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Belief in a just world theory and rape myth acceptance: A comparison between Chinese and UK citizens

Abstract: Rape myths are the widespread problematic beliefs that surround rape and other types of sexual violence, which can lead to various negative impacts on the victim-survivors and societies. Investigating rape myth acceptance (RMA) in different cultural contexts is crucial as RMA is a culturally constructed concept that can vary by different countries. Yet, most studies on RMA and its influencing factors have been conducted in Western societies, and there is scarce research addressing such issues in China. Thus, the current study aimed to investigate the relationship between RMA and the beliefs in a just world (BJW) theory among Chinese and UK citizens. Through survey data collected from 99 participants from the UK (N = 49) and China (N = 50), the study found that Chinese participants exhibit higher personal BJW than UK participants, while also demonstrating higher levels of RMA. Furthermore, the study revealed that gender plays a significant role in predicting RMA, with male participants showing greater endorsement of rape myths. These findings shed light on the complex interplay between cultural beliefs, attitudes toward justice, and perceptions of rape and sexual violence, emphasising the need for cross-cultural understanding and interventions to combat harmful stereotypes of rape and victim-blaming attitudes.

Keywords: *rape myth acceptance; belief in a just world theory; cross-cultural study; sexual violence; gender stereotypes*

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1. Rape myths:

The term ‘rape myth’ is used to describe the trite or incorrect attitudes that people hold toward victims of rape offences (Debowska et al., 2016). In general, individuals who embrace a strong belief in rape myths tend to emphasise the guiltlessness of the rapist but blame the victims for different reasons (Burt, 1980). Rape myths perpetuate false narratives about sexual violence, such as the belief that a real rape can only happen between strangers in dark alleyways and that all victims will physically resist the offender (Gölge et al., 2003; Lilley et al., 2023). Consequently, incidents involving acquaintances, where the victim does not engage in physical defence, may fail to be recognised as rape (Fray et al.,

2022; Stewart et al., 2024). In real-world contexts, however, victims and perpetrators are often acquainted, and offences frequently take place within the residence of either the victim or the offender (Parsons & Mojtahedi, 2022). Similarly, in many cases of rape, victim-survivors may experience a freeze response rather than physically resisting the perpetrator (Ostermann & Watson, 2024; Sleath & Bull, 2012; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005). Likewise, the endorsement of rape myths allows people to believe that women are raped because they have sexually invited the perpetrators (Franiuk, Seefeldt, & Vandello, 2008; Metson & Willmott, 2024). This so-called sexual invitation often involves judgements about the victims’ clothing, teasing behaviour, sexual reputation, or other behaviours deemed careless or inviting of sexual violence (Franiuk, Seefeldt, & Vandello, 2008; Smith, Herriott,



& Willmott, 2022). Such endorsements are strongly associated with reduced empathy for victims more generally (Debowska et al., 2019; Willmott & Widanaralage, 2024). Therefore, when a sexual assault deviates from the real rape stereotype, victims are more likely to face criticism and doubt, while sympathy and other advantages are often afforded to the perpetrator (for a detailed review see Willmott et al., 2021).

Importantly, false beliefs surrounding sexual violence remain widespread (Debowska, Boduszek, Willmott, 2018; Süssenbach & Bohner, 2011). Researchers have stated that, despite decades of academic and public discourse, the biases and stereotypes associated with rape and its victims persist more than 40 years after the publication of the first empirical studies on rape myths (Hudspith et al., 2023; Shechory & Idisis, 2006). Rape continues to be one of the most serious and damaging global issues (Parish, 2007), and the prevalence of rape myth acceptance (RMA) remains a pressing concern in today's society. Accordingly, examining its influence and identifying associated factors is essential.

The current study investigates RMA within cross-cultural contexts, focusing on China and the UK. Particular attention is given to how cultural distinctions between individualistic and collectivistic societies may shape people's beliefs in a just world (BJW) theory and their attitudes toward rape myths. The following sections will explore these cultural dynamics in greater depth and outline the study's aims and hypotheses.

1.2. The implications of RMA:

Belief in rape myths can have significant societal impacts. For instance, it can create uncertainty in defining rape and, more critically, influence the extent to which a rape case is recognised as illegal (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). This ambiguity poses challenges for victim-survivors, who may find it difficult to seek help or report the crime due to the extensive physical and psychological consequences they often endure (Stewart et al., 2024; Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Debowska et al., 2024; Thornton et al., 2022; Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007). Indeed, RMA has been identified as a potential contributing factor to the low reporting rates of sexual assault (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Kahn et al., 2003). Research indicates that these beliefs are pervasive across society, being held not only by the general public but also by professionals such as police and legal decision-makers (Sleath & Bull, 2012; Lilley, Willmott, & Mojtahedi, 2023), healthcare workers (Ullman & Townsend, 2007), clergies (Sheldon & Parent, 2002), and even offending populations (Debowska, Boduszek, & Willmott, 2018; Filkin, Mojtahedi, & Willmott, 2022). Specifically, such myths can influence law enforcement by shaping how investigative professionals assess the credibility of victims and determine case outcomes (Maiorano, Travers, & Valières, 2023).

