RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE AND FEAR OF SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION ON COLLEGE

CAMPUSES

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have identified individual characteristics associated with fear of sexual assault. Scholars have attempted to explain heightened level of fear among females by applying the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis. However, few studies have considered how situational characteristics influence fear of sexual assault. Notably, individual perceptions and beliefs about rape, including rape myths have been under-explored. The current study examines the influence of male rape myth acceptance (MRMA) on fear of sexual assault among a college student sample while controlling for individual demographics. Specifically, the current study aimed to explore if/how both demographics and MRMA influenced student's fear sexual assault. Multivarate analyses revealed higher odds of females, non-whites, and those who reported a past sexual assault victimization feeling unsafe and fearing sexual assault from both stranger and known offender. Higher odds of females and LGBQ students avoiding places on campus out of fear of victimization.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Whether directly, through personal experience - when someone becomes a victim of a crime - or indirectly - when someone learns about victimization from secondary experiences (e.g. media portrayals) and social interactions (Combs-Lane & Smith, 2002; Lane et al., 2014), individuals of all races, social classes, genders, and ages report experiences with some form of victimization (Fisher et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2014). While the criminal justice system has largely ignored victims of crime, particularly sexual victimization, the victim's rights movement began working to ensure victims were recognized thereby ushering in an era examining the prevalence of victimization (Fisher et al., 2016; Walker, 2014). Numerous studies have investigated individual characteristics associated with victimization, as well as attempted to identify patterns of victimization (Fisher et al., 2016).

Generally, the study of specific types of victimization among both males and females is devoted to explaining why, to whom, and where victimization occurs (Fisher et al., 2016). In this endeavor, an extensive body of research has focused on victims of sexual violence, with many studies devoting special attention to exploring rape (Davies et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2014). When investigating this topic, studies thave reported alarming rates of sexual assault and rape among college students (Hilinski, 2009; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). According to a report from the Department of Justice, both women (20%) and men (4-6%) experience some type of sexual victimization during their college experience (Fisher et al., 2000).

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Given the prevalence of sexual victimization among this population, the exploration of fear of sexual victimization among college students arises as an important topic, considering that actual victimization and fear may have the potential to both shape and affect students' quality of life and their overall college/university experience (DeJong et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2009). Although several studies have explored the influence of factors, such as age, race, biological sex as well as geographic location and prior victimization on fear of sexual vicitimization among college students (DeJong et al., 2020; Hale, 1996; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007), a paucity have attempted to investigate the potential influence of individual beliefs about victims and victimization on fear of sexual violence among this population. Thus, in an attempt to expand the current knowledge on this topic, the primary purpose of the present study is to investigate if/how individual perceptions about victims and victimization - specifically the role of male rape myth acceptance - may impact fear of sexual assault on college campuses, while controlling for others factors such as race, biological sex and past victimization.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fear of Crime

For many decades and across different areas of research, fear has been the subject of a vast number of scientific investigations attempting to provide a better understanding of human emotions and how they come to be (Lane et al., 2014). For instance, while psychologists have described fear as a natural, often rational response to an immediate or perceived threat, which leads both animals and humans to act to protect themselves and increase their chances of survival (Lazarus et al., 1980), other scientists have expanded and refined this definition to distinguish fear from other cognitive responses, such as perceived risk (Lane et al., 2014), threat, and defensive behaviors (May et al., 2010). Broadly, fear is a common human emotion that oftentimes manifests itself as a general apprehensive expectation that something negative, bad, or harmful is about to take place (Lane et al., 2014). Although in specific cases, individuals may experience phobias – which are abnormal responses to fear-inducing situations (Marks, 1987; Wolman, 1994) – fear is a learned emotional response commonly taught to every human being in their process of socialization (Lane et al., 2009; Lazarus et al., 1980). During the life course, individuals are taught what to and/or not to fear, and in which situations they should be fearful (Lane et al., 2014). However, most fears developed during childhood decline throughout the life course as individuals progress into adulthood (Lane et al., 2014).

