"He is not a Monster": Himpathy and Sexual Assault

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ABSTRACT

Himpathy occurs when privileged men accused of sexual assault or harassment receive extra attention and sympathy (Manne 2018, 2020). While himpathy is closely associated with the #MeToo movement, little research has explicitly explored the concept. In this review, we integrate himpathy with the literatures on rape myths, victim blaming, and attributions, detailing the empirical work that provides support for the theoretical claims of himpathy. By connecting himpathy to the existing empirical evidence, we illustrate that himpathy provides a conceptual framework for understanding how male perpetrators deny allegations of sexual assault perpetration, shift blame to the victims, and reframe the situation to exonerate themselves. Because of the prevalence of sexual violence and the victim blaming associated with these crimes, it is important to develop a clear understanding of how the numerous (male) perpetrators of these crimes are able to reframe the allegations against them.

KEY WORDS  Himpathy; Sexual Assault; Victim Blaming; Rape Myths; Attributions

"I’ll put this on TV because I’m so persuasive and I’m so smart, and I’m such a wonderful guy. . . . I will charm the pants off of America at the trial"  
—Johnny Depp (Saha 2022)

Depp’s confident sentiment mirrors the denials of many privileged men accused of sexual assault† and/or domestic violence. Men accused of rape and sexual assault often express

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similar ideas—that they are the good guys, definitely not criminals or rapists. Increasing numbers of men may make similar claims as the popularity of the #MeToo movement continues to empower victims/survivors to speak about their experiences and identify perpetrators. This has simultaneously prompted a backlash among the accused men, with denials of culpability and claims of wrongful accusations. In this way, the narrative of a wrongfully accused man emerges, developing into repeated claims that he is a good guy, whose reputation could be ruined by the allegations.

Especially for those accused of sexual assault who hold a privileged status (White, middle- to upper-class, cisgender, heterosexual), men encounter a disproportionate amount of sympathy, or himpathy, compared to victims/survivors. As introduced by Manne (2018, 2020), himpathy occurs when privileged men accused of sexual assault or harassment receive extra attention and sympathy. This excess of sympathy toward male perpetrators serves as a reminder that sexual assault is a unique crime that frequently exonerates (male) perpetrators and subsequently or simultaneously blames the victims/survivors for any harm that occurs. In this paper, we review existing empirical work that provides support for himpathy (Manne 2018, 2020). Although there are vast literatures on blame-shifting and rape myths, which implicitly support the theoretical validity of himpathy, these literatures have not been aggregated to discuss how they underlie himpathy.

Scholars are starting to explicitly acknowledge himpathy’s existence (c.f., Banet-Weiser 2021; Barber, Bridges, and Nelson 2019; Boyle 2019; Sweeney 2020), incorporating it into empirical work (c.f., Andreasen 2021; Bedera 2023; Boyle and Rathnayake 2020; Dodson et al. 2023; Miller 2019; Miller et al. 2022; Pals 2021). Thus, although there is only emerging research specifically utilizing himpathy, there is a vast literature within psychology and sociology that supports the tenets of himpathy. In this paper, we focus specifically on the literatures on rape myths, victim blaming, and attributions, outlining empirical work that provides support for the theoretical claims of himpathy. In doing so, we are drawing attention to the pervasiveness of himpathy and the negative societal and organizational implications of himpathy. Societally, himpathy upholds gendered norms and inhibits social progress toward a more equitable society. Male perpetrators continue to receive disproportionately lenient consequences—in terms of social sanctions, media portrayals, and formal punishments. In this way, men benefit from their privileged positions while marginalized groups observe another instance of structural inequity, and victims/survivors may become more reluctant to report after observing how their credibility could be questioned and undermined. Organizationally, himpathy allows a culture of impunity to persist, promoting institutional betrayal (Bedera 2023), failing to disrupt power and violence in institutions and workplaces. Taken together, these societal and organizational effects illustrate how himpathy is a social problem, composed of several processes. These processes shift blame and alleviate responsibility for the perpetrator and paint a problematic picture of what happens when victims/survivors report.