Reflecting on the relationship between rape myths and victim-survivors' reporting behaviours, researchers have found alarming statistics. Among a sample of

3,001 victim-survivors of rape, 84.2% did not report the incident to the police, with 42.6% citing fear of the justice system as a primary deterrent (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Similarly, mock jurors have been shown to endorse rape myths, which directly prejudice their verdict decisions (Willmott et al., 2018; Willmott & Hudspith, 2024). Research has demonstrated that mock jurors often attribute blame to complainants based on factors such as perceived respectability, attire, physical attractiveness, relationship to the defendant, and level of intoxication. These factors, while irrelevant to the legal facts of the case, reflect the influence of rape myths and can significantly bias judgements in rape trials (Gravelin et al., 2019). Ultimately, rape myths shape societal perceptions of sexual violence and continue to obstruct justice and support for victim-survivors (Lindsay, Willmott, & Richardson, 2023; Pisano, Widanaralage, & Willmott, 2025). For a comprehensive critical review of the impact of rape myths on jury decision-making, see Leverick (2020) and Daly and colleagues (2023).

In short, rape myths contribute significantly to the ambiguity surrounding the definition of sexual violence, making it more difficult for victim-survivors to seek help or report their experiences. The widespread acceptance of these misconceptions, particularly among key professional groups, further compounds the challenges faced by victim-survivors and undermines broader efforts to combat sexual violence. These false beliefs not only trivialise the severity of sexual offences but also promote victim-blaming and justify perpetrators' behaviours, ultimately influencing legal outcomes (Richardson, Jenkins, & Willmott, 2023; Stevens, Mojtahedi, & Austin, 2024). Addressing the underlying predictors of RMA is therefore essential in reducing their harmful impact and promoting a more just can supportive response to sexual violence.

1.3. The Belief in a Just World (BJW) Theory:

When examining issues related to social justice, people's perceptions toward the social world play a critical role; for instance, whether they perceive this world to be a just place and how they apply their worldview to others (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). The Belief in a Just World (BJW) theory describes the phenomenon wherein people perceive the world as inherently safe and fair, attributing misfortune to an individual's behaviour. This belief can be summarised by the notion that "people get what they deserve and deserve what they get" (Fetchenhauer, Jacobs, & Belschak, 2005, p. 26). Theoretical accounts suggest that human behaviour is driven by a complex mix of factors that vary between individuals, with motivations for sexual offending often linked to deep-rooted pathological and childhood factors (Barnett, Boduszek, & Willmott, 2021; Escarguel et al., 2024; Willmott, Boduszek, & Robinson, 2018). However, people tend to rely on simplified beliefs about the world to explain events and assign blame (Fetchenhauer, Jacobs, & Belschak, 2005). Individuals with a strong BJW are more likely to perceive the world in rigid, black-and-white terms, categorising people (including themselves) as either inherently good or

bad. In essence, they believe that negative outcomes befall those labelled as bad due to their certain behaviours (Escarguel et al., 2024; Willmott, Boduszek, & Robinson, 2018). This belief often fosters the perception that one can control their actions and, by extension, their outcomes, providing a sense of safety and making the world feel more predictable, controllable, and secure (Escarguel et al., 2024).

There are two types of just world beliefs: personal and general BJW (Sutton & Douglas, 2005). The notion of personal BJW suggests that individuals usually feel the world is a fair place for themselves more than they feel it for others (Sutton & Douglas, 2005). General BJW, on the other hand, refers to the idea that people believe the world is a just place in general, where individuals can get what they deserve and be treated equally and, likewise, be compensated for past injustice (Wenzel, Schindler, & Reinhard, 2017). It has been stated that individuals with greater personal BJW tend to have higher social desirability, and are more likely to express themselves as amiable, knowledgeable, and successful (Alves & Correia, 2010a). A higher level of personal BJW is associated with feelings of happiness, confidence, and better mood levels; thus, strong adherence to personal BJW can be regarded as a socially and normatively desirable trait (Wenzel, Schindler, & Reinhard, 2017). Conversely, people with a strong general BJW often exhibit harsher attitudes toward disadvantaged groups. This tendency may stem from the fact that general BJW reflects a broad perception that the world is fair to others, which can lead to victim-blaming attitudes when confronted with instances of injustice. Whereas, personal BJW, which reflects the belief that one personally is treated justly, is more strongly linked to psychological well-being and tends to serve a protective function. It is often associated with a more nuanced and empathetic perspective on life events, including those involving victimisation (Lodewijckx et al., 2001; Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006).