Research on the topic of fear has identified different types of fear (e.g., fear of strangers, fear of snakes, fear of heights), as well as different dimensions, causes, and contextual cues (Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2014). Notably, while psychologists have focused on investigating the *emotional* side of fear, (May et al., 2010), criminology has paid special attention to crime related fear, focusing primarily on how/why it occurs, manifests, and its practical implications on human behavior (Fisher et al., 2016; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2014). Most scholars agree that defining and achieving an exact definition for the fear of crime is challenging (Lane et al., 2014). For instance, while Ferraro (1995) described fear of crime as simply being an individual's emotional response to the potential of being victim of a crime, Warr (2000) expanded this definition to say that fear of crime is a feeling of alarm caused by known or expected danger. Despite the inconsistencies surrounding the development of one universal definition of fear of crime, most scholars seem to consistently adopt three key elements when differentiating crime related fear from other types of fear (Lane et al., 2014). Drawing from such elements, Lane and colleagues (2014) summarized fear as "(1) an emotional response (2) to a danger or threat (3) of a potential criminal incident" (Lane et al., 2014, p. 62).

Importantly, in conceptualizing fear of crime, scholars and researchers have argued that defining fear of crime is as important as distinguishing it from other constructs, such as perceived risk (Ferraro, 1995; Lane et al., 2014; May et al., 2010). Although both constructs – fear of crime and perceived risk - relate to an individual's response to crime, some authors have defined perceived risk as a cognitive rather than emotional response (Ferraro, 1995; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Lane et al., 2014; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). As Rader and colleagues (2007) explain, perceived risk relates to an individual's perceived likelihood of being victimized in a given situation. Therefore, some scholars suggest that perceived risk as a concept encompasses a more

rational risk assessment, since it requires a cognitive judgement of the scenario presented, whereas fear of crime is an emotional reaction to the scenario presented (Ferraro, 1995; Lane et al., 2014; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007).

Most scholars attempt to measure these two constructs separately (Rader et al., 2007) to observe if and/or how a cognitive assessment of risk (perceived risk) is associated with fear (an emotional response) (Lane et al., 2009; Lane et al., 2014; May et al., 2010) and how perceived risk and fear of crime are affected by other variables, such as age, race, and gender (Lane et al., 2009; Lane et al., 2014; May et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the measurement of these contructs has posed as a great challenge to researchers. Although scholars agree on the distinction between the two, many have often measured one instead of the other (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Lane et al., 2014; Warr, 2000), or included measures of both fear and risk while measuring only fear (Ferraro, 1995; Lane et al., 2014).

Specifically, a mistake often critiqued by scholars is related to the use of measures tapping into perceptions of "safety" in an attempt to measure individuals' level of fear (Lane et al., 2014). Inadvertently, researchers commonly evaluate individuals' perceptions of risk, since the question leads them to make a cognitive assessment about their level of risk in certain scenarios (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Lane et al., 2014; Warr, 2000). Notably, this is an issue also identified in critiques of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) - which is the primary source of information on criminal victimization in the U.S – when it asks questions that record perceptions of safety (perceived risk) in an attempt to capture fear of crime (Lane et al., 2014). Despite the issues associated with the measure, researchers have consistently suggested that risk is, indeed, a potential predictor of fear (Lane et al., 2009; Lane et al., 2014; May et al., 2010; Rader et al.,

2007), sharing importance with several individual level correlates of fear of crime that should also be considered.

Individual Level Pedicators of Fear of Crime

Many decades have passed since the first studies on fear of crime identified the numerous factors associated with individuals' fear of being victimized (Hilinski, 2009). Of the key correlates identified (e.g. age, race, geographic location, prior victimization), biological sex is the one variable that consistently stands out as the strongest factor influencing fear of crime (DeJong et al., 2020; Hale, 1996; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). Consequently, gender – here referred to as biological sex, considering that the studies mentioned were, in fact, measuring sex (male/female), and not gender – is also the most well-documented factors influencing fear of crime. Even after controlling for other factors, it was consistently determined to be a "stable predictor" for fear of crime (Hale, 1996; May et al., 2010).

Across several age groups, locations, and social classes (Hale, 1996), researchers have found that females are much more likely to report higher levels of fear of crime than males. Official data, however, has shown that females are less likely to be victimized -with the exception of certain offenses, notably sexual assault and rape (DeJong et al., 2020; Hale, 1996; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). Importantly, studies examining the connection between perceived risk and fear of victimization have also found that females are significantly more afraid than males (Ferraro, 1996; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009) of sexual and nonsexual crimes (Lane et al., 2009). Building on Ferraro (1996) and Fisher and Sloan (2003), Lane and colleagues (2009) found that while perceived risk was a stronger predictor for males' fear of nonsexual crimes, fear of sexual victimization remains a stronger predictor for

females' fear of nonsexual crimes. Interestingly, women perceived the risk of nonsexual crimes (e.g., robbery and assault) to be higher than men in their model (Lane et al., 2009) – even though their actual victimization rates for these crimes is lower than males (Hilinski, 2009).