Furthermore, the prevalence and impact of sexual assault makes himpathy a topic worthy of further investigation. Indeed, one in four women experiences attempted or completed rape in her lifetime, and an even higher percentage—nearly 44% of women—experience sexual violence in their lives (Smith et al. 2018). These figures highlight that sexual violence is a widespread problem, and as such, it is important to understand that
himpathy may underlie how the numerous (male) perpetrators of these crimes are able to reframe the allegations against them.

**HIMPATHY**

Himpathy occurs when privileged men accused of sexual assault or harassment receive extra attention and sympathy (Manne 2018, 2020). Manne argues that when himpathy takes place, there is a “flow of sympathy away from female victims toward their male victimizers” (2018:23). This notion of himpathy is similar to Kimmel’s (2008, Kimmel and Davis 2011) culture of protection. The culture of protection represents how the larger society sides with male perpetrators, not the female victims/survivors. The larger society forms a “protective bubble of community support” (Kimmel 2008:63) for male perpetrators, by looking the other way, trivializing the behavior, and blaming the victim/survivor. To be sure, this protective bubble does not extend to all men, just those who are entitled and privileged within society (e.g., White, middle- to upper-class, cisgender, heterosexual).

Himpathy employs exonerating narratives, which explain away the perpetrator’s actions, while simultaneously erasing the true victim/survivor of the crime. The privileged man’s story is rewritten in a way that simultaneously benefits him and disadvantages his victim/survivor. Although all men can be included in the process of himpathy, only highly privileged (White, middle- to upper-class, cisgender, heterosexual) men benefit from himpathy. For highly privileged men to be perceived as the “golden boys” and “good boys,” less-privileged men must be seen as the “true villains of the story” (Manne 2018:179). Pepin’s (2016) study of media portrayals of intimate partner violence corroborates this point by showing that Black men are more likely to be framed as criminals compared to White men. In addition, articles about White men were more likely to include excuses and justifications for their actions, compared to articles about Black men. This “reinforces negative tropes about Black men, privileges White men, and ultimately disadvantages women” (p. 133). In this way, White men are, again, framed as the “good boys” while less-privileged men are villainized (and women are victimized), meaning that himpathy contributes not only to gender-based violence but also to racial inequalities in the media. This is a serious and significant inequity for perpetrators and for victims/survivors seeking justice, and as observed in the Depp–Heard trial, the media can have a substantial impact on the outcome of a case.

Manne (2018) argues that there is a “strenuous collective effort” (p. 178) within society to uphold men’s innocence or give them the benefit of the doubt. As a society, we cast exonerating narratives, in which we doubt the stories of victims/survivors and err on the side of the perpetrators, which leads to testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when those who are less privileged are perceived as less credible—when the stories of men are believed over the stories of women. This includes the tendency to assume that women are lying or hysterical, instead of questioning whether men are trustworthy and honest. Following Fricker (2007), Manne (2018) argues that simply being a member of a less privileged group (i.e., woman, non-White) is enough for a person to experience testimonial injustice. Again, this is inequitable and problematic, and it raises questions
about the viability of legal recourse for victims/survivors when they are not believed as often as (privileged) men are.

Lastly, himpathy exists, in part, because of our cultural stereotypes about who rapists are and who they are not (Manne 2018). “Golden boys,” or privileged men more generally, are thought not to be rapists. When men use the excessive sympathy that they automatically receive to cast themselves as the victims of sexual assault cases in which they are really the perpetrators, they perversely turn the assault victims/survivors into the villains of the narrative. This creates exonerating narratives for perpetrators of sexual assault (who fall into the “golden boy” category) and allows for victim blaming, since the real victim is framed as the villain bringing hardship against the new victim (who is really the perpetrator!). Himpathy lends itself to “herasure,” in which women’s stories are not truly heard. In this way, a privileged man is able to both blame the victim as well as “excus[e] oneself from responsibility by proclaiming to be a good person” (Johnson 2006 as cited by Pepin 2016:126).

