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Feminism, masculinity and male rape: bringing male rape 'out of the closet'

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Feminist research has played a pivotal role in uncovering the extent and nature of male violence against women and suggests that the main motivations for rape are the need for power, control and domination. This paper argues that, although feminist explanations of rape are robust and comprehensive, male victims of rape have largely been excluded from this field of research. While feminism has enabled the victimisation of women to be recognised, further understanding of the victimisation of men is required. Some feminist writers (such as hooks, 2000) have argued that men's emancipation is an essential part of feminism since men are equally harmed by gender role expectations and sexism. This paper makes a contribution to current knowledge through evaluating the social constructions, stigma and phenomenological realities associated with male rape (by both men and women), arguing that there has been neglect in this area that functions to support, maintain and reinforce patriarchal power relations and hegemonic masculinities.

Keywords: male rape; sexual violence; feminism; gender equality; gender expectations; masculinity

Introduction

Feminist theoretical research on sexual violence is extensive: it highlights the hidden figure of unreported rapes in official police statistics (Lees, 1997, 2002); examines police responses to rape and attempts to eliminate rape myths (Gregory & Lees, 1999). Feminist research also plays a pivotal role in uncovering the extent of male violence against women and reveals the effect rape has on female rape victims, but comparatively little research has provided for male rape victims.[1] To explore male rape, it is important to examine feminist theory because it seeks to emphasise the gendered nature of rape. Stanko (1990) argues that men rape other men for exactly the same reasons that they rape women: to exercise power and control over the victim. Feminism conceptualises rape as a violent act which, along with a consideration of hegemonic masculinity, may help us understand why male rape has been widely overlooked and discover whether social and gender expectations facilitate this neglect. How a man perceives himself as a man and in what ways masculinities are formed within a social and cultural setting are vital to understanding male rape. This is verified by Groth and Burgess (1980), Kelly (1988), Berrington and Jones (2002) and Lees (1997) who conclude that masculinity is a social concept.

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Feminism and sexual violence

For over 30 years, feminist researchers and activists have framed sexual assault and rape as a 'women's issue'. It is important to closely dissect this to evaluate the extent to which feminism is fulfilling its aim of nourishing gender equality, and how broader feminist theory could facilitate the investigation of male rape.

Services for managing victims of rape have ameliorated over the past 10 years, for example, the emergence of 'rape suites', in the UK, designed to accommodate all rape victims, including male rape victims. This challenges Mezey and King (1989) who asserted that there are limited service provisions for male rape victims. The 'rape suites' include environments, often away from police stations, in which the victims of sexual assault can be interviewed and medically examined. In addition, the police attempt to supply specially trained police officers to deal with rape cases, the majority of whom are female. This is problematic since male rape victims may wish to speak to a trained officer who is also male. There is very little research regarding whether policing practice and policy have improved or exacerbated the situation for, and experience of, male rape victims.

In the past, it has been found that the Crown Prosecution Service has not pursued a high proportion of rape allegations or that the police classified them as 'no-crimes' (Gregory & Lees, 1999). Gregory and Lees (1999) also found that the police have tended to give their greatest attention to stranger rapes (where the victim does not know the attacker). Lees' (1997) research pointed to a criminal justice system and society that viewed stranger rape as 'true' rape, rather than acquaintance rape (a rape where the victim knows the attacker).

Gregory and Lees (1999) stressed that there was an urgent need for the police to take male rape more seriously, to keep victims informed throughout the legal process and for the police to respond efficiently to rape allegations, along with further training for the officials who deal with the victims of rape. Some feminist theory argues that it is not possible to utilise legal apparatus to challenge patriarchal oppression and domination when the procedures and language of these institutions and social processes are saturated with these same patriarchal structures and beliefs (see MacKinnon, 1989, 1991). One of these patriarchal beliefs is that a man cannot be raped; consequently, those men who report rape may be viewed, either by themselves or others, as not 'real men' for failing to fight off the perpetrator of the crime (Lees, 1997).

Documented research (Lees, 1997; Stanko, 1990) confirms that men do rape other men as a way to boost, preserve and execute 'hegemonic masculinity'; that is, the male sexual offender seeks power and control over their subordinate, powerless victim. For Groth and Burgess (1980), this enhances the sexual offender's masculinity by stripping away that of their victim. Ideas of power and control stem from areas of feminism, which place rape in an extensive social structure, wherein a hierarchy of patriarchal relations exists to enable men to exercise power and control over women (MacKinnon, 1991). Male rape, then, is conceptualised as an extension of male power and control over women where male offenders regard their male victims as inferior, weak and subordinate, revealing the intrinsic issue of domination that accompanies the hegemony (Stanko, 1990). Although feminism robustly accounts for rape, it does come with some limitations in the context of this paper, which are important to examine next.