Given strong consistency in findings across studies, researchers have dedicated significant attention to explaining this association (DeJong et al., 2020; Fox et al., 2009; Hale, 1996; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007) and have referred to these findings as the "gender-fear paradox" (Ferraro, 1996; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). Although numerous explanations have been developed to explain this paradox, some scholars suggest that an issue seen in traditional literature was the failure to measure fear and perceived risk separately to account for women's fear (Hale, 1996). More specifically, some scholars argue that females' higher levels of fear would increase their perception of risk (Chan & Rigakos, 2002; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). Other scholars link women's higher levels of fear to females' perceptions of vulnerability to crime (Hale, 1996). In addition, while some research has tied the gender paradox to females' fear of sexual assault "shadowing" their fear of other crimes (Ferraro, 1995; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003), others argue that this paradox results from differences between males' and females' socialization process (Hale, 1996; Stanko, 1993). These key explanations will be explored in the following section.

Theoretical explanations for the gender paradox in Fear of Sexual Victimization

The literature has not only explored fear of crime more broadly, but many scholars have investigated fear of specific forms of crime, with one of the key areas of focus within this body of work highlighting fear of sexual violence. Similar to fear of crime in general, biological sex is the individual characteristic that is consistently associated with fear of sexual assault and is often one

of the strongest correlates of fear of sexual victimization (Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009). As previously noted, fear of crime and perceived risk are distinct, yet often related concepts and both have been explored in studies on fear of sexual violence.

For instance, in a study investigating the effect of fear of sexual assault on fear of other crimes, Fisher and Sloan (2003) found that females reported feeling twice as likely (i.e., perceived risk) to be raped than their male counterparts. Later, building upon these results, Lane and colleagues (2009) found that although females were generally more afraid than males of robbery, assault, and sexual assault, the largest difference between the sexes was for sexual assault. While males were more afraid of being robbed, females were most afraid of being sexually assaulted (Lane et al., 2009). More recently, these findings were confirmed in a public opinion poll conducted in October 2018. According to the results of Gallup's annual crime poll (2018), 36% of women reported being "frequently" or "occasionally" concerned about being sexually assaulted, while only 4% of males reported being frequently/occasionally concerned about being sexually assaulted (McCarthy, 2018).

The distinction between men's fear of sexual violence and women's fear is likely tied to their differential risk of sexual victimization which is consistently reported in studies of sexual assault and rape. For example, according to Fisher and colleagues (2016) regardless of the victim-offender relationship, women are more likely to be victims of sexual assault compared to males. According to the 2015 report from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) (Smith et al., 2018) data, 43.6% of women (approximately 52.2 million women) reported experiencing some form of sexual violence in their life compared to 24.8% of men (approximately 27.6 million men). Further, 37% women (approximately 44.3 million females) reported some form

of unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime, whereas 17.9% of males (approximately 19.9 million males) reported the same (Smith et al., 2018).

Consequently, as data on sexual victimization consistently points to women being more likely to be sexually victimized than men (Fisher et al., 2016), several scholars have linked females' higher levels of fear of sexual victimization to their likelihood of experiencing this type of victimization and how this contributes to their feelings of vulnerability to crime (Hilinski, 2009). Specifically, among the theories developed to explain fear of crime, the vulnerability perspective has been used to examine individual fear at the micro-level (Fisher et al., 2016). According to this perspective, a person's fear of being victimized results from their own perception of vulnerability to victimization, and this perception is likely to be associated with their personal characteristics, such as gender and race (Fisher et al., 2016). For this reason, this theory has been used to explain the patterns seen among sexes and races, supporting the premise that females may perceive themselves as more vulnerable to victimization due to their size and strength when compared to a male offender (physical vulnerability perspective), and minorities may perceive to be more vulnerable because of their status in society (social vulnerability perspective) (Fisher et al., 2016).