“HE IS NOT A RAPIST”

The case of Brock Turner, who was convicted of sexual assault in 2016, made international headlines when he received merely six months in county jail, with three years of probation. Judge Aaron Persky drew upon character letters in making his sentencing decisions. In his character letter, Turner’s father argued that “these verdicts have broken and shattered him and our family in so many ways. His life will never be the one that he dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve. That is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years of life” (Sweeny 2020:126). Turner’s childhood friend argued within her character letter that “Brock is not a monster. He is the furthest thing from anything like that, and I have known him much longer than the people involved in this case. I don’t think it’s fair to base the fate of the next ten + years of his life on the decision of a girl who doesn’t remember anything but the amount she drank to press charges against him” (Sweeny 2020:148).

In her analysis of character letters, Sweeny (2020) highlights how rape myths are embedded and, additionally, how himpathy is also woven within these letters. The purpose of character letters is for family and friends of the offender to persuade the judge, prior to sentencing, to issue the lightest sentence possible. Within these letters, the offender’s good character and bright future are highlighted. Character letters, by definition, focus on how the offender is suffering, rather than the victim. As Sweeny (2020) points out, character letters in and of themselves are not problematic, but it is how they influence judges and their decisions that is problematic. Himpathetic statements embedded within the character letters shift the victim/survivor of the crime to the offender. Himpathetic statements can also be found within rape myths. Rape myths are “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists” (Burt 1980:217). While specific myths vary, as a group, they “blame the victim for their rape, express a disbelief in claims of rape, exonerate the perpetrator and allude that only certain types of women are raped” (Grubb and Turner 2012:455). Rape myths are “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women”
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Rogalin and Addison (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994:134). Rape myths contribute to victim blaming (Ryan 2019) by amplifying the supposed importance of the “real rape” script (Ryan 2011). A “real rape” is assumed to involve a (male) stranger hiding in the shadows or in the bushes who attacks an innocent victim/survivor (woman). The victim/survivor is expected to be physically injured, to immediately report the incident to the police, and to seek medical help (Franklin and Garza 2021). Rape myths serve to create an idea of what typically occurs during a rape and what should (not) count as rape; they (de)legitimize sexual assault situations depending on the extent to which those situations fully conform to the “real rape” script. Subsequently, rape myths shift the blame for the incident onto the victim/survivor (Grubb and Turner 2012), a point which we will elaborate upon in the next section.

In addition, the stereotype of who a rapist is and, more importantly, who a rapist is not, is embedded within rape myths. For example, “men from nice middle-class homes almost never rape” and “rapists are usually sexually frustrated individuals” are two indices from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS; Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald 1999:49). These himpathetic statements highlight the notion that (privileged) men are not rapists. In their examination of rape myths present in local papers, Sacks, Ackerman, and Shlosberg (2018) found that 4.1% of stories included a reference that “he’s not that kind of guy.”

In their analysis of rape myths surrounding a Steubenville, Ohio case, Kosloski, Diamond-Welch, and Mann (2018) included several characteristics of the perpetrator. Specifically, they included “adolescent males don’t know better,” “good guys who make a mistake shouldn’t be penalized/penalized heavily,” and “a conviction ruins men’s lives for an innocent mistake” (p. 169) in their coding scheme. They argue that these specific myths help to reduce the (perceived) guilt of the perpetrator—that these myths help to shift the concern from the victim to the perpetrator. This shift of victimhood from the victim to the perpetrator is an aspect of himpathy, which we discuss later in the paper. Kosloski and colleagues (2018) found that when these rape myths were present in articles, about half of them supported these themes and the articles tended to focus on how the incidents ruined the lives of the perpetrators and/or how the perpetrators were all-star football players.

BLAME-SHIFTING

Himpathy uses blame-shifting (Lanier and Green 2006), or victim blaming, to shift the blame from the perpetrator to the victim/survivor (Manne 2018, 2020). Although victim blaming is observed for several types of crimes (Bieneck and Krahé 2011; Felson and Palmore 2018; Reich, Pegel, and Johnson 2021), the prevalence, negativity, and stigma of victim blaming are especially pronounced and detrimental in instances of sexual assault (Bieneck and Krahé 2011; Gravelin, Biernat, and Bucher 2019; Orchowski, Untied, and Gidycz 2013; Reich et al. 2021). In cases of rape and sexual assault, victim blame not only shifts responsibility and negative attention toward the victim/survivor but also tends to displace the blame from the offender.

