



VNU Journal of Foreign Studies

Journal homepage: <https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/>



RAPE CULTURE AND RAPE MYTHS ON FACEBOOK FANPAGE OF BILLBOARD: THE CASE OF KESHA AND DR. LUKE

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Received 15 July 2024

Revised 11 August 2024; Accepted 26 August 2024

Abstract: This study explores the dynamics of rape culture and myths surrounding sexual assault through discussions on Billboard's Facebook fanpage, focusing on the case involving Kesha and Dr. Luke. Analysis of 1000 comments across four posts revealed that over half of the comments expressed support and empathy towards Kesha, while approximately a third blamed her. Supportive comments debunked rape myths, shared personal narratives, highlighted the complexities of sexual assault, and criticized Dr. Luke. These comments advocate victims and challenge harmful attitudes, suggesting the need to broaden societal and legal definitions of rape, foster constructive dialogues, and identify and challenge systemic issues that prevent victims from speaking out. In contrast, victim-blaming comments perpetuate rape myths by accusing Kesha of false accusations and non-conformity to gender norms. This study indicates that Facebook can emerge as a platform where individuals actively combat victim blaming and slut shaming, denounce hegemonic masculinity, and advocate for victims, illustrating its potential to foster constructive dialogues and challenge entrenched beliefs about sexual assault.

Keywords: rape culture, rape myths, victim blaming, gender norms, social media

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BÌNH THƯỜNG HÓA HIẾP DÂM VÀ NHỮNG HIỂU NHẦM KHÁC VỀ HIẾP DÂM ĐƯỢC THẢO LUẬN TRÊN FANPAGE FACEBOOK CỦA BILLBOARD: TRƯỜNG HỢP CỦA KESHA VÀ DR. LUKE

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Nhận bài ngày 15 tháng 07 năm 2024

Chỉnh sửa ngày 11 tháng 08 năm 2024; Chấp nhận đăng ngày 26 tháng 08 năm 2024

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu xem xét việc bình thường hóa hiếp dâm và những quan niệm sai lầm về quấy rối tình dục thông qua các cuộc thảo luận trên trang Facebook của Billboard, tập trung vào vụ việc liên quan đến Kesha và Dr. Luke. Phân tích 1000 bình luận dưới bốn bài đăng cho thấy hơn một nửa số bình luận bày tỏ sự ủng hộ và đồng cảm với Kesha, trong khi khoảng một phần ba đổ lỗi cho cô. Các bình luận ủng hộ chỉ ra những quan niệm sai lầm về hiếp dâm và quấy rối tình dục, chia sẻ câu chuyện cá nhân, nhấn mạnh sự phức tạp của vấn đề tấn công tình dục và chỉ trích Dr. Luke. Những bình luận này ủng hộ các nạn nhân và phản đối những thái độ gây hại, nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết phải mở rộng định nghĩa xã hội và pháp lý về hiếp dâm, thúc đẩy đối thoại mang tính xây dựng và giải quyết các vấn đề hệ thống ngăn cản nạn nhân lên tiếng. Ngược lại, những bình luận đổ lỗi biện minh cho các hiểu lầm về cường hiếp bằng cách buộc tội Kesha không tuân thủ các chuẩn mực giới tính. Nghiên cứu này chỉ ra rằng, Facebook là một nền tảng có thể được sử dụng để chống lại việc đổ lỗi cho nạn nhân, lên án nam tính bá quyền và thúc đẩy các cuộc đối thoại mang tính xây dựng để thay đổi các quan niệm cố hữu liên quan đến tấn công tình dục.

Từ khóa: hiểu lầm về tấn công tình dục, đổ lỗi cho nạn nhân, chuẩn mực giới, mạng xã hội

1. Background of the Study

Online social media platforms have democratised information exchange by allowing citizen journalists' instant reaction to news and sharing of feelings and viewpoints. In this post-truth era, where people are more influenced by emotion rather than facts (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.), and where public perception is consequential, studies on how people discuss controversial issues online helps us understand current cultural dynamics.

Billboard, a global music media brand, plays a significant role in shaping these discussions. Launched in 1995 by Prometheus Global Media, Billboard presents music charts, music breaking news, videos, interviews and scoops of artists and their lives. Billboard has featured the international music market targeting chiefs and tastemakers in the industry through Billboard Magazine, Billboard Conferences, and Billboard Bulletin together with music fans through Billboard.com and Billboard Events (About Billboard Magazine, n.d.). The Billboard fan page on Facebook was created on May 9, 2009 and by July, 2024 reaching 14 million followers.