Researchers supporting this perspective also argue that individuals' perceptions of vulnerability are also affected by factors that surpass their personal characteristics, such as target suitability and previous victimization (Fisher et al., 2016). Although research on the influence of prior victimization and fear has arrived at indefinite conclusions (Hale, 1996), some researchers argue that since women are more common targets of sexual victimization, they may perceive themselves as more vulnerable targets to this type of crime (Fisher et al., 2016). Consequently, this perspective holds that females' fear of sexual victimization is also a byproduct of their perceived

vulnerability, since females' perceived vulnerability is likely to be affected by their differential risk of being sexually victimized (Fisher et al., 2016).

This pattern, however, is puzzling when other offenses are controlled for (Fisher et al., 2016). As Hilinski (2009) explains, even for crimes in which males have a higher risk of being victims, specifically nonsexual crimes (e.g., robbery), females report levels of fear that are two or even three times higher than males (Hilinski, 2009). Studies have consistently found that, with very little exception, women are more afraid of victimization than males, even for offenses in which they have lower victimization rates (Ferraro, 1996; Fisher et al., 2016; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). Thus, scholars began to develop additional explanations for the "the gender paradox of fear" (Fisher et al., 2016).

In their seminal study, LaGrange and Ferraro (1989) investigated both fear of crime and perceived risk, accounting for individual characteristics and fear. After conducting telephone surveys with 320 participants, the researchers found that females were significantly more afraid than males, for offenses such as theft, burglary, sexual assault, and murder (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1989). Later, in an attempt to explain these findings, Ferraro (1996; 1992), developed what became one of the most tested theories on this topic, the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis, which suggests that females' fear of sexual assault "shadows" other types of victimization, leading to the paradox seen across sexes.

According to Ferraro (1996; 1992), women's fear of crime is strongly driven by their fear of sexual victimization. At its core, the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis holds that in situations in which a face-to-face confrontation is expected, women perceive that the victimization has the potential to escalate to sexual violence (Ferraro, 1996; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; LaGrange et al., 1992). For example, considering that a burglary (property crime) could escalate into a rape,

females would fear crime in general more than males because, to them, the possibility of sexual violence is ever-present (Fisher et al., 2016). Scholars have found this hypothesis to be compatible with the vulnerability perspective indicating that perceived vulnerability increases females' fear that a nonsexual crime could escalate into a sexual vicitimization (Fisher et al., 2016).

Additionally, scholars have also argued that females' levels of fear of crime are a function of their socialization process. According to the socialization perspective, individuals are socialized by both primary and secondary sources (Lane et al., 2014). While parents and friends are considered primary sources of socialization, media is described as a type of secondary source that also plays a part in a person's socialization process (Lane et al., 2014). When discussing the development of fear over the life course, Marks (1987) explained that fear is typically a learned emotion taught in the process of socialization. Parents often tell their children the things and situations they should or should not be fearful of and, consequently, a person's fear throughout their life is likely to be a function of these shared socialization messages about risk, danger, and fear (Lane et al., 2014; Marks, 1978).

Building upon this premise – that fear is a learned emotion (Lane et al., 2014; Marks, 1978) – the socialization perspective argues that through both primary and secondary sources, girls are taught that females are more likely to be victims of certain crimes (i.e., rape) by certain offenders, at certain times, and in certain places (Lane et al., 2014; Scott Jr, 2003). However, even though these messages are usually not based on factual statistics about females' victimization patterns, these messages would teach a woman to fear certain people (e.g. strangers) and avoid specific places (e.g., dark places) (Lane et al., 2014). Similarly, males also receive socialization messages that may affect their fear, but these messages are usually centered around the idea that males should be tough and should not fear being victims of a crime (Goodey, 1997; Lane et al., 2014).

Multiple scholars have used these frameworks to understand fear of crime across sex with most studies finding consistent support not only to the influence of socialization, but also that much of females' disproportionate levels of fear of crime are a function of their fear of sexual victimization (e.g., rape) (Fisher et al., 2016; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). For instance, Hilinski (2009) incorporated measures that allowed for the consideration of situational characteristics (e.g. time of the day) and the victim-offender relationship (e.g. stranger or acquaintance). Consistent with previous studies, Hilinski (2009) found that even when victim-offender relationship is accounted for, females' fear of sexual assault and rape impacts their fear of other crimes (e.g., burglary, robbery, and assault).