1.4. The BJW theory and RMA:

There is evidence suggesting that BJW theory is significantly associated with RMA (Hafer, 2000). Specifically, researchers found that people with higher personal BJW are less likely to accept rape myths, whereas people with higher general BJW tend to have higher RMA (Hayes, Lorena, & Bell, 2013). Perhaps, the reason that general BJW has an impact on RMA is that rape myths incite victim-blaming, and it seems hard for people who hold a strong general BJW to believe that crime can involve an innocent victim, which is in contradiction to the concept of BJW theory that people always get what they deserve (Alves & Correia, 2010a, Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2014). Hence, when considering general BJW, the enforcement of rape myths serves to protect individuals from confronting uncomfortable truths about sexual violence, including its perpetrators and victims (Franiuk, Seefeldt, & Vandello, 2008). By denying the incident or blaming the victim, individuals can create a manageable ascription that allows them to evade acknowledgement that

such a dreadful crime could also happen to themselves or their loved ones. This perspective often leads them to view the victim's misfortunes as merited (Lambert & Raichle, 2000), making them more inclined to blame the victim.

1.5. Cultural differences in BJW theory:

It has been revealed that people's perceptions of BJW tend to vary across cultures (Wenzel, Schindler, & Reinhard, 2017). The concepts of individualism and collectivism are the most important social and cultural factors that determine individuals' psychological and physical behaviours (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006). Individualistic culture highlights rights more than duties, and individual achievement more than group well-being, whereas collectivistic culture underlines the feeling of belonging and places the group's needs above the needs of the individuals (Sigal et al., 2005). According to several studies, significant differences between general and personal BJW under the cultures of individualism and collectivism have been found (Correia, Batista, & Lima, 2009; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2006). In general, people who live in an individualist culture are more likely to endorse personal BJW rather than general BJW. Such phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the endorsement of personal BJW is conducive to the dissemination of positive self-image to others and, living in a culture that values individualism, the demonstration of one's ability and success is important (Alves & Correia, 2008). Moreover, individuals who endorse a strong personal BJW are better able to differentiate between their own experiences and those of others, fostering a greater sense of personal control. This heightened sense of control can enhance their ability to adapt to challenging or unpredictable environments (Alves & Correia, 2010b). A good representation of individualist culture is in Western countries, such as the United States, where people's self-concepts are independent, and it emphasises the uniqueness of each individual which normally rates the position of others and collectivism as secondary (Alves & Correia, 2010b). Therefore, people from the US tend to believe that they will be treated more fairly than others, which is conducive to maintaining individual mental health, making each individual more supportive towards the principle of justice, and making them willingly invest time and energy for long-term life goals (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006). That is, the more an individual supports the idea of personal BJW, the more likely they are to believe that the social system serves not only the whole society but also the people who live in the society (Alves & Correia, 2010b). Hence, holding a higher level of personal BJW can be beneficial for maintaining social order (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006).

On the other hand, the findings mentioned above may not fully apply to individuals living in collectivist cultures. Research suggests that people in collectivist societies often face more constrained avenues for personal advancement due to a stronger emphasis on group harmony, hierarchical social structures, and shared responsibilities (Bond et al., 2004). As a result, opportunities for individual recognition and success may be more limited, which can heighten

competitive motivations within the group as individuals strive to stand out or secure scarce resources. In such contexts, the belief that good deeds will ultimately be rewarded, whether by society, fate, or moral order, may serve as a coping mechanism or motivational framework (Bond et al., 2004).

China, a collectivistic society, fosters self-concepts that differ significantly from those in individualistic cultures (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006). Chinese people emphasize interdependent selves, which prioritise the harmonious coexistence of the individual and others (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006). In response to challenges such as war, social transitions, revolution, and wealth polarization (Ren, 2000), Chinese culture has cultivated strong resilience, a characteristic rooted in the ancient philosophy of Taoism (Alves & Correia, 2010b). Taoism highlights that suffering is followed by blessings, and individuals should align with the natural order rather than attempt to change it (Wu et al., 2011). These philosophical tenets have deeply influenced Chinese culture, explaining why resilience is a central trait of Chinese society (Shek, 2004). Building on this, the concept of general BJW appears to play a vital role in supporting resilience among individuals in collectivistic cultures. In the context of Chinese society, general BJW helps people better cope with harsh realities and ongoing stress by offering a sense of order and moral balance (Bond et al., 2004). It also serves a palliative function, allowing individuals to alleviate frustration and emotional strain resulting from social or economic disadvantages. Notably, research has found that Chinese people tend to endorse general BJW more strongly than personal BJW (Sigal et al., 2005). This pattern may reflect cultural values that discourage self-focused narratives in favour of collective identity and humility. In China, individuals are often encouraged to refrain from making overtly positive claims about themselves, instead demonstrating worth through long-term perseverance and resilience (Wu & Li, 2014). As a result, this cultural orientation may contribute to a lower endorsement of personal BJW, while simultaneously reinforcing a broader belief in justice within the societal system.