The case of the pop star Kesha and her producer Dr. Luke exemplifies how the public discourse on a social issue unfolds through social media. They reached a settlement in June 2023, when both sides dropped charges against each other (Coscarelli, 2023), resolving long-standing legal disputes involving allegations of rape and defamation. The case, which began in

2014 when Kesha accused Dr. Luke of sexual, physical, verbal, and emotional abuse (Gardner, 2014) spanning nearly a decade, garnered significant public attention and legal manoeuvring. Initially, Kesha filed a lawsuit against Dr. Luke alleging he forced her to consume substances and raped her (Lynch, 2014), followed by Dr. Luke's countersuit claiming contractual disputes. Despite Kesha's amended lawsuit adding allegations against Sony Music Entertainment for allegedly concealing Dr. Luke's assaults on her and other female artists, her claims of sexual assault were dismissed in 2016 by New York Judge Shirley Kornreich (Vincent, 2018), which led to ongoing public discourse and debate. The settlement in 2023 marked a significant development of the case, indicating its enduring impact on discussions surrounding sexual assault and the music industry.

This case can represent a broader societal issue: the normalization of sexual assault or sexual abuse cases and the blaming of their victims due to gender inequality and patriarchal values, which conditions the acceptance of “rape myths” (Paulson, 2018). Social networking sites now have allowed individuals to openly discuss these issues. Despite being exposed to multiple streams of information and educated about human rights and equality, people still accept and spread rape myths or exchange negative language about sexual assault as jokes. Studies have found the representation of rape culture and rape myth on mass media including news coverage (O’Hara, 2012), television (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011), online websites and social networks like Twitter (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). However, less is known about how viewpoints towards rape cases are expressed or how rape myths and rape culture are portrayed on Facebook even though this social networking site has reached the largest number of users.

To understand the issue better, the research aims at exploring the portrayals of rape myths and rape culture on Facebook discussions about sexual assault involving the case of Kesha and Dr. Luke on Billboard fanpage on Facebook from October 2014 to February 2016.

The study aims to answer two questions:

1. How do Facebook users respond to and discuss sexual assault in the case of Kesha and Dr. Luke under posts on Billboard fanpage?
2. How are rape myths and rape culture reflected in Facebook users’ responses towards sexual assault and its victims?

The study aims to understand public reactions on social media to the sexual assault lawsuit involving Kesha and Dr. Luke. It will examine perceptions of sexual assault and survivors, the influence of rape myths and rape culture, and the complexity of sexual assault in the context of these online discussions. The study does not aim to explore the “truth” about what had happened, but focuses on public perceptions due to their potential consequences.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is illegal physical contact of a sexual nature that compels upon a person without their consent (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). It usually inflicts upon the ones who lack capacity to consent or who put the penetrator in a trust or authority position. Sexual assault is believed to be a life-changing event that survivors have to suffer trauma such as “depression, low self-esteem, flashbacks, fear, and difficulty with intimacy” (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape [PCAR], n.d.). During sexual exploitation, the survivors tend not to show their feelings since expressing them may increase their risk of getting hurt. In some cases, saying “no” seems useless to protect the victims from being sexually attacked. Therefore, silence

becomes the only choice that sexual assault victims can make (PCAR, n.d.).

Studies have found that the rate of rape victims reporting their case varies in different contexts, from 1% reporting forced first sexual intercourse in Japan, to nearly 30% in rural Bangladesh; or women reporting sexual violence by their own partners ranging from 6.2% in Japan to 59% in Ethiopia, while in other contexts ranging from 10% to 50%, and sexual assault by non-partners is less likely to be reported as one by intimate partners (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). These variations in report might result from the differing number of cases of sexual assaults or might result from the cultural and psychological reasons that prevent victims from reporting. Reasons for sexual assault not being reported include insufficient support system, and victims' feelings of shame and fear or risk of being retaliated, blamed, not believed, and socially ostracized (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). Thus, it is important to understand the complexity of sexual assaults and how the public's responses pertain to sexual assault victims' feelings of shame and fear to report their case. However, while analysing public responses can reveal cultural reasons that prevent victims from reporting, promote constructive discussions on the complexity of the sexual assault cases, and might help prevent further happenings, it does not provide evidence to uncover what actually happens in the cases of sexual assault.

2.2. Gender Roles

Gender role, or sex role, is a socially constructed role comprising a set of behaviours, attitudes and psychological traits generally considered proper, accepted and expected for a person based on their biological sex (Gochman, 2013). Gender roles are assigned during the socialisation process (Anderson & Doherty, 1997) and can be constructed around the concept of masculinity and femininity (Alters & Schiff, 2009). Gender roles exert an influence on people's behaviours and beliefs about themselves, encompassing sexual behaviours (Anderson & Doherty, 1997). Men are usually expected to be more aggressive and dominant, to initiate sexual acts while women are expected to be more passive (Jenkins & Dambrot, 2006). Both genders develop normative gender role behaviours during social interaction, leading to the support of sexually aggressive behaviours and thereby creating a hostile climate of rape myths acceptance and false sexual beliefs (Burt, 1980). Traditional gender roles were found to be associated with prejudices towards rape victims (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995).