Further, when examining specific populations, the extant literature has identified high rates of sexual victimization among college students, which has led scholars to focus in on college students' fear of victimization, in particular, their fear of sexual assault/rape (Allen, 2013; Archer, 2019; Fedina et al., 2016; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009). A plethora of studies have found support for the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis within this population (Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009). More specifically, findings have indicated that when measures of fear of rape and sexual assault were included, female college and university students are more fearful than their male counterparts of nonsexual crimes (Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009). Additionally, research has demonstrated that when fear of rape and sexual assault were not considered, college and university women and men fear crime equally (Fisher & Sloan III, 2003).

The Impact of Past Victimization on Fear of Sexual Assault

Given the impact that perceived risk and vulnerability have on fear of sexual violence, studies have also focused on how prior victimization influences fear of sexual assault. Considering the higher rates of rape and sexual assault reported among females, several researchers hypothesized that women's higher levels of fear of victimization were predominantly a result of their previous experiences with this type of victimization – whether direct or vicarious. According to Lane and collegues (2014), building upon the assumption that personal victimization may increase or decrease fear, many studies have attempted to measure personal victimization as a predictor of fear. Nevertheless, although initially it seemed obvious to assume that people who have had past experiences with victimization would be more fearful than others, studies on the topic have presented mixed results with regard to previous victimization in predicting fear of crime (Lane et al., 2014). While some scholars have found that being victimized was not a statistically significant predictor of fear (e.g., Ferraro, 1995), other studies suggest that previous personal crime and rape victimizations increase fear (e.g., Bachman et al., 2011; Ferguson & Mindel, 2007; Kanan & Pruitt, 2002).

Additionally, although early studies on this topic have focused primary on personal firsthand victimization (Lane et al., 2014), more recent research has focused on what is called indirect victimization (Archer, 2019; Fisher et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2014). While direct victimization is said to be an individual's personal experience with crime, indirect victimization takes place when an individual is made aware of the victimization of others through sources, such as people they know, social media, Internet, or television (Lane et al., 2014).

In a recent study, Archer (2019) examined the relationship between victimization (both direct and indirect) and fear of crime, through the lens of Agnew's General Strain Theory. In this

study, Archer (2019) hypothesized that as sexual and physical victimization are great strains leading to delinquency and crime, prior victimization could also influence negative emotional states, such as fear (Archer, 2019). Consistent with prior research (Bachman et al., 2011; Ferguson & Mindel, 2007; Kanan & Pruitt, 2002) the findings indicated a statistically significant association between direct and vicarious prior sexual assault victimization and fear of sexual assault, and that males were less likely to fear sexual assault than females (Archer, 2019). Further, when prior sexual victimization and self-protective behaviors were combined, for both females and males, he found that participants who had been sexually victimized or knew someone who had been sexually victimized were more likely to report engaging in self-protective behaviors (Archer, 2019). This finding seems to suggest that individuals who are more fearful may be more inclined to engage in behaviors to prevent their victimization, which could have a significant impact on their quality of life.

Individual Perceptions of Victims and Fear of Sexual Assault

Most studies have focused on explaining differences in fear across sex by testing the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis and how females' fear of sexual crimes may affect their fear of nonsexual crimes as well (Davies et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2016; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; May et al., 2010; Rader et al., 2007). More recently, scholars have begun to examine this phenomenon from the male perspective by attempting to answer the question "are males less fearful of sexual victimization?" (DeJong et al., 2020). Notably, these studies hypothesize that males' reliance on rape myths and false beliefs about male and female sexual victimization affects their attitudes toward victims of sexual victimization (Davies et al.,

2012; Davies et al., 2008), which could potentially influence their own appraisal of risk and fear of sexual assault.

According to Aronowitz, Lambert, and Davidoff (2012) the concept of rape myths as a set of "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistenly held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Brownmiller, 2005, p. 12) was first introduced in the 1970s - 1980s. Specifically, the studies conducted by Martha Burt (1980, 1998) are of great importance, since she was one of the first researchers to investigate rape-supportive attitudes in studies about rape and sexual assault. Once this potential connection between rape myths and fear was first established, several other studies have attempted to explore this topic alongside explanations for the different patterns seen in sexual victimization of both females and males (e.g.,Davies et al., 2012; DeJong et al., 2020; Rosenstein & Carroll, 2015; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). As a result of such investigations, some scholars have argued that the adherence to traditional gender roles for males and females, as well as to stereotypical views of women are also associated with the acceptance of rape myths (Combs-Lane & Smith, 2002).