How useful is feminism to the study of male rape?

Some theories on patriarchy are criticised for being too descriptive instead of analytical and as incapable of explaining the inception of male supremacy. Feminist theory has been

criticised for not offering strategies for weakening male power structures (Bryson, 1992). Walby (1990) illustrates that the theoretical paradigm of patriarchy does not suggest that every single male person oppresses every single female person in society, but instead that patriarchal theory enables for a distinction between individual men on the one hand, and the structures of hegemony on the other. Therefore, the 'enemy' is male supremacy, which is perceived to be a social construction rather than an innate determination (Walby, 1990).

Further, much feminist theory has tended to concentrate on men as rape offenders and women as victims. Although the growth of feminism gave recognition to female rape victims, significantly less time has been expended on male victims of rape. Many examinations of rape were based on the assumption that men control and dominate women, and that sexual assault and other types of sexual violence carried out against females strengthen male primacy (Abdullah-Khan, 2008). This position overlooks that men do get raped and it has even been asserted that male rape victims may be perceived as a threat to support provision put in place for female rape victims:

> On the one hand, they [survivors organisations' spokespersons] acknowledge the contribution and work of feminist groups in putting men's violence, rape and sexual abuse on to the public agenda and the setting up of support services for women, while on the other hand, they repeatedly assert that RCC's [rape crisis centres] have been unhelpful, indeed hostile, to male survivors who have called telephone counselling lines for support. (Gillespie, 1996, p. 155)

Rape crisis centres in the UK have no systematic provision for male victims in place, even though the Ministry of Justice provides public funding so that such centres can give support to *all* victims of sexual violence. Male rape victims seeking help have been turned away from these centres within the UK (Cohen, 2014; Pitfield, 2013), leaving these men isolated and unable to obtain help (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). Donnelly and Kenyon (1996) argue that feminist-based rape crisis centres have been less ready to recognise and manage male rape victims, disbelieving that men can be raped. For example, they found that 'Many [rape crisis centres] believed that men couldn't be raped or that they were raped only because they "wanted to be"' (1996, p. 444). Consequently, they remark:

> Because they [male rape victims] are less likely to ask for assistance in dealing with their attacks, the consequences of sexual assault may be compounded and even more severe for males than for females. Thus responsive and understanding provision of services that make seeking and receiving attention less traumatic is vitally important for male victims. (Donnelly and Kenyon, 1996, p. 442)

Donnelly and Kenyon also state that, because of the fewer social, physical and cultural provisions available for men, men are reporting sexual assault at much lower rates. Similarly, Abdullah-Khan (2008) argues that this situation persists in the twenty-first century since there is still a considerable lack of services provision available to men, leaving male rape victims reluctant to report offences.

The main worry for feminist writers such as Gillespie (1996) appears to be the strain that male rape victims could place on resources for rape support services. She further argues that, while rape crisis centres can be forthcoming to the demand for survivor groups for male rape victims, resources available for the operation of women's support provision should not be reduced as a result:

> Developing services for men who need or want them should not be achieved at the expense of what is now 20 years of developing knowledge and expertise within the rape crisis movement. (Gillespie, 1996, p. 162)

Gillespie (1996) implies that there is no urgent need for rape crisis centres to include help for male rape victims since their number is small:

> Since the extensive media coverage of, albeit a small number, of male rape cases … it has become apparent that RCCs [rape crisis centres] are experiencing pressure to extend service provision to men, both from statutory services, who are also often funding bodies, and who may be on the management or executive committee of RCCs, and also from male survivors of sexual assault. While RCCs are generally supportive of the need for male rape survivor groups, they do not on the whole wish to divert hard won resources and to dissipate energies needed for running female support services in the pursuit of setting up separate services for men. Centres do not, in any case, receive many calls from genuine (male) rape survivors. (pp. 157–158)

Cohen (2014) states that feminist discourse has conceptualised particular ideas of victimisation as inherently female: rape and sexual violence are examples of these. It is therefore vital to highlight male victimisation in victimology,[2] not only to develop a greater understanding of it, but also to be alert researchers and funders to the relegation of male rape. The segregation of male rape can also create problems, although at least in this form it becomes visible. Cohen (2014) argues that much of feminist theory in the field of sexual violence has neglected male rape. Any neglect can only maintain and reinforce patriarchal power relations and 'hegemonic masculinities'.