This blame-shifting can occur because of elements of language or through cognitive processes regulating the allocation of blame to involved parties. Through language, increased linguistic focus on the victim/survivor of sexual assault increases victim blame,
whereas focusing on the perpetrator reduces it (Niemi and Young 2016); however, even though focusing on the perpetrator may serve to reduce victim blame, the perpetrator is not always the focus of rape reporting in media. Northcutt Bohmert, Allison, and Ducate (2019), using a university newspaper, found that passive voice is frequently used when discussing rape and sexual assault (75–100%). Using passive voice separates the actor (the rapist) from the actions (the rape), thereby removing perpetrator responsibility. In addition, 39% of rape articles and 14% of sexual assault articles placed responsibility on victims/survivors, whereas less responsibility was placed on victims of other crimes. Combined, the frequent use of passive voice and elevated rape/sexual assault victim/survivor responsibility illustrates two ways in which victims/survivors of rape are blamed in writing at a higher level than victims/survivors of other crimes. Victim-blame attributions are affected by whether the victim/survivor was drinking (Venema 2019), whether they are perceived to be promiscuous (Donovan 2007; Genna 2017), and whether the victim/survivor knew the perpetrator (Persson and Dhingra 2021). Rape myths, which we discussed earlier, tend to underlie the factors that increase victim blame (see Grubb and Harrower 2008 for a review of this literature).

In sexual assault cases, victim blaming may involve statements or nonverbal indicators that imply that the victim/survivor’s appearance (Deitz, Littman, and Bentley 1984; Genna 2017), alcohol consumption (Venema 2019), or personal (ir)responsibility contributed to their victimization (Grubb and Harrower 2008, 2009). Manne (2018) argues that assigning credibility deficits to the victim/survivor and surpluses to the perpetrator functions such that the victim/survivor’s allegation of sexual assault is not believed. Not only is credibility disputed for victims/survivors and perpetrators, but culpability/responsibility also interacts to influence who or, more often, to what extent perceivers think the victim/survivor is to blame for the assault.

Next, as mentioned previously, rape myth acceptance (RMA) is an underlying individual attitude that has been widely explored in relation to victim blaming. Rape myths “create a false narrative about what victims/survivors can or should do during an assault” (Kosloski et al. 2018:171). The IRMAS is one of several scales that measure rape myths by having respondents select their level of agreement with statements that reflect rape myths. Several of the measure’s subscales reflect victim blaming with specific items such as “A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex,” “Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them,” and “If a woman doesn’t physically resist sex—even when protesting verbally—it really can’t be considered rape,” which serve to shift responsibility to the victim/survivor and trivialize or limit what can be considered rape (Payne et al. 1999). In research on victim blaming, this scale and others show that higher RMA is related to attributing more responsibility to the victim/survivor (Mason, Riger, and Foley 2004), increased victim blaming (Newcombe et al. 2008; Sleath and Bull 2012; Starfelt et al. 2015), and minimization of the severity of the rape in some situations (Newcombe et al. 2008). Rape myths tend to focus on what the victim/survivor did (or did not do) that led to the rape; thus, clothing, resistance levels, and drinking behaviors are rape myths that may have precipitated the person’s victimization (Payne et al. 1999). These scales focus on rape victims/survivors’ behaviors, illustrating that rape myths are about victims/survivors’ behavior rather than on the wrongdoings of...
Besides RMA, another individual attitude that is frequently measured alongside blame attributions is belief in a just world (JWB). In relation to victims/survivors, JWB is a tendency to believe that good things happen to good people whereas bad things happen to bad people (Catlin et al. 2021), thus rendering the world just and explaining who deserves to experience negative events. Within JWB, people have a tendency to view themselves as good and therefore deserving of good things happening to them. Conversely, bad things, like rape, happen to bad people, which those bad people deserve (Lerner, Miller, and Holmes 1976).