Sexism, stemming from gender role stereotypes (Parry, 2014), plays a significant role in higher levels of victim blaming in rape scenarios. Sexist attitudes include hostile sexism and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism involves negative attitudes towards women who violate traditional gender roles, such as wearing seductive clothes or drinking alcohol. In contrast, benevolent sexism views women as pure and deserving of protection and reward if they conform to traditional roles. People with sexist attitudes classify women as "good" if they adhere to traditional roles and "bad" if they do not, with the latter more likely to be blamed for sexual assault and considered deserving it (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

2.3. Rape Myths

Rape myths are defined as "prejudicial, stereotyped and false beliefs about rape, rapists, and rape victims" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Despite being generally wrong, the false attitudes and beliefs of rape are widely and consistently spread and used to "deny and justify male aggression toward women" (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). One of the most prevalent rape myths is that the victim's clothes can trigger sexual assault, so it is that one's fault to be raped for wearing provocative clothes (Hayes, et al., 2013). That the victim often "lies about rape," is also widely accepted (Hayes et al., 2013). This common rape myth is apparently known by the

public in the form of false accusation: “Women often falsely allege rape for compensation or for attention” (Yancey-Martin et al., 2002). Some other familiar rape myths include: “She asked for it” (Payne et al., 1999); “Women got rape deserved it” (Burt, 1980); and “He didn’t mean to” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Rape myths are strongly tied to conventional gender roles, thereby provoking interpersonal aggression acceptance and misconception of sexual assault (Burt, 1980). Rape myth acceptance is in a close association with societal gender inequality and the idea of patriarchy (Levine, 2018; Paulson, 2018). In most cultures, men are given more value than women, thereby generating a power control of men towards women (Deutsch, 2007). Moreover, patriarchy recognizes gender as a primary feature in organizing social relations, retaining a hierarchical prominence, and establishing social arrangements that emphasize domination and power control (Hunnicut, 2009). Rape myths function to excuse the rape by male perpetrators (i.e., “Boys will be boys”) as such behaviour conforms to characteristics of male gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Meanwhile, female rape victims are blamed for flouting their gender category trait via rape myths linked with unfeminine behaviours, such as “She asked for it” (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). Rape myth acceptance triggers a wide range of issues including a wrong portrayal of false rape allegations made by female victims, or inaccurate perceptions that victims are not the actual victims of sexual assault (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Social media are a favourable environment for individuals to publicly discuss rape myths (Kosloski et al., 2018). Rape myths are prevailing in the content of both newspaper articles and social networking sites. Articles with headlines endorsing rape myths allow readers to be less likely to find accused perpetrators guilty and to adopt more rape-supportive attitudes (Pennington & Birthisel, 2015). As reported by Kosloski, et.al. (2018), rape myths are strongly advocated by Internet users on social sites like Twitter or online newspaper articles webs, portrayed under victim-blaming opinions. Nevertheless, Stubbs-Richardson et.al. (2018) finds that Twitter can be used to diminish rape myth acceptance. Hence, more research is needed to discover the rape myths within the comment threads following a sexual assault case on influential networking sites like Facebook.

2.4. Rape Culture

The term “rape culture” originated in the 1970s, corresponding with the feminist movement’s second wave (Burnett, 2016). Rape culture is an environment where rape is rampant and sexual violence against women is normalized (Marshall University, n.d.). Rape culture is nurtured in various ways such as hegemonic masculinity, politics, media, language and rape myths (Burnett, 2016). Behaviours associated with rape culture encompass the use of misogynistic language (i.e., sexually explicit jokes), victim-blaming, sexual and human body objectification, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women’s rights and safety (Burnett, 2016).

Victim blaming means any indication or implication that sexual assault was the victim’s fault. Victim blaming is usually observed in sexual assault cases, based on the public judgements of rape victims (Muehlenhard & Rogers, 1998). Victim blaming reinforces power relations preventing perpetrators or persons of higher social status from being punished. Meanwhile, the victims of sexual assault, despite being the victims, are blamed for being victimized, even to the extent of taking responsibility for sexual assault happening to them (Muehlenhard & Rogers, 1998). Rape myth acceptance, gender role stereotypes and victim’s use of substance are found to be the attributions of victim blaming phenomenon (Grubb &

Turner, 2012).

Studies have shown the prominent role of media in reinforcing rape culture (O'Hara, 2012). Rape culture highlights the demonstration of sexual violence and abuse toward women through movies, television, advertising, and magazines (O'Hara, 2012). Hegemonic masculinity is portrayed in the media with the depiction of males as aggressive, power-dominant and rape as a normal act (Burnett, 2016). Paulson (2018) finds that rape culture, specifically male privilege and women as objects, appears in thirteen Disney animated princess movies. The prevalence of rape myths on newspaper coverage is another example of the media's role in advocating rape culture (O'Hara, 2012). Social media sites also exacerbate rape culture and sexual violence through people's use of misogynistic language (i.e., humor and jokes about genders, sexuality and sexual activities) (McCann et al., 2010). Stubbs-Richardson et.al. (2018) found that victim-blaming tweets on Twitter tend to be more influential with more followers and attract more retweets than victim-supporting ones. However, digital activism has started to respond to rape culture. The use of hashtag #AskThicke for feminism takes over Twitter's online discussions about sexual assault (Horeck, 2014). Overall, research has found that social media is used to both spread rape culture via survivors' victimization and combat rape culture via digital activism work. Further research is still needed to examine how individuals may respond to rape culture via social networking sites in a specific sexual assault case.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

Keywords "Sexual Assault," "Kesha" and "Dr. Luke" were used to search on Billboard fanpage and eight public posts were found reporting the case from October 14th, 2014 to February 23rd, 2016. Four posts chosen to analyze the comments below are those with the highest number of likes, shares and comments in each year.