Walklate (2004) argues that much research, both empirically and conceptually, contributes to the marginalisation of male victims. Feminist activism and the feminist academy have highlighted awareness of a range of important issues: domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual assault and rape, but the rape of the male is under-discussed and its taboo nature resounds of the shame historically attached to female rape victims (although this shame is of course still present today, it is at least tackled). Walklate (2004) states that it is vital to challenge approaches to the field of sexual violence that attempt to essentialise the differences between females and males.

Following Walklate, there is strong evidence that men can be, and are, raped by *women*. For example, in Weiss's (2010) recent study, it was found that 46% of men ($n = 94$) had been raped by women. This challenges historical and cultural stereotypes that present females as subordinate and passive, both sexually and physically, along with the idea that men are solely the offenders in sex crimes. Weiss further alerts us to the fact that men experience attempted forced sex, actual forced sex and other sex-related incidents a lot more commonly than we read/hear about. The view that men cannot be the victims of sexual violence by women is prevalent in many societies (and consequent law-making), but it does not resonate with lived social reality (Graham, 2006). According to Walklate (2004), sexual assault is not a gender-specific crime. While MacKinnon seeks to re-establish the sexual aspect of certain types of violence, she focuses solely on the extensive range of women's experiences over men's. She adds that 'Battery as violence denies its sex-specific nature … Not only in where it is done – over half the incidents are in the bedroom …' (1989, p. 92). A criticism of MacKinnon's argument is that she does not consider the possibility that women can perpetrate sexual violence and violence in general.

Abdullah-Khan (2008) and Weiss (2010) find evidence for sexual assault by women against men as well as men against men, while Walklate (2004) also alerts us to the possibility of sexual assault by lesbians and heterosexual women: '[T]his muting of women's voices and experiences as offenders within the criminal justice system is a feature they share with female professionals working within it' (p. 181).

Brownmiller's (1975, p. 292) influential text argues that male victims are not neglected or actively 'forgotten', but that female victims usurp them as the latter is *more* 'acceptable'. Neither, though, can we equate male victims with female victims and parallel the motivation for, and experience of, male rape with same as/more than/less than

statements. Cohen (2014) warns us that comparing and contrasting male rape with female rape is deleterious because it fuels the continued polarisation of debate and limits the conceptualisation of harm, rendering male rape invisible or at least on the margins. Reductionist and essentialist conceptualisations of rape affect the recording, prosecution and reporting practices in sexual violence against men (Cohen, 2014).

Authors on the subject of male rape (excluding Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Cohen, 2014) are reluctant to 'blame feminism' for the neglect of male rape. Male rape is generally conceptualised in conventional frames rather than theorised as a topic in its own right (e.g., Groth & Burgess, 1980; Hodge & Canter 1998; Stermac, Sheridan, Davidson, & Dunn, 1996), which Cohen (2014) believes results in the subject of male rape being stymied. To tackle the marginalisation of male rape, a few studies argue that feminism has detracted from the subject of male rape (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Cohen, 2014; Davies, 2002; Javaid, 2014a, 2014b). Such authors argue for feminism to re-consider its position on male rape. With this in mind, Cohen (2014) supports the view that feminism has rendered male rape 'invisible'. Mezey and King (1992/2000, p. vi) add:

> In becoming a 'women's issue' the debate about rape and sexual violence polarized women as victims and men as perpetrators … in contrast, there has been no 'men's movement' to raise awareness of the plight of victims and demand effective services.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity may be useful in explaining why there is no men's movement *per se*; male rape victims may be reluctant to expose themselves to society as victims of a crime seen solely to affect the female population. In addition, many of these victims fear a negative reaction to them as the victim of such violence.

For many, male rape is just another aspect of men's violence against women:

> Rape law sets the boundaries within which it is acceptable for men to have sex. It is about men's not women's sexuality: men act, women are acted upon; men force, women succumb; men are the subjects, women are the objects. This is the case even where both the parties involved are men; as has frequently been observed, the raped man is culturally feminised by the act of rape. (AHRC, 2006)

Such myopic ideology, currently fairly widespread, needs challenging because while it persists, male rape victims will continue to suffer in silence (as many women still do of course). Even Abdullah-Khan (2008) can be accused of keeping focus on the female victim of rape, segregating male rape. While Cohen's research (2014) lacks substantial empirical data, her work remains a vital touchstone within the debate on male rape.