Later, a growing body of research began to investigate male rape myth acceptance and how that may impact males' attitudes toward sexual victimization, such as the study conducted by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992). According to Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) there are three common myths about male rape - one, that it does not happen to males, two, that if it does it is the victim's fault, and three, that it is not traumatizing for males - and these myths can be categorized as: denial myths, blame myths, and trauma myths. Although some studies have found that males are more likely to support rape myths than females (Davies et al., 2012; DeJong et al., 2020; Rosenstein & Carroll, 2015), not many studies have

attempted to investigate if and/or how males' acceptance of male rape myths impacts their fear of sexual victimization, which leaves a gap in the literature that warrants further investigation.

As previously discussed, when accounting for females' disproportionate levels of fear of crime – sexual and nonsexual crimes – some researches have observed the impact of socialization messages on females' fear (Fisher et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2014) supporting that, since fear is a learned emotion, certain socialization messages teach girls what to fear (Lane et al., 2014). These socialization messages are often not supported by empirical evidence, but rather based in myth that increase females' fear (Lane et al., 2014). One example is the idea that most sexual offenses are perpetrated by strangers (Lane et al., 2014). In reality, most sexual crimes are perpetrated by an offender that is known to the victim – an intimate partner, a friend, or acquaintance (Fisher et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2014). Thust, it is important that researchers strive to investigate the potential link between male rape myth acceptance and their fear of sexual victimization. It may be possible to infer that their beliefs related to *denial myths* – as proposed by Struckman-Johnson, and Struckman-Johnson (1992) – may impact their fear of being victims of sexual crimes.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Current Study

Numerous studies have investigated individual characteristics associated with victimization, as well as identified patterns of victimization (Fisher et al., 2016). However, considering that most investigations are conducted from the female perspective (Davies et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2016) other victim populations, such as males are often neglected (Davies et al., 2012; Davies et al., 2008), which may lead to the perpetuation of inaccurate social constructions, myths, and stereotypical views of rape and gender (Davies et al., 2012; DeJong et al., 2020). More specifically, recent investigations indicate that what is known today about gender differences and rape may be a result of many factors. For instance, some studies report that traditional attitudes and stereotypes towards rape, as well as male rape myths acceptance (MRMA) (DeJong et al., 2020; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992) have been consistently associated with higher levels of underreporting of crime among males (Davies et al., 2012; Frese et al., 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Considering that sexual victimization of both males and females has been reported to be considerably high among college students (DeJong et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2009; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992), the current study focuses on male rape myths and how false beliefs about sexual victimization among male victims may affect fear of sexual victimization among college students.

The primary purpose of the current study is to investigate the influence of male rape myths among male and female college students and if and/or how these prejudicial beliefs may impact fear of sexual assault on college campuses. To achieve this purpose, the current study explores the following research questions:

1. To what extent do college students fear being the victim of sexual violence?

    a. Do students feel safe from rape and sexual assault on campus?

    b. Are students more fearful of situations involving stranger offenders compared to known offenders?

    c. Do students avoid certain places and/or take precautionary measures to prevent being victimized on campus?

2. What individual-level characteristics influence college students' fear of sexual violence and perceptions of safety on campus?

    a. Notably, drawing from the extensive body of research suggesting an effect of individual perceptions on fear of sexual assault, how do individuals' degree of male rape myth adherence influence fear of sexual victimization by strangers, as well as known offenders?

Data and Sample

The current study is based on data collected from a convenience sample of 380 undergraduate students from a southern, mid-sized university. Students were surveyed while on campus, and the questions were designed to assess students' perceptions and attitudes toward rape, controlling for situational and demographic factors. After the survey was administrated, the study had a sample of 376 participants. Specifically, the Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's

(1992) rape myth acceptance scale was used to assess students' perceptions of rape, and the instrument included a variety of questions related to demographic, as well as behavioral characteristics of students.