The first post (1) "Report: Kesha suing Dr. Luke for alleged sexual assault and emotional abuse" uploaded on October 15th, 2014 reaches 40,000 likes, 2,900 shares and 2,500 comments. In the post, the effort of this singer in filing a lawsuit against her producer to regain control of her music and freedom in personal life is reported through her lawyer's statement. A copy of the lawsuit was uploaded on Billboard, stating that Kesha was forced to drink and drug, then being sexually assaulted by Dr. Luke. Dr. Luke also immediately filed a countersuit against the singer's one.

The second post (2) on June 18th, 2015 is "Dr. Luke wins halt to Kesha's sexual abuse lawsuit" with 3,600 likes, 47 shares and 88 comments. Kesha was reported to suffer a setback since the judge decided to put her lawsuit on hold. Her lawsuit was considered by the judge to implicate her contract with Dr. Luke and Sony, and her claim for sexual harassment and gender violence was affirmed.

The next post (3) "Kesha's sexual assault lawsuit against Dr. Luke" was posted on February 23rd, 2016 (4,700 likes, 218 shares, 112 comments). The process, from when Kesha started working with Dr. Luke to how she lost control of her music and her life due to this producer, was narrated. Details of her lawsuit were also analyzed in this post.

The last post (4) chosen to analyze comments is "Dr. Luke: 'I didn't rape Kesha and I have never had sex with her'" (4,300 likes, 112 shares, 366 comments) uploaded after post (3) on the same day – February 23rd, 2016. In the midst of their ongoing duel lawsuit, Dr. Luke

tried to defend himself by taking advantage of social network – Twitter, reported by Billboard. He wrote different tweets saying that: “I didn’t rape Kesha and I have never had sex with her. Kesha and I were friends for many years and she was like my little sister”, and “They are getting behind an allegation only - motivated by money” or “of course any sane person is against rape and sexual assault, but everybody who is commenting is doing so without knowledge or facts”. Also in the post, it is reported that various female artists such as Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift and Demi Lovato have supported Kesha with tweets and donations.

In this study, text comments are the unit of analysis. The comments under four posts were collected using the software iClick - Get Comment Facebook. Among all comments, only comments that are relevant to the post content, expressing users’ opinions of sexual assault in general or Kesha’s case in particular were chosen. The comments ranked as “Most relevant” by Facebook were considered on the grounds that Facebook itself already excluded comments that are considered spam. The comments including nested comments selected were around one day after the posts were published. Spam and irrelevant comments, stickers or emojis, or tagging their friends to follow the case were omitted. Finally, 731 under the first post, 50 under the second post, 64 below the third post, and 155 under the last post totalling 1000 comments below four posts were selected.

3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

In this paper, content analysis was applied and the results were reported according to emerging themes. Firstly, the coding system was constructed based on rape myths and rape culture literature. Then, grounded coding was employed, which incorporated initial and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). The data were coded phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. In the process of analysing data, we counted the comments and making inferences about the commenters’ perspectives. However, we did not trace whether each comment is from the same or different commenters. Once all the comments were saturated, they were categorized into major themes. Though the data were publicly available, during the analysis procedure, we assigned each comment writer a distinct pseudonym.

4. Findings

The data reveal that rape myths and rape culture are reflected in commenters’ standpoints toward the accuser and the accused. Descriptive statistics of three main standpoints are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Commenters’ standpoints by posts

Posts	Standpoints			Total
	Victim supporting	Victim blaming	Neutral	
(1)	418 (54.7%)	239 (32.7%)	74 (12.6%)	731 (100%)
(2)	32 (64.0%)	12 (24.0%)	6 (12.0%)	50 (100%)
(3)	43 (67.2%)	13 (20.3%)	8 (12.5%)	64 (100%)

(4)	76 (47.7%)	48 (31%)	31 (21.3%)	155 (100%)
Total	569 (56.9%)	312 (31.2%)	119 (11.9%)	1000 (100%)

As can be seen in Table 1, victim supporting comments (n = 569) accounted for the minor majority of the collected data (56.9%). Meanwhile, victim blaming comments (n = 312) comprised around one third of the data, and neutral ones (n = 119) constituted 11.9% of total.

Victim blaming appears at all posts' discussions in a total of 312 out of 1000 comments, but mostly appears under post 1 (239 comments) and post 2 (48 comments).

