling a woman's risk of rape. This finding has important implications because if women cannot afford or choose not to rely on these

products, they may be blamed for getting raped. As with many other rape myths there is a neglect of men's behaviours in the raping of women.

Many of the emergent themes depict a small but important factor which is the language used to discuss rape. Scholarly research has explored the differences between the terms rape and sexual assault. I argue that women's experiences which frame this discourse should be articulated and referred to as rape rather than sexual assault. Furthermore it is significant to understand the difference between gender neutral and gender specific language as language is the key to communication. If rape and rape myths are disseminated using gender neutral language it further reflects the gender inequality that surrounds the issue of rape. Gender neutral language allows for men to be neglected in this problem. Thus language does have important meanings and consequences.

Overall the discovery of rape myths in women's safety websites is an important contribution to understanding rape and sexual violence against women. One of the most crucial elements to rape myths and women's safety is the idea that you should expect to be raped because you are a woman. Although one cannot choose their gender, society has accepted rape myths and deemed them as justification for why women are raped by men. The suggestion that women should be vigilant, aware, dependent and armed as a means to avoid being raped further reinforces the importance of this research.

Women's safety and security from rape is an important social issue that affects all individuals, not just women. In both the data and scholarly literature, women are perceived as being the solution to avoiding rape. By placing the onus of responsibility of women's safety only on women opens the doors for victim blaming. Victim blaming is an overt theme in rape literature and often emerges in less academic realms, such as news media. Victim blaming is a

powerful contributor to rape myths. Thus even in websites dedicated to women's safety; victim blaming and gender inequality are present. The influence of gender role expectations not only continues to exist but flourish when disguised as a means of safety.

Limitations

In any research endeavour there are limitations that exist. Qualitative research, and more specifically content analysis, is often criticized because of the researcher's subjective determination of what information to include and exclude (Krippendorff, 2004; Berg, 2007; Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009; Van Den Hoonaard, 2010). Inclusion of data becomes more complex when utilizing the Internet because of the nearly endless information available. One way to overcome this obstacle is to be explicit about why certain information is selected as data. Specific to the content analysis of this thesis, is the idea that the data is described as a snapshot of a group of websites that provide information on women's safety.

One can develop the design further by using inter-rater reliability to analyze the same material to determine if competing interpretations occur. However, due to time and cost restrictions, this approach was not feasible. In addition the use of content analysis requires the researcher to be familiar with the context of the subject thus increasing internal validity. This thesis provides an introductory and exploratory analysis of women's safety information online. Despite these obstacles, content analyses was an important part of this research.

Another limitation to this study is the linear approach of data inclusion. Although many Internet users navigate the web in a non-linear fashion, non-linearity can present issues for conducting academic research. To maintain systematic rigor, the amount of in-depth links selected is limited. For example, the table column titled "*name and depth of links*" indicates the number of mouse clicks to get to that website following Google's search results (see Appendix

A). It is impossible to establish how any one Internet user navigates the web with absolute certainty.

There are numerous confounding variables that influence how a user searches the net and what search terms they employ. Combined with the vastness of the Internet, it is very possible that no two users take the same path in seeking information. Future studies may wish to include more websites; however, timeline and scope necessitated narrowed data collection for this project.

Despite research to suggest a user will pick the first four search results, not all will. Thus a limitation of this study is generalized findings and external validity. External validity is the ability to generalize a study's results beyond the context of the specific research (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). Despite this limitation; I maintain a sampling interval of four websites per search term to ensure a structured framework for data collection.

As with much social science research there are limitations regarding the generalizability of findings. Since the Internet is a foundation of this study it is important to recognize that not all women have Internet access. Therefore one can argue that many users of these sites are middle class, educated women who can afford access to the Internet. This is problematic because there are many women who are poor and illiterate and may not be able to benefit from accessing online information about personal safety. Thus an important limitation of this study is that information under analysis is only disseminated to certain groups of women, not all.

There are also limitations in this sample as it may be geared towards a younger demographic. Research shows there is considerable variation amongst Internet users and age is one distinct variable. Younger individuals are deemed to be more adept at searching the Internet for information than their older counterparts. If younger woman are accessing this information

more so than older women it could potentially limit the dissemination of information across a broader spectrum of women.

What is imperative to understand is women are a diverse group and should not be assumed to be homogenous. A limitation to this study is that it is culturally narrow as I conducted and analyzed the research alone. The ability to have access to conduct this research online asserts that I am privileged enough to have Internet and the educational background to support this study. Therefore my interpretations of rape myths online are in accordance with my own reflexivity. If one were to expand this study to include other cultures one may find there are differences in language, taboos or types of rape myths.

Policy Implications

Although this analysis is limited in its scope, it does yield practical implications for understanding women's safety tips. Use of the Internet has increased dramatically since its inception (Canada Internet Project, 2007) which can increase the audience of access. Thus if women access the Internet to receive information about their personal safety, it is likely to wield influence over personal perceptions of safety and risk of rape.

One suggestion for policy implication could include educating the creators of safety sites about the reality of rape and the reflection of rape myths on their sites. Although this study aimed to review information available to general Internet users, the authors of this information need to be educated about rape myths.

The findings from this thesis could be the basis of what should constitute a proper and valid safety site. Women's safety websites should be direct about the reality of dangers women face regarding rape. Rape myths should be articulated and then followed by empirical evidence to show the misinformation being proposed. By showing the myths and the reality it can help

women understand rape myths and how myths can be disproved. Most importantly an ideal safety website should reinforce the fact that men are responsible for rape and that women should not blame themselves for being raped. In doing so women would likely be safer.