1.6. RMA in Asian and Western countries:

Several studies that examined RMA between Asian and Western countries have consistently revealed that, compared to participants from Western countries, Asian participants were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward victims of sexual violence and greater RMA (Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2014; Booth, et al., 2023; Waite & Mooney, 2024; Lee et al., 2005). The consistency of such findings highlights the importance of ethnic variations when determining attitudes toward sexual violence and RMA. Indeed, it has been indicated that RMA is a culturally constructed norm that tends to vary from different countries, which highlights the importance of historical, political, and cultural factors in determining rape myths (Pedersen & Strömwall, 2013). When comparing rape myths between Asian and Western countries, differences in legal, social, and cultural perspectives on

sex and sexual violence are evident (Xue et al., 2016). For example, Confucianism is one of the most profound and long-lasting cultures in China, which can be seen as a dominant philosophical perspective that can greatly impact people's values and attitudes toward sexuality (Yu, 2021). To illustrate, Confucianism emphasises the importance of maintaining social and interpersonal harmony, which emphasises that a well-behaved and noble individual should not discuss sex-related topics in public (Yu, 2021). As a result, this has contributed to a limited understanding of sex and sexual violence within Chinese society, making these topics taboo throughout Chinese history. Sexual violence has often been viewed as a private, sexual matter to be kept between those involved rather than as a violent crime (Yu, 2021). Such cultural norms have also contributed to the reinforcement of rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs in the present Chinese society, which in turn, have led to increased RMA levels among Chinese individuals (Li & Zheng, 2022).

On the other hand, Western societies, such as the United Kingdom (UK), are not influenced by Confucianism. More importantly, variations in gender equality, patriarchal structures, and ideology between the UK and China result in differences in individuals' RMA (Fakunmoju, et al., 2021). Yet, a lack of extensive academic research has hindered the development of nuanced understandings of rape myths in both countries. Likewise, there is scant research which explicitly investigates the link between general/personal BJW and RMA using participants from China and the UK. Thus, it is crucial to conduct comparative research that explores these relationships.

1.7. Gender and RMA:

Gender, as well as culture, has been seen as a crucial predictor of rape myths, where studies have found that males are more likely to embrace beliefs that are supportive of violence against women and hold narrower perceptions of what constitutes violent behaviour (Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Flood & Pease, 2009). Since sexual assault is a highly gendered crime, and most rape myths disproportionately target the behaviours of female victims, society often constructs rape victimisation as a women's issue (Stewart et al., 2024; Edwards, et al., 2011). Such construction can be attributed to the patriarchal opinion that women are always weaker than men, which can incline women to be victimised, specifically in sexual offences (Edwards et al., 2011; Ryan, 2011). In fact, according to social identity theory, people are more likely to favour or identify with their own group, thus victim-blaming behaviour tends to be diminished when individuals can identify with the victim (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2024). Hence, when considering sexual violence with men as the perpetrators and women as the victims, it is intuitive that females are less likely to engage in victim-blaming behaviours than males (Willmott & Widanaralage, 2024; Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Indeed, it has been demonstrated consistently that men support rape myths to a greater extent than their female counterparts; with

findings from different countries, including America (Nabors & Jasinski, 2009), South Korea (Lee, Kim, & Lim, 2010), China (Jiang, et al., 2006; Shen, Chiu, & Gao, 2012), and the UK (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Ioannides & Willmott, 2023; Willmott et al., 2024). Nevertheless, different findings have also been shown in other studies, with males being less likely to endorse rape myths than females (Jayalakshimi et al., 2016; Koenig et al., 2003). For example, a study conducted in Uganda has shown that 90% of female participants tend to justify sexual violence against women (Koenig et al., 2003). While these findings are evident in each country, the empirical research still struggles to establish cross-cultural validity regarding gender differences in the endorsement of rape myths across nations.

1.8. Aim of the current study:

Based on the research outlined above, it is evident that individuals with stronger general BJW are more likely to endorse rape myths, whereas those with higher personal BJW tend to reject them. Additionally, cultural differences between the UK and China play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward both BJW theory and RMA. What the research has not yet investigated, is the relationship between personal/general BJW and RMA comparatively within participants from China and the UK. Therefore, the current study serves as an exploratory investigation with the following aims: 1) to examine individuals' personal and general BJW in China compared to the UK, and 2) to explore the relationship between RMA and BJW scores based on nationality and gender. In addition, the study predicts that:

1. Chinese participants would have a higher general BJW, whereas participants from the UK would have a higher personal BJW.
2. RMA would be associated with several factors:
 - a) There will be a significant relationship between general BJW and RMA, with higher general BJW scores associated with higher RMA.
 - b) There will be a significant relationship between personal BJW and RMA, with higher personal BJW scores indicating lower RMA.
 - c) Participants from China would show higher RMA than those from the UK.
 - d) Male participants would demonstrate higher levels of RMA than female participants.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

2.1 Design:

A cross-sectional online survey was used to examine the difference between the UK and Chinese participants' attitudes on personal/general BJW, as well as the impact of nationality, BJW, and gender on participants' RMA scores.