4.1. Gender Roles Nonconformity

Rape culture is evident in comments under four posts in 134 comments, where Kesha was criticized for defying traditional gender roles, and in 70 comments, where Internet users make rape jokes about her behaviour and dressing. Examples included:

I thought she always woke up in the morning feeling like P. Diddy? (Nate)

Maybe she doesn't remember because she brushes her teeth with a bottle of Jack? (Sean)

Interesting that an artist who consistently sings anthems of getting drunk, drugged up, wild, and sexual would find herself blacked out in a stranger's bed. Guess none of that is evidence, huh? (Babin)

According to her music, she always wakes up naked, hungover, and with no memory..... I dunno... if you sing about it...it makes it harder to take seriously. (Nelson)

but let's see her drug screening and see if she was 100% sober... and the dr. I'm just saying most of this stuff happens to girls who don't hold much respect for themselves... Learn how to say no to drugs and alcohol and maybe u won't be a super slut and flirt with guys and give them the wrong signals... just saying. (Morrison)

In these comments, Nate, and Sean implicitly express sarcasm toward Kesha's suing by using the lyrics in her song named "Tik Tok." The use of misogynistic language, correlated with rape culture, implies that this female singer is an indecent woman who is too drunk herself, which is considered inappropriate behaviour for a woman. In Babin's view, the act of "getting drugged," "being wild" and "sexual" would function as evidence for her being assaulted as deserving. Morrison accused not just Kesha but other victims of sexual assaults as they themselves not respecting themselves and sending men the wrong signals. They take what she conveys in her songs as evidence not to trust her. These comments indicate that women are supposed to conform to their gender roles, or sex roles, encompassing a set of behaviours and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable and appropriate by society. Consequently, any women who have improper behaviours such as getting drunk and hungover are untrustworthy and deserved to be raped (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

This idea is further reinforced by the following comments: "Good that what she gets for being a slut!" (Kelly), "After whoring now she's suing...WHORES AINT LOYAL" (Joseph), "The abuser is only at fault when he sexually assaults someone who is not "slutty"!" (Chou), and "Guess that image as a drunk party girl didn't help much." (Tom). Kesha is condemned for being sexually assaulted, and rape is considered a normal act as she is viewed as "slutty." By calling her "a slut," "whoring," or depicting her "a drunk party girl," the commenters slut-shame Kesha, lower her value and regard her as an object for male aggression. These victim-blaming comments are closely linked to the rape myths: "She deserved it," and "She asked for it," by dressing and acting promiscuously, as represented in the comments: "Hey Kesha...stop dressing

how you don't want to be treated. And stop singing about it too...then people wouldn't think you are easy and don't have to ask you before they go for it" (Vicky), or "She deserved it. Get over it" (Ambrose). As a whole, these comments exemplify a viewpoint of Facebook users that dressing and acting improperly is a root cause of sexual assault.

To these commenters, Kesha deserved what happened to her, as a consequence of the rape myths: "She lied about it," "She deserved it," "She asked for it" and conventional gender roles. She is accused of making false allegations and acting not in accordance with what society considers appropriate or desirable for a woman. This means the women must be responsible for their own victimisation, which fosters the continuation of rape culture, trivializes the seriousness of sexual assault and exonerates the perpetrators from all responsibilities. Concurrently, gender inequality is also manifested as people blame the rape on the women for having behaviours that do not adhere to the gender norms.

4.2. The Netizens' Support for Kesha

The most common stance in the comment thread is support for Kesha and sexual assault victims, with over 50% (569 out of 1000) of comments being victim-supporting. Specifically, 11% (114 comments) oppose rape jokes, 21% (213 comments) debunk rape myths, and 116 comments recount personal experiences from survivors. Nearly one-third (302 comments) discuss the complexity of sexual assault, while 85 comments express hatred towards the accused.

4.2.1. Rape is not Something to Joke

While only 10 comments indicate that rape jokes are funny, 114 comments express commenters' anger and dissatisfaction towards people making fun of sexual assault and its victim. The following comments exemplify how rape joke is opposed:

But when it comes down to a topic that no one is taking seriously AT ALL, that's where you draw the line. [...] If Kesha is comfortable joking about it, that's fine, but if the joke is being dragged out to the point that she can't get the help she needs and actually has to SUE him because of it, that's when it isn't a funny joke anymore. (Donald)

I've a friend who is a MALE and was raped, he went to get help and a restraining order and was literally laughed out of the courtroom. [...] Jokes are one thing, someone getting denied help because it's seen as a joke is not funny. I AM speaking from personal knowledge from not only being sexually abused by several different people, but from knowing others in varying cases. (Donald)

Donald takes a stand against making a joke about a serious problem like rape. He points out the difference between a normal joke and a serious rape joke. While benign jokes are fine, joking in case of rape can deny victims of the help they need. In the second comment, Donald accentuates the seriousness of making jokes out of sexual assault by citing a real case of his male friend who was raped but "was literally laughed out of the courtroom." Humour on such serious issue like rape can prevent people from obtaining justice and further humiliate victims in places that they seek support and justice. This can contribute to silencing victims further and justifying or covering the act of the offenders, creating an unsafe environment.