Future Directions

Rape myths are a complex component of the rape literature and future studies are required in order to fully comprehend this topic. First, a subsequent study might expand upon this research by broadening search terms selected for website retrieval. Because of this seemingly endless information, a single search term was used; “*safety tips for women*”, to ensure the research was manageable. However, it would be useful to investigate other search terms related to women`s safety to determine what kinds of other information exists. Although it is difficult to navigate through the abundance of Internet information, alternative search terms could include “*how to safe as a woman, girls safety, staying safe from crime, safety tips for mothers, etc*” would allow for further contribution to this area of study.

Second, researchers should continue to study Internet information longitudinally. This would allow researchers to determine if information is maintained over time, what information is no longer available, and if new information is presented. A study of this magnitude would take considerable planning as the Internet is in a constant state of flux, but it would also yield considerable returns on rape myth stability and fluctuation in online contexts.

Third, cross cultural research is needed in this area. As the data is directed at women, it is important to understand its influence. Since each woman has their own personal experience regarding safety and risk of rape and should not be considered homogenous. Thus it would be beneficial to see if there are differences both across and between cultures. It is important to develop further knowledge about women`s experiences worldwide. The United Nations

recognizes violence against women as the more pervasive yet least recognized violation of human rights (Rozee & Koss, 2001). The recognition of inequality regarding women's rights needs to extend worldwide in order to ensure all nations understand the gravity of this problem.

Conclusion

Overall many of the rape themes that are present on Internet safety sites are connected to a broader understanding that women's fear of rape is a common societal norm. When such myths are readily accepted by society and reinforced through means of safety tips, it demonstrates the inequality women face regarding their safety. The ability to provide an oversimplified answer to why a woman is raped demonstrates that this behaviour is normal. Unfortunately whether the devaluing of women and their fear of rape is normal does not mean it is right. One passage eloquently reflects the reality of this research: "Rape myths stretch far beyond the confines of the criminal justice system. They are still very much a part of the fabric of everyday life, affecting how rape victims, assailants and the public view the crime of rape." (Stanko & Williams, 2009, p. 209). Until society can move towards valuing women and their right to live without fear of rape, it appears rape myths will continue to influence and frame the way rape is understood in contemporary times.

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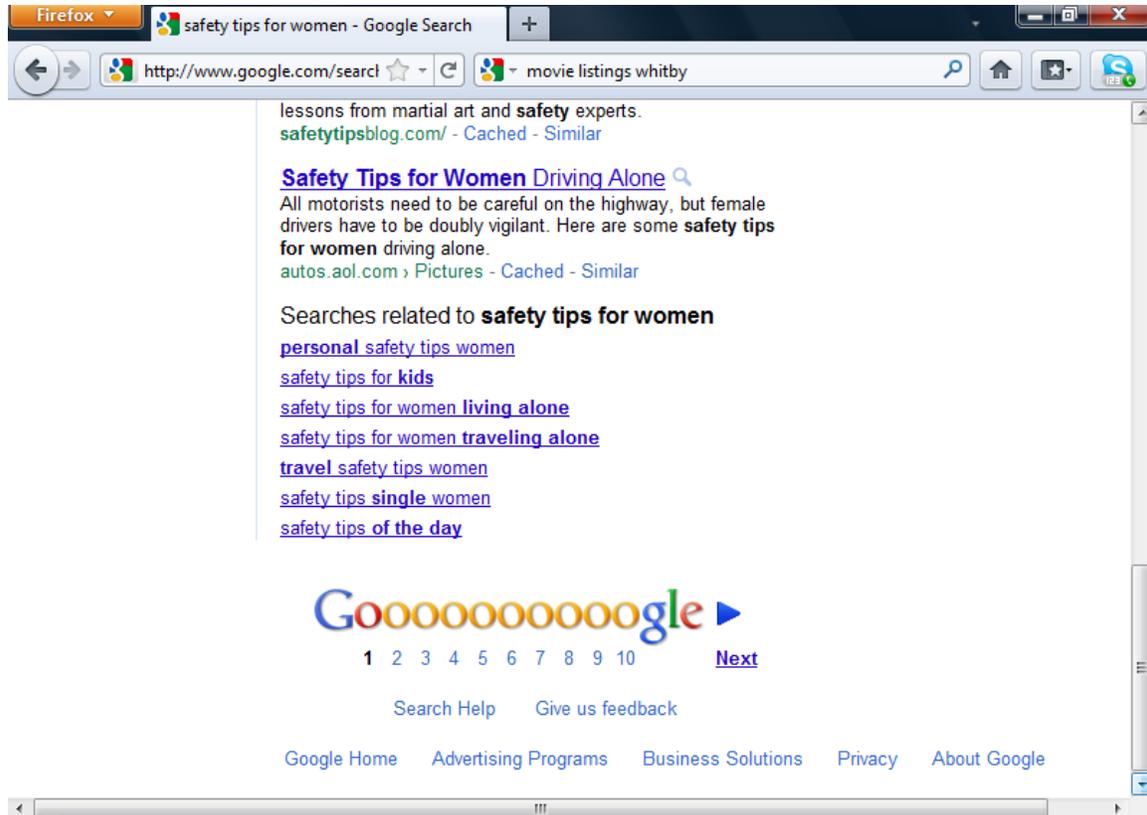
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Appendix A

Recommended Terms by Google



Appendix B

Outline of Data Collection Table

| | | Thoughts and Explanations |
|----------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Name of Website | | |
| URL | | |
| Rank on Google | | |
| Search term used on Google | | |
| Name of links and depth | | |
| Author and date | | |
| # of page views | | |
| Verbatim Words | | |
| Extras | | |
| Screen shots and date | | |