2.2 Participants:

The study aimed to recruit participants aged 18-60 with either Chinese or British nationality. Participants were sampled from different social media platforms in the

UK and China, as well as the Moodle system of the University College London (UCL). Initially, 106 responses were received from the online survey. However, four participants declined to take part after reading the information sheet, two participants failed to meet the age eligibility criteria, and one participant did not specify their gender, which was a key factor in this study. Thus, a total of 99 responses were retained for the final analysis, with a mean age of 27.52 years ($SD = 10.39$). The average age of UK participants was 25.67 ($SD = 8.09$), while the mean age of Chinese participants was 29.32 ($SD = 12.04$). Participants' detailed demographic information is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Variables	Female	Male	Total	Female (%)	Male (%)
British					
Total	33	16	49	67%	33%
Chinese					
Total	38	13	51	75%	25%
Grand Total	71	29	100	71%	29%

2.3 Materials:

Three questionnaires were used in the survey to examine participants' RMA, general BJW, and personal BJW respectively. All three questionnaires have been psychometrically validated in previous studies (Linhares et al., 2022; McMahan & Farmer, 2011), making them suitable for use in this study without requiring further validation. The validation of these scales in prior research adhered to confirmatory factor analysis techniques, as recommended for the application of multidimensional scales (Sherretts & Willmott, 2016; Woodfield, Boduszek, & Willmott, 2019).

The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA) scale:

The current study mainly focuses on male-on-female sexual violence. Thus, the IRMA scale was chosen to measure participants' RMA. This scale consists of 22 rape myth items and has been divided into four subscales: "She asked for it", "He didn't mean to", "It wasn't really rape", "She lied". Sample of scale items include: "If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control", "If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone without meaning to", "Women who are caught cheating sometimes claim rape". The scale ranges from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree" with each response associated with scores 1-5. Scores are totalled for a cumulative score and higher scores indicate greater rejection of rape myths.

General Belief in a Just World (GBJW) scale:

The GBJW scale consists of six items with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale includes items such as: "I believe that, by and

large, people get what they deserve”, “I think the world is generally a just place”. Higher cumulative scores on this scale reflect stronger general BJW, that the world is generally just and fair.

Personal Belief in a Just World (PBJW) scale:

This measure is a seven-item scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sample items from the scale include: “I believe that I usually get what I deserve”, “I am usually treated fairly”. Higher scores on this measure are associated with greater personal BJW that the world is just and fair for that person.

2.4 Procedure:

This study was approved by UCL’s Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Data collection took place from June 2020 to the end of July 2020. The survey was administered using UCL Opinio system and was made available on UCL Moodle system, as well as different UK and Chinese social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and WeChat. To ensure accessibility for all participants, the survey was translated from English to Chinese and then back-translated, allowing participants to respond in their native language. The initial translation was done by the researcher, after which a native Chinese speaker reviewed it for accuracy and readability. Participants were able to select their preferred language at the start of the survey by clicking the ‘Language’ option.

At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to read and accept the information sheet and consent form, where detailed research information was stated, including the study purpose, ethics, data protection policy, risk for participants, right to withdraw, and researchers’ contact details. Participants were able to decide on their willingness to continue the study after reading the above information. Demographic details, including gender, age, nationality, and current relationship status were asked before the main questionnaire.

In the main questionnaire, participants were first presented with the IRMA scale, followed by the general BJW scale, and the personal BJW scale. Answers for each item were compulsory; however, participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants were presented with the debrief sheet, where comprehensive study information was provided, along with information about relevant mental health resources should they experience any discomfort resulting from their participation.

3. RESULTS:

3.1. UK and Chinese participants’ general and personal BJW scores

Initially, two independent sample t-tests were carried out to measure the difference between the UK and Chinese participants’ opinions toward general and personal BJW (see Tables 2 and 3). Normality tests were conducted first

to ensure the assumptions were met for a t-test. An alpha level of .05 was used for all the following analyses.

There was no statistically significant difference between participants from the UK and China on their general BJW scores, $t(97) = -1.22, p = .23, d = -0.25$. This implies that participants’ general BJW scores do not differ between nationalities with a small effect size. However, a significant difference was found in personal BJW scores, $t(92) = 2.63, p = .01, d = 0.55$, suggesting a moderate effect, with participants from China showing significantly higher personal BJW than their UK counterparts.

Table 2. T-test results for nationality and personal BJW scores.

Nationality	N	M	SD	df	p
China	50	3.70	.85	92	.01
UK	49	3.18	1.06	92	.01

Table 3. T-test results for nationality and general BJW scores.