All the negative people on here are sick. I bet more than half of you are hypocrites. And it's just music. You don't know her lifestyle. What freaking difference does it make? Rape is serious and not something people should joke about. I hope none of you are so unlucky to wake up somewhere and not know how you got there. (Amy)

As can be seen in her ironic tone of voice, Amy rebukes "negative people" who made

jokes or encouraged rape jokes as “hypocrites.” She points out another problem of telling rape jokes, which is the difference in Kesha’s song lyrics and her way of life. Amy argues that the lyrics and ideas in the artists’ songs cannot be used to deduce about her actual lifestyle. The consequence of making jokes about sexual assault and its victim can preclude the possibility that the victim speaks out their case and can get help from society. These comments indicate the support to the singer against the rape culture and netizens’ attempt to defend the right of Kesha, and of men and women who are victims of sexual assault.

4.2.2. Rape Myths Debunking

The aforementioned jokes were associated with one of the popular myths. The myth "Women got raped deserved it" is debunked 52 times, "She asked for it" is opposed in 50 comments, and "She lied about it" is disproven 105 times.

No one deserves it and no one is asking for it. The fact that she WASN'T asking for it indicates that it's assault! Only yes means yes. I'm glad she's standing up, that must be so difficult knowing that so many people still victim blame and are heartless A.F. Inability to consent is lack of consent. It's IMPOSSIBLE to be "asking for it" because the VERY NATURE of the crime means that she specifically was not asking for it. (Abigail)

Even if a woman willingly takes a handful of pills, and drinks an entire 5th of Jack, and flirts with a man, and wears slutty clothing... THAT STILL DOES NOT EQUAL CONSENT!!! Some of you boys think the world is yours for the taking and you need a wakeup call. (Sarah)

I don't care if Kesha has slept with 100 men or no men, no means no. It doesn't matter if it's a stranger or someone she knows, no means no. Dr. Luke didn't take no for an answer, as you can see by reading the article, and that is not okay, whether it's Kesha or someone you actually know personally. (Donald)

Rape is not supposed to be taken as a "regular" act EVER. It's an outrageous, disgusting kind of violation. It's a crime. You should take that "no big deal" back, Mohd. (Paulo)

The comments from Abigail, Sarah, Donald, and Paulo aim to dismantle rape myths, emphasizing that consent must be explicit. By using capital letter, Abigail angrily challenges the perception that anyone ever "asks" to be raped, indicating the violation inherent in sexual assault and aligning with the affirmative consent of "Only yes means yes." She expresses her empathy by stating the difficulty victims face in challenging victim-blaming attitudes. Similarly, Sarah uses extreme examples to deconstructs the myth that certain behaviors or appearances can justify rape, stating that consent cannot be inferred from any of a victim's clothing, actions, or state of intoxication. Her criticism of male entitlement challenges a patriarchal mindset that normalizes sexual violence, reemphasizing that consent must be explicit and cannot be assumed under any circumstances.

Donald and Paulo further these arguments by stressing the universality and seriousness of consent and rape. Donald emphasizes consent must be respected regardless of the victim's sexual history or relationship with the perpetrator, reinforcing that "rape is rape" and challenging the myth that a victim's character or past can mitigate the crime's severity. Paulo condemns the normalisation of rape as a "regular" act, calling it a "disgusting kind of violation" and a crime that must be taken seriously. His insistence that rape should never be trivialized fights against the normalization of sexual violence and stresses the importance of societal acknowledgment of its severity. Together, these comments advocate for a more just and empathetic understanding of sexual violence victims.

While debunking the rape myths, commenters also discussed the consequences of those myths:

This is why women don't speak out about their sexual abuse. Because people like the ones in these comments are making fun of her, blaming her, slut shaming, etc. People are so quick to blame the victim but won't blame the abuser it's sickening. Grow up! (Hayes)

Stop slut shaming and blaming the victim. This is why people keep quiet and continue to be abused. Drunk, high or not, no one asks for it. STOP SAYING THEY ASK FOR IT. No one knows the full story either. Just because she sings about partying does not mean she does it 24/7. It's called having an image. Besides, no means NO. (Laux)

"Drunken slut" when he was the one who drugged her and took advantage? I hope you realize how idiotic you sound, victim blaming is never ok and you're just contributing to a society that blames women for being assaulted but won't blame the person harming them. (Hayes)

Slut or not...she has every right to decide who she wants and doesn't want. #stopslutshaming NO WOMAN ON THIS EARTH DESERVES TO BE RAPED!!! Some of u f***tards need to get a f***** grip. You sound so ignorant. Especially u slut shaming females. (Alisha)

The comments from Hayes, Laux, and Alisha critically address and debunk prevalent rape myths, especially those involving victim-blaming and slut-shaming. Hayes and Laux emphasize that the societal tendency to blame victims rather than perpetrators discourages survivors from speaking out about their abuse. Hayes points out that mocking, blaming, and slut-shaming victims perpetuate a culture that protects abusers, while Laux argues that assumptions about a victim's lifestyle or behavior, such as singing about partying, do not equate to consent. Both highlight the importance of recognizing that no one, regardless of their state or image, ever "asks for" or deserves sexual assault. Their comments stress the need to shift the focus from the victim's actions to the abuser's accountability, advocating for a societal change in how sexual abuse is perceived and addressed.