Blame attributions are also affected by the relationship between the victim/survivor and perpetrator. The literature frequently differentiates between stranger rape and acquaintance rape because they affect victim blame differently. Stranger rape conforms more with the stereotypical image of a “real rape”; however, this scenario is less common than acquaintance-rape situations. In some cases, victim/survivors of stranger rape are seen as significantly less blameworthy for their victimization than are acquaintance-rape victim/survivors (Sleath and Bull 2010, 2012), yet this is not always observed (Felson and Palmore 2018; Newcombe et al. 2008). The results are mixed on whether stranger or acquaintance rape truly elicits more victim-blaming reactions (Grubb and Harrower 2008), although it is clear in both circumstances that the perpetrator does not receive the entirety of the blame. Instead, respondents prefer offering at least some leniency to the perpetrator. Similarly, Johnson, Kuck, and Schander (1997) used a rape myth scale with three categories: “excusing the man,” “blaming the woman,” and “justifications for acquaintance rape.” Respondents not only agreed with the “excusing the man” scale—indicating the presence of rape myths—but also agreed much more with the items that excused the offender rather than the items that blamed the victim. This suggests that respondents preferred to “excuse the man” rather than “blame the woman.” Although blaming women continues, this comparison of subscales reveals an interesting preference to excuse or exonerate the man instead of a preference for derogating the victim/survivor. Additional literature suggests that social media posts (Whiting et al. 2021) and even victims/survivors (Weiss 2009) are prone to providing excuses for perpetrators’ behaviors, which indicates the pervasiveness of the problem of himpathy.

Across the literature about victim blaming, numerous factors are examined for their relationship with victim blaming. Most seek to identify what attitudes or elements increase victim blame (Grubb and Harrower 2008), but it is noteworthy that victim blame is one way that blame is displaced from the perpetrator and begins to transform the victim/survivor into a more blameworthy target and in turn activates himpathy in favor of the perpetrator because of the consequences he could experience, which ultimately leads to victim shifting.

**VICTIM SHIFTING**

*A Christine Blasey Ford is not the victim here—Brett Kavanaugh is.*

—Cheryl K. Chumley (2018)
Himpathy shifts the victim of the assault from the actual victim/survivor to the perpetrator, victim shifting, or what Flusberg and colleagues (2022) call victim framing. Victim framing occurs when the perpetrator of the sexual assault is perceived as the real victim. According to Manne (2018), in order for the perpetrator to become the victim/survivor in the narrative, either victim blaming or victim erasure happens to the female victim/survivor. A rape victim/survivor “may be seen as unforgiving, as trying to take something away from her rapist” (p. 204). This framing is consistent with the trend of journalists calling victims/survivors accusers rather than victims (Katz 2004, 2015). In Franiuk, Seefelt, and Vandello’s (2008) content analysis of the rape myths found in the writings about the Kobe Bryant case, they found that accuser was used significantly more often in headlines, compared to victim and alleged victim. In their sample, in looking at headlines that used accuser, alleged victim, or victim, 91% of the headlines used accuser.

Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald (2002) performed a content analysis of magazine descriptions of 10 rape cases and found that there were more sympathetic statements toward the offenders than toward the victims/survivors in the write-ups of the rape cases. When the victim/survivor was White and the perpetrator was not White, then there was more offender blaming. They also found that there was less offender blame when the offender was of a higher social class than the victim/survivor. Again, this illustrates how himpathy acts inequitably to further privilege some men while excluding men with marginalized identities.

Manne (2018) makes it clear that not all men receive himpathy, only privileged men. In analyzing the media coverage surrounding Brock Turner and Cory Batey, both college athletes convicted of sexual assault, Teebagy (2018) argues that whiteness allows male perpetrators to escape responsibility. The media tended to be more victim-focused in their coverage of Corey Batey’s case (Black football player) compared to their coverage of Brock Turner’s case (White swimmer). In addition, the media tended to be more sympathetic toward Brock Turner than to Corey Batey. Although Black athlete-students are more privileged than Black nonathlete students, both Teebagy (2018) and Ash and colleagues (2017) argue that once a student’s athlete status no longer benefits the institution, the student’s privileged status as an athlete disappears.