Measures

Dependent Variables

The current study incorporates four dependent variables. Each variable was originally measured on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree), and was recoded into a dichotomous variable with two response categories agree (0) and disagree (1). The first dependent variable examined in the present study is feeling safe on campus, which was measured by respondent's agreement to the following item: "I feel safe from rape and sexual assault on campus." This variable was recoded into a dichotomous variable, with two response categories "agree" (0) and "disagree" (1).

The second dependent variable explored in the current study is fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender, and it was gleaned from the item in the data set which stated, "I am very afraid of being raped or sexually assaulted by a stranger." To examine any differences between fear of stranger versus known offenders, a third dependent variable was included that explored fear of sexual assault by a known offender. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following item, "I am very afraid of being raped or sexually assaulted by an acquaintance/friend, family member, or significant other."

Finally, an item was included to investigate students' crime prevention behavior on campus, specifically, if students avoided certain places on campus. For this variable, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement, "I avoid certain places

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on campus out of concern that I may be victimized." Similar to all other dependent variables, this variable was recoded into a dichotomous variable, with two response categories "agree" (0) and "disagree" (1).

Independent Variables

Male Rape Myth Acceptance. The independent variable of focus for the current study is male rape myth acceptance, and it is based on a series of nine items from the Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's (1992) Male Rape Myth Acceptance (MRMA) scale. The scale is based on the three dimensions of male rape myths identified by the authors in their study, which are: denial myths (male rape cannot happen), blame myths (men are to blame for being sexually assaulted), and trauma myths (men do not experience trauma related tp their sexual assault). Items of their scale include questions, such as "It is impossible for a women to rape a man", and "most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not being more careful." Participants were asked to rank their level of agreement to each item on a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4). All items were used to create a summative scale with higher scores reflecting greater adherence to male rape myth acceptance (Cronbach alpha =.816).

Past Sexual Victimization. Past sexual victimization is also an independent variable within the current study. This variable was based on four items that asked about any past attempted/completed sexual vicitimization. Items included the following questions: "Have you ever had sexual intercourse (i.e. vaginal, oral, or anal sex) when you did not want to because someone, male or female, threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?"; "Has anyone, male or female, ever attempted to make you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex against your will?"; "Has anyone, male or female, ever made you

have sexual intercourse when you did not want to by using continuous verbal pressure, threatening to end your relationship, threatening to exclude you from a group, and/or threatening to damage your reputation or spread rumors about you?" and finally, "Excluding unwanted vaginal, oral, and/or anal sex, have you ever had any unwanted sexual contact such as kissing, petting, or fondling with somenone because you felt threatened or some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) was used?" Respondents were asked to respond "yes" (1) or "no" (0) to all four items, and these items were later dichotomized to create the past victimization variable, recoded as any past attempted/completed sexual victimization (1) and no past attempted/completed sexual victimization (0).

Criminal Justice Major. Considering that the participants were college students, respondents were asked to identify their major. This variable was coded as a string response, and participants were instructed to write in their major. Responses were used to recode this variable into a dichotomous item reflecting whether respondents were majoring in Criminal Justice. Criminal Justice majors were coded as "1" while all other majors were coded as "0."

Victim Related Courses. For this variable, respondents were asked if they had taken any of the following courses: Victimology; Race, Class, Gender, and Crime; Violence Against Women; Family Violence. This variable was included in the study to assess respondents' exposure to issues related to subjects that may devote greater attention to violence against women and/or sexual violence. This variable was dichotomized into "yes" (1) or "no" (0) to indicate whether or not a participant had taken such a course.

Greek Affiliation. Considering that greek affiliation has been found to increase the risk of sexual assault victimization in college campuses (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991; Franklin, 2016; Kalof, 1993; Sawyer & Schulken, 1997), this variable was also included. Participants were

asked if they were currently part of a fraternity or sorority. This variable was also dichotomous, coded as "yes" (1) and "no" (0).