Nationality	N	M	SD	df	p
China	50	3.80	.71	97	.23
UK	49	3.98	.90	97	.23

3.2 Examining predictive factors of higher RMA:

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine whether general BJW, personal BJW, nationality, and gender predicted RMA scores. The assumptions of linearity, normality, and absence of outliers were met. The overall model was significant, $F(4,94) = 13.77, p < .00$, with an adjusted R^2 of .34, indicating that approximately 34% of the variance in RMA scores was explained by the four factors.

Personal BJW ($B = -.63, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.14 \text{ to } -.12], p = .02$), nationality ($B = 11.54, 95\% \text{ CI} [5.96 \text{ to } 17.11], p < .001$), and gender ($B = 11.19, 95\% \text{ CI} [5.58 \text{ to } 16.81], p < .001$) were all significant predictors of RMA. In contrast, general BJW was not significantly associated with RMA ($B = .26, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.45 \text{ to } .97], p = .48$). Hence, the results suggest that participants with higher personal BJW scores were significantly more likely to reject rape myths. Additionally, UK participants (coded as 1) and female participants (coded as 1) showed significantly higher RMA scores, indicating a stronger rejection of rape myths compared to Chinese and male participants, respectively.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis of RMA predicted by total RMA scores, nationality, and gender.

	B	β	t	
Personal BJW	$F(4, 94) = 13.80, p = .02$	-4.42	1.8	-2.45
General BJW	$F(4, 94) = 13.80, p = .48$	1.56	.08	.73
Nationality	$F(4, 94) = 13.80, p = .00$	11.54	.38	4.11
Gender	$F(4, 94) = 13.80, p = .00$	11.19	.33	3.96

DISCUSSION:

4.1 The relationship between nationality and personal/general BJW:

The current study found a significant relationship between nationality and personal BJW ($t(92) = 2.63, p = .01$), and no significant relationship between nationality and general BJW ($t(97) = -1.22, p = .23$). These findings suggest that Chinese participants showed stronger personal BJW than UK participants, resulting in the rejection of study hypothesis 1. This finding is also different from previous research suggesting that Chinese people tend to hold stronger general BJW than people from Western countries due to the cultural differences between individualism and collectivism (Wu et al., 2011). Such findings may be explained by exploring under what circumstances collectivistic and individualistic cultures can influence people's endorsement towards personal/general BJW. It has been documented that people's beliefs toward BJW can be influenced by natural disasters (Xie, Liu, & Gan, 2011). Their endorsement towards general/personal BJW theory may not remain stable when there are unexpected life events. In consideration of this, it is necessary to mention that the current study took place in June 2020, the year when the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread to the whole world. At this time, many people were experiencing unexpected and negative impacts from the pandemic, such as anxiety, fear, stress, and even unemployment (Torales et al., 2020). Things that happened during the pandemic can be unfair for some individuals and unexpected for the majority. When experiencing enduring life events, it is possible that people's attitudes toward BJW can be changed (Cubela-Adoric & Kvarnuc, 2007; Otto & Dalbert, 2005). Given this information, it is reasonable to surmise that, under the influence of COVID-19, participants in the current study may feel that the world is not generally fair to everyone, and this perception may have influenced the study's results. This conjecture is supported by the fact that exposure to extremely unfair life events can undermine individuals' general BJW, as their coping resources may suddenly become insufficient to sustain such beliefs (Bobocel & Hafer, 2007). Although it is beyond the scope of the current study, it would be crucial to further investigate how the pandemic may alter people's attitudes toward personal and general BJW, and how these changes might affect their post-pandemic adaptation.

4.2 RMA predicted by nationality, personal BJW, and gender:

According to the study results, the following hypotheses have been accepted: a) personal BJW is significantly associated with RMA, with higher personal BJW scores indicating lower RMA; b) Chinese participants tend to hold stronger RMA than UK participants; and c) male participants are more likely to show higher levels of RMA than females. Yet, the findings indicate rejection towards the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between general BJW and RMA. Detailed discussions of such findings are outlined below.

The study results indicated that participants with higher personal BJW scores tend to show stronger rejection of RMA ($p = .02$). This result is logical given that previous research has found people with stronger personal BJW were less likely to endorse rape myths (Hafer, 2000). In addition, it has been noted that personal BJW can better reinforce feelings of justice (Hafer, 2000; Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2014). A strong adherence to personal BJW can help individuals better adapt to the justification of their life events (Dalbert & Filke, 2007). For example, individuals with high adherence towards personal BJW often consider their overall legal records assigned by their correction offices as just and are less likely to experience personal anger (Dalbert & Filke, 2007). Perhaps, having a strong belief in personal BJW allows individuals to be less prejudiced when viewing events such as victimisation (Lodewijkx et al., 2001). Compared to general BJW, which encourages people's victim-blaming behaviours to justify their or other's victimisation, personal BJW tends to reduce victim-blaming behaviours by attributing victimisation to external factors (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). Ergo, when considering rape myths, individuals with higher personal BJW are less likely to show supportive attitudes.