Victim blaming can easily lead to victim shifting, which plays a role in himpathy, because it allows for people to blame someone for the violent act. Within our culture, existing rape myths make it easier for people to blame the victim/survivor instead of the perpetrator. If women are responsible for their rape, notions of a just world are reinforced. As we discussed above, the just world hypothesis, or JWB, argues that people desire to see the world as a just place—that people get what they deserve (Lerner et al. 1976). If women are seen as responsible for being raped, then this means that the male offenders are not responsible. Furthermore, it is not just people in general who perceive women as being responsible. For example, Donde (2017), investigating the attributions of blame by victim/survivors of rape, found that 0% of the sample indicated that the male involved was “totally” to blame and 52% (N = 67) believed that the male involved was “not at all” to blame. In other words, none of the victims/survivors believed that the perpetrator was completely at fault for the crime and half of them believed that the male perpetrator had no responsibility for the crime. Instead, victims/survivors perceived themselves to be the ones...
most at fault, assigning the least amount of blame to the male perpetrator. While shocking, this result underscores the insidious nature of himpathy.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this review, we discuss elements of the sexual assault literature that corroborate the philosophical concept of himpathy. Himpathy refers to privileged (White, middle- to upper-class, cisgender, straight) male perpetrators of sexual assault receiving undue sympathy and exoneration for their offenses by way of discrediting/blaming the victim/survivor. We explicate how rape myths and blame-shifting are associated with discrediting or attributing responsibility to victims/survivors. Underlying attitudes (RMA, JWB) of perceivers and the context/circumstances of the sexual assault are also discussed in relation to their role in facilitating victim blame. Subsequently, we explain how victim shifting, particularly in journalism and media, conceptually transition the perpetrator into the victim of allegations. Simultaneously, we note that victims/survivors are reframed as irresponsible, as liars, or even as maliciously intending to ruin men’s reputations.

The concept of himpathy is a compelling one, yet little empirical work has been done to directly test the theoretical claims. Future work should explore the role of himpathy in why women do not report victimization of sexual assault. Although one out of every five women has experienced attempted rape in her life (Smith et al. 2018), it remains one of the most unreported crimes in the United States (Guidry et al. 2021). A growing number of scholars are turning to social media to investigate the reasons why women do not report sexual violence (c.f. Guidry et al. 2021; Reich, Anderson, and Maclin 2022). Within this literature, evidence of himpathetic statements exists. For example, in their analysis of tweets using the hashtag #WhyIDidntReport, Guidry and colleagues (2021) reported a tweet that recorded “Because the police told me, ‘Why don’t you wait a few more days and then decide if you want to ruin this man’s life’ ” (p. 132). Using similar methodology, Reich and colleagues (2022) in coding tweets with the same hashtag, found that some victims/survivors of sexual violence did not report because of a lack of faith in the legal system—they believed that the perpetrators would be protected rather than them. In addition, who the perpetrator was dissuaded victims/survivors from disclosing—because of power differences. The negative reactions of others also was given as the reason for not reporting, including “You know he has a wife and kids, right? You wouldn’t want to ruin his reputation” (Reich et al. 2022:488). Some victims/survivors expressed a desire to protect the perpetrators: “Didn’t want to publicly ruin someone’s life, even though they privately ruined mine” (Reich et al. 2022:489). Whiting and colleagues’ (2021) analysis of tweets found that others pressured the victim/survivor to protect the perpetrator: “The police told me [. . .] why damage a young man’s life like that?” (p. 761) and “I was begged not to ruin his life” (p. 761).

Within social psychology, there are several concepts that future scholars could also consider in conjunction with himpathy. As pointed out by Sweeny (2020), both the fundamental attribution error and the halo effect play a role within himpathy. The fundamental attribution error explains that negative characteristics or actions by strangers are explained in dispositional terms (e.g., they are a bad person) whereas familiar people’s
mistakes are perceived to be situationally influenced (e.g., they are having a bad day). Thus, a known perpetrator’s actions may be seen as caused by their social environment whereas an unknown (i.e., stranger) perpetrator may be described as a “bad,” predatory person. The halo effect is the idea that a person who is good in one domain is assumed to be good in all domains, such that a positive first impression or a strong ability in one area leads others to believe that the person is a good person in general (Nisbett and Wilson 1977). Johnny Depp certainly benefited from the halo effect since early in the trial when he emerged as the fan favorite because of his performance in other domains; thus, because Depp is a good guy, benefiting from the halo effect, he becomes a relevant example of an individual who is being wrongly defamed and therefore deserves empathy for his emergent reputational victimization.