Alisha's comment reinforces the idea that every woman has the right to decide who has access to her body, irrespective of any labels or judgments placed upon her. She vehemently rejects the notion that any woman deserves to be raped, calling out the ignorance of those who engage in slut-shaming and victim-blaming. By using strong language and capital letters, Alisha emphasizes the urgency of stopping these harmful behaviors and attitudes. Together, these comments dismantle the myths: "Women got rape deserve it," "She asked for it" and "She lied about it," which perpetuate rape culture, advocating for a more empathetic and just approach to supporting survivors and holding abusers accountable.

4.2.3. Personal Sexual Assault Stories Sharing

To show empathy with Kesha, many Facebook users told their personal stories or stories of people they know about rape and sexual assault:

One of my best friends was assaulted by a family member of hers and waited six years to tell anyone. He scared her, there could have been threats whether actual threats to her or to her career. No one knows the true story except for them and no one really will. (Zapell)

This happened to a family member of mine. She was drugged at the bar and couldn't even walk let alone speak out. [...] Luckily he is in jail now. Just because she is famous doesn't mean it can't happen to her too because the man was desperate enough to drug her just to sleep with her seems totally plausible with a celeb... (Tiffany)

Just like her, I was also a victim. I know how she feels. :((Josephine)

The comments reveal the prevalence and complexity of sexual assault, describing the fear, threats, and power dynamics that often silence victims. Zapell recounts the long-lasting impact of threats and fear, while Tiffany points out that fame does not protect against assault. Josephine's brief yet poignant statement of shared victimhood provides a personal connection and solidarity with Kesha. These comments illustrate the pervasiveness of sexual violence and the complexity that can prevent victims from speaking out, while also showing empathy and understanding towards Kesha's experience.

This happened to me with a guy, but police said they can't do anything because I'm a guy and according to police rape can only occur with a penis and a vagina. (Evan)

Female rape is acceptable, and male rape doesn't happen. That is how society deals with rape. (Cara)

Evan scornfully describes the definition of rape by the police. Evan and Cara's comments reveal the gender biases and misconceptions surrounding rape that hinder justice for male victims. Evan's experience with the police indicates a flawed understanding of rape, where male victims are dismissed due to a narrow definition. Cara's comment further critiques societal attitudes that trivialize female rape and deny male rape, exposing a pervasive and harmful double standard. These comments suggest that societal and legal definitions of rape need challenging and broadening to ensure that all victims receive recognition and justice.

4.2.4. The Complexity of Sexual Assault

Another way that a great number of Facebook users (in 302 comments) chose to defend the artist is to provide further information related to rape and sexual assault, mostly around the intricacy of sexual assault and the victim's feeling after being sexually assaulted. The following comments are a vivid illustration of information given in support of the victims:

I work with assault victims, and I'm a doctor. I can tell you now that women get raped and at times there is no physical evidence. No tearing, no DNA, no bruises. They are drugged, taken advantage of, and left. The only knowledge of something not being right is when they wake up with hours missing from their memory and the feeling of having had sex without their knowledge. Also, coming forward about being raped is infinitely hard because of scenarios like this, because no one wants to believe you that someone could be that horrible. (Hamilton)

While many people request evidence for her accusation, Hamilton, who self-identifies as a doctor working with assault victims, describes the complexities of rape cases where physical evidence is mostly absent. Women can be drugged and assaulted without showing signs of trauma, leaving them with only gaps in their memory and a sense of violation. Hamilton points out the difficulty victims face in coming forward, as the lack of visible evidence and societal disbelief in the severity of such acts make it challenging for survivors to be believed and supported.

I don't think anyone can understand why she waited to report it unless you have been in that situation. The mental toll something like this has on anyone alone is enough to keep her silent but also the fear of what he was going to do if she told...such as ruin her career and her whole life basically. Don't judge her until you have been there then you still really shouldn't judge her. (Meghan)

Regardless of the situation, what she did or didn't do that is NOT for us to assume. What would you do if you were in this situation? Sexual assault doesn't just happen, it builds from mental abuse and slowly tearing someone down. [...] To say someone deserved it

or should have known better, you are the reason why we never progress because comments like those who make girls stay quiet on what types of abuse are going on. (Salcedo)

For one, the percentage of alleged rapes that turn out to be lies is so tiny... Less than 1%. The percentage of rapes that DO happen that are also reported is way too small! One in four women is sexually assaulted. (Rachel)

Very common for rape, sexual assault victims to wait years (if ever) to report the crimes. Victims rarely see justice in court. Threats and further abuse in all kinds of forms are what awaits most victims for speaking out against their abuser. #FREEKeshha (Smith)

The above comments describe the challenges and misconceptions surrounding the reporting of sexual assault. Meghan explains the delayed reporting by citing the psychological obstacles and fear of repercussions, such as career ruin, that keep victims silent, insisting that no one should judge without personal experience. Salcedo explicitly criticizes the harmful assumptions and judgments that perpetuate silence and hinder societal progress.