It is expected in the study that general BJW would indicate higher endorsement of rape myths; however, the study found no significant relationship between general BJW and RMA ($p = .48$). This finding is in contrast to previous studies which found a significant relationship (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Fetchenhauer, Jacobs, & Belschak, 2005; Lodewijkx et al., 2001). To explain this finding, it has been argued that the BJW theory is a primitive belief that loses some of its importance during adulthood (Oppenheimer, 2006). This is especially true for endorsement towards general BJW, which has been found to be weakened earlier than the personal BJW. Instead, individuals tend to replace their adherence to general BJW with more sophisticated reasoning that allows them to believe that the world is functioning neither orderly nor justly (Oppenheimer, 2006). Although this conclusion remains debatable (Wu & Li, 2014), it is possible that some participants in the current study may have shown diminished endorsement of general BJW, particularly given the inclusion of community samples spanning different age groups. However, this interpretation should be approached with caution, as the sample was predominantly composed of younger individuals, with a mean age of 29.32. Future research is needed to explore this possibility further by systematically examining BJW scores across different age cohorts to assess the influence of age on just world beliefs.

In addition, the study revealed a significant relationship between gender and RMA, showing that male participants demonstrating higher levels of RMA than females ($p < .001$), with a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .65$). This indicated that gender differences in RMA were not only statistically detectable but also practically meaningful. This finding also aligns with previous research highlighting gender as a consistent and

significant predictor of RMA (Nabors & Jasinski, 2009; Lee, Kim, & Lim, 2010; Jiang et al., 2006; Shen, Chiu, & Gao, 2012; Grubb & Turner, 2012). Perhaps, the influence of gender on RMA stems from the persistent normalisation of sexual violence in society, driven by sexist attitudes towards gender roles (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). Regarding gender roles and sexual experience, a pervasive double standard exists, wherein females are expected to be sexually passive while males are anticipated to be sexually aggressive (Shi & Zheng, 2020). This standard implies that women are theoretically discouraged from saying 'no' to sexual advances, and when they do, their refusals are often not taken seriously. Such a standard is widely held by males; it is also one of the leading barriers in preventing rape and rape myths (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). In addition, when examining sexual violence with women being the victims, female observers may be more likely to empathise with the victims according to social identity theory, which could reduce their likelihood to engage in victim-blaming and lower RMA. It is worth noting that the social identity theory may be particularly relevant in collectivist societies such as China, as social identity processes align more closely with collectivism than individualism (Li & Zheng, 2022). In-group favouritism is also more strongly associated with collectivist cultures. However, it is important to interpret this result with caution, as the current sample included a relatively small number of male participants. This imbalance may limit the generalisability of the findings and underscores the need for future research with more balanced gender representation to confirm and extend these results. Similarly, future studies are encouraged to examine the influence of individualistic versus collectivistic cultures and gender on individuals' RMA and attitudes toward sexual violence.

Consistent with previous literature, the current study found that participants from China were more likely to endorse rape myths than those from the UK ($p = .00$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.8$), further emphasising the substantial influence of cultural context on attitudes toward rape myths. It also supports earlier research suggesting that individuals from Asian cultural backgrounds, including China, tend to report higher levels of RMA compared to their Western counterparts (Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2014; Lee et al., 2005; Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002). This finding is reasonable given the impact of traditional Chinese culture that emphasises the safety and importance of female virginity and chastity (Li & Zheng, 2022). As mentioned above, the concept of rape has been traditionally constructed as a sexual matter between the involved ones rather than a crime of violence (Luo, 2000). When considering the rape of women by men, people who endorse traditional Chinese culture tend to believe that it is the woman's responsibility to use all means to resist the perpetrator, especially physical resistance, which itself a rape myth (Xue et al., 2016). That is, a woman's virginity will be doubted if she failed to use physical resistance during the rape, which would also make her be considered morally imperfect. Hence, in Chinese traditional culture,

rape has been socially assembled as a taboo where victim-blaming is more likely to occur (Zimbardo, 2007). By contrast, awareness and understanding of sexual violence are more common among Western people (Zimbardo, 2007). Similarly, the individualist culture in Western countries tends to show less tolerant attitudes toward sexual assault and ascribes less responsibility to the victim; instead, it tends to ascribe more blame to the perpetrator, which is opposite to the collectivist culture that encourages people to focus more on prioritising the necessities of the social system rather than personal rights (Sigal et al., 2005). As a consequence, it is not surprising that individuals from China are more likely to hold rape myths than individuals from the UK.