Mezey and King (1992/2000) observe that the extensively dispersed statement that 'rape is a feminist issue' results in a dearth of research in male rape and service provision which overlooks male rape victims. In addition, the activity of 'fund-raising' for gendered issues is still very much an activity conducted by feminist groups; there are few male fund-raising groups by comparison. According to Graham, 'Male victims are largely neglected by a predominately feminist perspective that seeks to highlight the gendered nature of sexual assault as a social phenomenon' (2006, p. 187). Graham's study, however, adds little to contemporary understandings of how to create change and improve services for male rape victims. Nonetheless, these studies are valuable in putting male rape on the agenda since without them, the configuration of rape as something men do to dominate women leads to male rape victims being left behind. The reality is that male rape victims, and men who are victims of crime in general, remain *men* (Owen, 1995) with all that that entails. Accounts of sexual violence may then be partly attributed to the conception of ingrained social ideals and gender expectations, particularly of masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity and its relevance to male rape

While social constructions of women as sexually vulnerable and physically weak fit a stereotyped view of the victims of sexual violence, expectations of what is required of men (tough, powerful, strong, invulnerable, impenetrable and self-sufficient) challenge perceptions of victimisation in general (Lees, 1997). While 'real' men are forced to take on a masculine role and avoid behaviours linked to femininity, male rape victims may be judged to have failed as men for not fighting off their aggressor (Lees, 1997). Feminising or gendering victimisation is mostly seen through the use of derogatory labels ascribed to men who have not achieved expectations of hegemonic masculinity[3] (Connell, 2005) and men who have been the victim of a sexual attack undermine the dominant, social ideal of masculinity (sexually dominant, powerful, potent and in control) (Weiss, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity, coupled with heterosexuality, has been presented by feminist theory as the dominant norm in which society intrinsically expects 'real' men to want, initiate and pursue sex only with women (Connell, 2005). In a culture that emphasises male superiority, power and control, subordination or powerlessness are unacceptable (Lees, 1997). Instead, men are seen to commit most conventional crimes and serious crime (including sexual violence; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005); not suffer it. Men who report sexual violence appear to confirm that they have been powerless and contest codes of male (hetero)sexuality (Weiss, 2010). It is these assumptions that have been greatly neglected by criminology and victimology, and consequently these disciplines are accused of being 'gender-blind' (Walklate, 2004).

Societies' expectation that men must attain particular standards and norms of masculinity, together with a fear of being seen as homosexual or effeminate (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2009), dictates that men display the stereotypical behaviours associated with their gender as part of a procedure of impression management (Goffman, 1967). For example, by sexually 'hooking up' with a lot of women, men can confirm to others and even to themselves their heterosexuality and masculinity (Pascoe, 2005). According to Prohaska and Gailey, 'The key to hegemonic masculinity is power, whether over other men or women …' (2006, p. 15).

Both Carlson (2008) and Mullaney (2007) argue that, after a sexual assault, male victims may reaffirm their masculinity through carrying out risk-taking behaviour, physical violence and demonstrating an ability to care for themselves by not reporting the crime; all activities which aspire to re-establish or repair their 'broken' masculinity. However, men can move through multiple meanings of hegemonic masculinity according to their interactional needs, so can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable to do so, and simultaneously, strategically distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity at other times (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

An example of masculine behaviour that might be perceived to facilitate the repair of masculinity in the midst of sexual victimisation is 'getting even' or 'fighting back'. The victim might display physical violence to prevent a perceived sexual threat or attack, proving their ability to take care of themselves (Weiss, 2010). This can reveal their victimisation without labelling themselves as 'feminine', passive or weak. Evidently, this process lessens feelings of emasculation and overcompensates through conforming to expectations of men as invulnerable and strong; characteristics that are conceptualised under the umbrella of hegemonic masculinity. Violent behaviour may mirror the anger that heterosexual men have displayed towards homosexual men who are perceived to threaten their sexuality and hegemonic masculinity (Nelson & Oliver, 1998). Analogously, although women making unwanted advances towards men or coercing

them in some way may challenge masculinity, it contradictorily underpins it (Nelson & Oliver, 1998). In physically retaliating with violence to a male sexual offender, the male victim refutes that he is a homosexual (Weiss, 2010), but retaliating against a female abuser is problematic since the male victim may be perceived as failing in his heterosexuality (or as the aggressor himself).