Rachel and Smith provide statistical and contextual support to these arguments, stressing the rarity of false rape allegations and the high incidence of unreported sexual assaults. Rachel notes that only a small percentage of rapes are reported, with one in four women experiencing sexual assault, highlighting the prevalence of the issue. Smith points out that many victims wait years to report, if they report at all, due to the lack of justice and the threats and further abuse they face. These comments challenge the systemic and cultural perception issues that prevent victims from speaking out and call for greater support and justice for survivors.

Comments highlighting the complexity of sexual assault receive significant engagement, with Hamilton's comments garnering over 100 likes each and similar comments attracting 50 to 70 likes. In contrast, victim-blaming comments receive about 10 likes. This suggests that informative comments about sexual assault can shape public beliefs and raise awareness about the issue. By attracting attention and encouraging understanding of the mental and emotional challenges faced by victims, these comments help dispel rape myths and contribute to a more informed and empathetic view of rape victims.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Social media has emerged as a significant arena for discussions and reactions to cases of sexual assault, including high-profile instances like Kesha and Dr. Luke. This study examined responses on Billboard's fan page, revealing a predominant trend of victim-supportive comments (569 comments), followed by victim-blaming attitudes (312 comments) and neutral stances (119 comments). This contrasts with previous findings suggesting that victim-blaming content often garners more attention on social media platforms. Qualitative analysis identified three key response patterns: victim blaming, strong support for the victim, and calls for legal justice.

Victim blaming was evident in comments that portrayed rape culture through accusations that victims fabricate assaults for personal gain, echoing historical biases identified by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994). Gender roles also played a significant role, with comments employing sexist jokes and attitudes toward victims who did not conform to societal expectations, aligning with research by Burt (1980) and Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995). These comments perpetuate a harmful narrative that blames victims for their own assaults, contributing to a culture where responsibility for sexual violence is misplaced onto victims.

Conversely, a substantial number of comments expressed unwavering support for Kesha

and other victims, rejecting rape jokes and challenging societal norms that enable rape culture. The data show that Facebook users are more supportive of victims than inclined to blame them, contrasting with Stubbs-Richardson et al.'s (2018) finding that victim-blaming tweets often receive more followers and retweets than supportive ones. Previous studies found how social media provoke the pervasiveness of rape culture and rape myths acceptance (McCann et al., 2010; O'Hara, 2012; Pennington & Birthisel, 2015; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). The data in this study revealed that social media like Facebook, even though being considered environments exacerbating rape culture (O'Hara, 2012; McCann et al., 2010), can be used to combat victim blaming and slut shaming, denounce the hegemonic masculinity, and muster support for sexual assault survivors. This study indicates that Facebook emerged as a platform where individuals actively dispute harmful attitudes and advocate for victims, illustrating its potential to foster constructive dialogues and challenge entrenched beliefs about sexual assault.

This study reveals that Facebook users actively challenge and debunk prevalent rape myths surrounding sexual assault. Comments reject notions such as victim blaming ("she asked for it"), justifying rape ("women got rape deserved it"), and lying about assault, aligning with findings from Stubbs-Richardson et al. (2018). Empathetic support towards victims reflects a broader societal shift away from traditional victim-blaming attitudes. Furthermore, survivors of sexual assault use Facebook to share personal narratives, fostering empathy and challenging misconceptions about why victims may delay reporting. The use of hashtags like #FreeKesha illustrates digital activism against sexual assault, echoing research by Horeck (2014). The study brings out Facebook's role as a platform for public discourse on sensitive issues, where sentiments against rape and rapists are outspoken despite societal norms of hegemonic masculinity that normalize such violence (Burnett, 2016; Paulson, 2018). By bringing out stories of male victims, the commenters demand to broaden societal and legal definitions of rape, address systemic issues preventing victims from speaking out, and ensure all survivors receive recognition and justice.

While these insights contribute to understanding public attitudes towards sexual assault, it is crucial to recognize that the opinions shared on Facebook represent a subset of society, in this case from American context, and the platform's selective display of content and policies on sensitive material may skew the data analyzed. Moreover, the absence of nonverbal cues and the platform's data access restrictions present challenges in fully capturing nuances in public discourse. Nevertheless, this study highlights Facebook's potential as a tool for shaping public perceptions of sexual assault, advancing societal awareness of its complexities and addressing Garcia-Moreno et al.'s (2012) concern that fear of blame and lack of support are significant barriers to reporting assault. Further studies, especially in the contexts of Vietnam, where recent controversies related to sexual assault cases have emerged, would provide fruitful results for comparison.

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