4.3 Implications:

The current study is one of the few to conduct a cross-cultural examination between China and the UK, exploring how general and personal BJW, nationality, and gender influence individuals' acceptance of rape myths. By incorporating both Western and Eastern cultural contexts, the study highlights the culturally nuanced ways in which justice beliefs and gender dynamics shape attitudes toward sexual violence. Furthermore, the findings reinforced the well-established relationship between gender and RMA, revealing that male participants were significantly more likely to endorse rape myths than their female counterparts. In addition, the study highlighted notable cultural differences, with Chinese participants showing higher levels of RMA compared to participants from the UK. These findings provide valuable insights for the development of targeted rape myth training programs. The demonstrated relationship between gender and RMA, with males being more likely to endorse rape myths, suggests that training should include gender-specific approaches. For example, designing training for legal professionals that focuses on addressing unconscious biases that male workers may hold. Knowing that bias can have a negative impact on the justice process generally (Smith & Skinner, 2017; Curlet & Neuhaus, 2024; Munro et al., 2024; Willmott & Sherretts, 2016), and specifically within police officers, prosecutors, and jurors during verdict reaching process within sexual offence cases (Smith & Skinner, 2017), the need for greater myth debunking training is warranted. Whilst some studies suggest limited efficacy in training forensic professionals about avoiding biased thinking (Cui, Li, & Gao, 2001), in the context of rape myth debunking education, Hudspith and colleagues (Hudspith et al., 2023) have found much more promising results (see Willmott & Hudspith's paper for a comprehensive review) (Willmott & Hudspith, 2024).

Additionally, the cultural differences identified in this study, with Chinese individuals showing a stronger tendency to endorse rape myths, highlight the importance of culturally sensitive education and training. These findings suggest an increased need for sexual violence-related educational programs in China. Cultural norms around discussing sex-related topics, often considered uncomfortable, may contribute to limited knowledge about sexual

violence and the persistence of misconceptions about sexuality (Cui, Li, & Gao, 2001; Tu et al., 2004; Zhang, Li, & Shah, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to provide accurate and comprehensive education on sex and sexual violence to foster healthier attitudes and greater awareness.

4.4 Limitations:

The present study has several limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the study failed to explicitly measure the impact of Asian and Western cultures on individuals' adherence to rape myths. Although the study recruited participants from the UK and China, there is a chance that some participants were born and raised in different countries, which may cause them to have different cultural backgrounds. Thus, participants' attitudes toward individualism/collectivism and traditional Chinese cultures were not measured directly. Future research is needed to fill this gap by conducting a qualitative study on the impact of specific cultural norms and concepts on individuals' RMA. Furthermore, categorising cultures solely as individualistic or collectivist may not be sufficient and evident enough when comparing individuals' RMA cross-culturally. To gain a deeper understanding, future research could benefit from exploring and comparing more nuanced cultural distinctions that go beyond the basic individualism-collectivism dichotomy. This approach would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of how specific cultural factors impact attitudes toward sexual violence.

In addition, the study was conducted during a period of high Covid-19 prevalence. This may significantly influence the study results, especially when measuring the relationship between people's general/personal BJW and attitudes toward rape myths. Hence, future study is encouraged to replicate the study when there are no influential historical events. Moreover, due to the small sample size, the study's findings may not be representative enough while the mixed social backgrounds and age groups of the study participants indicated a level of sample diversity. Future study is warranted with a larger and more representative sample size. The current research also included sensitive questions, and participants may feel reluctant to openly admit their opinions. This is especially relevant for participants from China, where the influence of Confucianism may contribute to discomfort when discussing topics related to sex. As a result, social desirability and the influence of traditional Chinese culture may have been key factors impacting the study's findings.

Finally, it is also crucial to mention that while this study has focused on rape myths related to female victims, the fact that rape is also perpetrated against men should not be underplayed. Indeed, male victim-survivors are often restricted from seeking help and disclosing their experiences due to the prevalence of male-specific rape myths (Widanaralalage et al., 2022). Thus, it is possible that men, as potential victims of sexual violence, may also empathise with victims in the way female victims are posited to empathise with victims above, and may similarly be less likely to endorse rape myths for that reason. The interplay of sexual violence, RMA, and gender is complex, and future

studies should take into account both genders when examining the impact of rape myths on victim-survivors, to develop a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in shaping individuals' attitudes toward sexual violence.

5. CONCLUSIONS:

Overall, this study explored how general and personal BJW, nationality, and gender influence RMA across the UK and China. Findings revealed that Chinese participants scored significantly higher on personal BJW than UK participants, though nationality did not impact general BJW. Higher personal BJW was associated with greater rejection of rape myths, while general BJW showed no significant link to RMA. Additionally, UK participants generally endorsed fewer rape myths than Chinese participants, and males demonstrated higher RMA than females. These insights contribute to our understanding of rape myth predictors, underscoring the need for intervention and training programs for both the legal sector and the public. Future research with larger and more diverse samples could further clarify the role of cultural values in shaping RMA, paving the way for culturally informed prevention and awareness strategies.

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