'Taking care' of offenders and incidents themselves confirms to the male victims of sexual violence that they are competent and self-reliant; two further components of hegemonic masculinity (Lees, 1997). Maintaining their silence allows the male victim of a sexual attack to avoid the stigma and embarrassment that might be expected when reporting a sexual assault to the police (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Carlson, 2008).

This shame, within the conception of hegemonic masculinity, may be used to explain why male rape victims are even more reluctant to report female-perpetrated incidents to the police than rapes committed by other men; although the assertion here is a theoretical, instead of an empirical, one and in need of testing. Social ideals of heterosexuality and masculinity dictate that men are the penetrator, not the penetrated, and pursuers of sex, rather than pursued (Weiss, 2010). In this conception of masculinities, it is women who are pursued and penetrated, so a man who discloses to the police that he did not want sex with a woman, but was forced to do so, challenges norms of masculinity and inverts heterosexual scripts (Weiss, 2010). Men are expected to neither complain about injury/pain nor be emotional (Weiss, 2010). Embarrassment in the victim can also be attributed to constructions of male sexuality that expects men to be virile and to satisfy women, a conception reinforced through contemporary pornography (Weiss, 2010).

According to Walklate (2004), while women are permitted to express emotion, this position is not available to men and the experience is often denied to them. For the functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons (1937), gentleness and the expression of emotions are refused to men, as these are behaviours associated with femininity and men must seek masculine qualities, such as being tough and self-reliant. Men admitting that they have failed to achieve such masculine qualities may be viewed, or view themselves, as not 'real men' (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Hodge and Canter, 1998; Isely, 1991; Lees, 1997; Mezey & King, 1989).

While functionalism[4] has had some influence in criminology in order to account for the gendered nature of crime and victims, it fails to acknowledge social change and challenge unhelpful stereotypes. Parson's (1937) functionalist ideology is speculative in that it is theoretically imaginative, partial and without supporting data. Nonetheless, functionalism has been important in understanding the socialisation processes that define how men should behave. One aspect of this process is normative heterosexuality contrasted with homosexuality which threatens both heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity (Nelson & Oliver, 1998). Walklate (2004) adds that normative heterosexuality is valued in all parts of social life, and by being so valued, defines both the form and the structure of the struggle of men to achieve the power and dominance. Simultaneously, normative heterosexuality structures the lives of men who choose not to, or fail to, engage in such a struggle (Walklate, 2004). For Goffman (1967), homosexual men often feel stigmatised by their sexual identity, and that there is an additional burden on the homosexual man to deal with the ramifications of 'discrediting' himself openly. On this basis, we might expect a gay male rape victim's reluctance to report to the police, or seek help from voluntary agencies, in the event of sexual violence (perpetrated by either a woman or a man).

By writing about the power of interpersonal interactions to formulate impressions, Goffman (1959) compares interaction to a dramaturgical performance with off-stage and on-stage behaviours. He stipulates that interacting is based on many factors such as other

people's judgments of the person involved in the interaction. Male rape myths, for example that 'men cannot be raped' because of their masculinity (Abdullah-Khan, 2008), reinforce the blaming attitudes ingrained in societies whereby male rape victims are accused of inviting the rape (Hodge & Canter, 1998) and made to feel ashamed (Isely, 1991). According to Goffman '… unwarranted feelings of shame; ambivalence about oneself and one's audience … some of the dramaturgical elements of the human situation' (Goffman, 1959, p. 237) all contribute to our (mis)understanding of rape.

The work of Judith Butler (1993), regardless of the intricacy of her broader project, is useful in furthering our understanding of men as the victims of sexual assault and rape. Butler remarks that heterosexuality creates sexual differences, so that gendered subjectivities and heterosexual affiliations are comprehended with regards to *penetration*; heterosexuality is rooted in an understanding of whether bodies penetrate or are penetrated. Further, through the classification of anal penetration as 'unnatural' or 'abnormal', the credibility of male rape victims is further damaged. Butler's analysis suggests that the feminine is always the penetrated and the masculine is always the *impenetrable*. Research confirms that men suffer for failing societies' expectations that do not permit the male as victim (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Carlson, 2008; Cohen, 2014; Connell, 2005; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Hodge & Canter, 1998; Isely, 1991; Javaid, 2014a, 2014b; Lees, 1997; Mezey & King, 1989; Nelson & Oliver, 1998; Pascoe, 2005; Weiss, 2010).