Although we have provided a few potential directions for future study, there are certainly many other directions scholars can take. Regardless of the future direction of this work, we strongly believe that the study of empathy is critically important, given that the focus of much work is on the victims/survivors and not the perpetrators (Thapar-Björkert and Morgan 2010). Echoing a point made by Seabrook and Ward (2019), by focusing on the perpetrator, we can “re-center the conversation about sexual assault prevention around perpetrators” (p. 1483).

ENDNOTES

1. There are several ways to define rape, sexual assault, and sexual coercion. In this review, we draw upon the Uniform Crime Report, which defines rape as any penetration or oral penetration of the victim/survivor without their consent (Uniform Crime Report n.d.). Sexual assault is broadly defined as any nonconsensual sexual act under the law, including when capacity to consent is absent (U.S. Department of Justice 2023). Sexual coercion is “unwanted sexual penetration that occurs after a person is pressured in a nonphysical way” (Smith et al. 2018:1). These are among the many definitions for rape, sexual assault, and sexual coercion. Although an individual’s identification with the term or a researcher’s operationalization of these terms may vary, these terms provide a background to build upon. The varying definitions are not a focus of this review, and authors’ descriptions of rape, sexual assault, and sexual coercion will therefore be accepted as they are.

2. Before we continue, it is important for us to consider the consequences of using the label of victim versus survivor. Although the normative approach is to use the label of victim (Hockett and Saucier 2015), following the lead of Boyle and Rogers (2020), for this review, we use the label of victim/survivor. In their study of college students who experienced sexual assault, 44% of their respondents self-identified as both victim and survivor, compared to 25% identifying solely as survivor and 11% identifying solely as victim. This is also consistent with Thompson’s (2000) interviews of women who survived rape who use both victim and survivor to describe themselves and their experiences. The decision about which label to use in describing women who are raped or experience sexual assault by men is not something to be
taken lightly (see Dunn 2005; Hockett and Saucier 2015; Schwark and Bohner 2019; Williamson and Serna 2018).

3. Though outside the scope of this paper, other existing literatures are connected to himpathy, including the literature on deserving victims (e.g., Charman 2020; Charman and Williams 2022) and on missing White woman syndrome (e.g. Hawes, Slakoff, and Anguelov 2023).

4. In the Steubenville, Ohio, case, two high school football players were accused and convicted of rape. Part of the controversy of the case arose because the survivor/victim did not remember the event but videos and social media spread information about the case and contributed to the legal case (Oppel 2013).

5. For a review of the individual characteristics and attitudes that affect female victim blame, see Ferrão and Gonçalves (2015). For more general reviews of the literature on victim blaming, see Gravelin et al. (2019), Grubb and Harrower (2008), and Grubb and Turner (2012).

6. Many additional individual attitudes and characteristics influence victim and perpetrator blaming, but that is outside the scope of this paper. Gender (Ferrão and Gonçalves 2015), prior sexual victimization (Catlin et al. 2021), ambivalent sexism (Angelone, Mitchell, and Smith 2018; Angelone et al. 2021; Ferrão and Gonçalves 2015) and endorsement of traditional gender role attitudes (Angelone, Mitchell, and Grossi 2015; Sleath and Bull 2010) influence victim and/or perpetrator blaming.

7. RMA also shows a relationship to perpetrator blame. Perpetrator blame is sometimes measured alongside victim blame to determine which actor receives more blame. High RMA is fairly consistently related to victim blaming, but high RMA is sometimes associated with increased perpetrator blame (Newcombe et al. 2008) or decreased perpetrator blame (Sleath and Bull 2012; Starfelt et al. 2015). Despite this, victim blame attributions do show a more consistent relationship to RMA.

8. When Brett Kavanaugh was nominated to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, Christine Blasey-Ford spoke out publicly about being raped by Kavanaugh. In the midst of his confirmation to the Supreme Court, the publicity around this case drew national attention (Stolberg and Fandos 2018).

9. In the Cory Batey case, Cory Batey—a Black male college football player—was convicted of aggravated rape of a White victim. He received a harsh sentence compared to another highly publicized rape case at the time. Batey was one of four men who was heavily prosecuted in order to serve as an example to the campus community about the university’s stance on campus rapes (Associated Press 2016).

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