Male rape victims have reported feeling frightened, dehumanised and contaminated (Lees, 1997); all words used by the female victims of rape (Lees, 2002). The difference between male rape victims and female rape victims, though, is that the former tend to more widely report feeling angry when assaulted (Lees, 1997; though it is acknowledged that within the context of gendered expectation, women are rarely permitted to express or feel anger). Male rape victims equally report feeling powerless and vulnerable at the time of the attack (Groth & Burgess, 1980). Groth and Burgess's study is based on a small sample from therapeutic practice, limiting its scope for meaningful analysis; significantly more empirical research is the next step if we are to properly support the male victims of sexual assault.

The persistence of the myth of sexual assault as affecting the female population only does not resonate with our limited understanding of the social reality for male rape victims and is embedded in heterosexism (Connell, 2005). Challenging normative (hetero) sexuality can create a space for male rape victims, whether homosexual or heterosexual and whether sexually assaulted by a man or a woman. Stanko (1990) highlights men's reluctance to acknowledge or voice their fears, leading to male rape victims neither seeking help/treatment nor prosecution. To underline this, Stanko and Hobdell (1993, p. 400) state that 'Criminology's failure to explore men's experience of violence is often attributed to men's reluctance to report "weakness". This silence is, we are led to believe, a product of men's hesitation to disclose vulnerability'. To unquestioningly and uncritically accept that men – by virtue of being male – experience no fear or trauma is to reinforce the context in which men can too easily be the victims of unreported sexual violence. Stanko and Hobdell's research (1993) included in-depth interviews with male victims of different kinds of violence, suggesting that men connect with, what Connell (2005) describes as, hegemonic masculinity. The men in the study valued adventure, power and control and felt that they lost this when subjugated through assault. Walklate (2004) states that, while both excitement and thrill operate along with fear, danger and risk, and that these are usually discussed in male terms, they render men's victimisation 'invisible' and silence them.

Conclusion

Feminism has played a key role in uncovering the extent and nature of violence against women by men and it has also created frameworks for understanding the construction of hegemonic masculinity. What is lacking currently is an acknowledgement of these as a context in which the sexual assault of men is under-discussed, under-reported and under-resourced. Abdullah-Khan (2008) argues that male rape research demonstrates the main motivation for rape to be seeking power, control and domination; concepts first recognised by feminism to explain rape against women. Rape is used as a means to exert power and control and utilised to humiliate, degrade, destroy and hurt victims (Stanko, 1990). Some feminist writers (hooks, 2000) have argued that men's emancipation is an essential part of feminism since men are also harmed by gender roles and sexism. Social ideals regarding gender may be facilitating the neglect of male rape victims. For example, whilst social constructions of femininity (sexual vulnerability and physical weakness) fit the stereotypes for the female victims of sexual violence, they are even less helpful to the male victim than they have been to the female victim. Expectations from society of what is required of men (invulnerability, impenetrability and self-sufficiency) help to perpetuate the myth that 'men cannot be raped' (Lees, 1997). In a context where 'real' men are forced to take on their masculine role and avoid behaviours associated with femininity, male rape victims are judged, and judge themselves, to be failed men for not fighting off the perpetrator of a sexual assault (Lees, 1997). As explored here, men as the victims of sexual assault undermine the dominant, social ideals of masculinity, which in turn contributes to the neglect of male rape victims as a subject for empirical study.

Through critically evaluating the social constructions, stigma and phenomenological realities associated with the sexual assault of men (by women or men), this paper argues that the neglect of this field functions to maintain and reinforce patriarchal power relations and hegemonic masculinities. The project of gender equality is undermined by our failure to properly activate feminist theory in relation to this project.

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Notes

1. This paper will solely focus on adult male rape victims rather than male children who are raped, prison rape and rapes that are also war crimes; these are very important areas for research that fall beyond the scope of this paper.
2. 'Victimology' is a branch of criminology, which essentially is the study of victims.
3. 'Hegemonic masculinities' refers to the culturally idealised patterns (practices, norms, and forms) of masculinity that perpetuate patriarchy. Essentially, the concept refers to the ideal or model of masculinity.
4. For functionalism, each aspect of society is interdependent and contributes to society's functioning and stability as a whole; in other words, society is held together by social consensus, wherein members of the society concur upon, and work collectively to achieve, stability and solidarity (see Merton, 1957).

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