Demographics. Several key demographic variables were included in the current analyses. First, biological sex is a control variable for the current study. Participants were asked to report their biological sex, and four responses were initially provided for this item: male (0), female (1), transgender (2), and other (3). Later, considering the low number of participants who reported being transgender and/or other, this variable was recoded as a dichotomy with the two categories being, "male" (0) and "female" (1). *Race* was also included as a control variable. Participants were asked to report their identified race, and the categories provided were: White (0), Black/African American (1), Asian (2), Native American/Alaskan Native (3), and other (4). Considering that the majority of respondents (83.2%) reported "White" as their race (n=313), this variable was dichotomized into "White" (0) and "non-White" (1). *Age* was also accounted for in analyses with the age of the paticipants measured as a continuous variable. All participants were asked to report what age they were in years, at the time they filled out the survey. Participants were also asked to report their sexual orientation, and five answer choices were provided, as follows: Heterosexual (0), Bisexual (1), Homosexual (2), Pansexual (3), Asexual (4), and other (5). The majority of participants (94.4%) identified themselves as heterosexual (n=355), thus this variable was recoded into a dichotomous variable with two responses, "heterosexual" (0) and "LGBQ/other" (1)

Analytic Plan

The analysis for this study was conducted in stages. Initially, univariate statistics were estimated to observe the distribution of the variables and characteristics of the sample. As a result, frequencies and percentages of all variables were provided as well as measures of central tendency,

giving the researcher insights to explore the trends within the data. When conducting univariate analysis, there are several ways to summarize and describe data (Gau, 2018). For the present study, the percentages and raw numbers were provided for the categorical variables for they allow the researcher to observe the distribution of participants among the categories, whereas measures of central tendency, specifically the mean, allowed the researcher to observe the mid-point, and/or the average response for the continuos variables (Gau, 2018). Next, bivariate analyses were employed. At this stage, bivariate relationships between the variables were examined to observe how each independent variable was associated with each of the outcomes. Specifically, bivariate analyses serve the purpose of assessing the existence - or lack thereof – of an association between each of the dependent variables and each of the independent variables. Specifically, Chi-square tests of independence were utilized to examine the association between the dichotomous variables and each of the outcome variables, while the association between the scale variables and each of the outcomes was explored with independent sample t-tests. At this stage, bivariate analysis allowed the reasearcher to examine the significance and directionality of the associations observed. Finally, four logistic regression models were estimated at the multivariate level to explore the relationships among all variables used in this study and each of the dichotomous variables. Considering that the dependent variables - were binary - coded with only two response categories, "agree" (0) or "disagree" (1) –logistic regression was the appropriate multivariate statistical test to be employed for the four outcome variables.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Univariate Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all the variables used in the current study. The total sample for the study is comprised of 376 respondents. The vast majority of the sample (78.5%) reported feeling safe from rape and sexual assault on campus. Regarding respondents' fear of being victimized by a stranger versus known offender, 22.5% of respondents reported being afraid of being raped or sexually assaulted by someone they know, and 50.4% of respondents reported being afraid of being victimized by a stranger. Further, when examining the descriptives of the crime prevention behavior variable, the majority of respondents (54.8%) reported avoiding places on campus out of concern of being victimized. Importantly, when examining the male rape myth acceptance scale, developed by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992), the overall values presented a mean score of 18.02, a mode of 12.00, and a median of 18.00 (SD= 5.332, R= 11.00 – 31.00). The reported score for the participants for the MRMA scale fell between 11.00—31.00, with a mean of 18.02, and a standard deviation of 5.332.

Regarding the variables associated with participant demographics, the majority of the sample is female (64.1%), White (83.2%), heterosexual (94.4%), and the average age of participants was approximately 19 years. Exploring participants' major and their experience with victimization/crime courses, the majority of the sample (87.2 %) reported being a non-CJ major, and only 11.2% of the sample reported taking a crime/victimization course. Only 22.3% reported

being in a fraternity or sorority. Lastly, exploring past sexual victimization experiences of the sample revealed that most participants had not been sexually victimized (72.9%), however, a sizable number had experienced an attempted/completed sexual victimization in their lifetimes (27.1%).

Table 1 Characteristics of Sample (n = 376)

	n	%	$\bar{x}$	s	Range
Feeling safe on campus					
Yes	295	78.5	--	--	--
No	76	20.2	--	--	--
Fear of SA by stranger offender					
Yes	188	50.4	--	--	--
No	185	49.6	--	--	--
Fear of SA by known offender					
Yes	84	22.5	--	--	--
No	289	77.5	--	--	--
Crime prevention behavior on campus					
Yes	206	54.8	--	--	--
No	164	43.6	--	--	--
Male		35.4	--	--	--
	133				
Female		64.1	--	--	--
	241				
Race					
White	313	83.2	--	--	--
Non-white	59	15.7	--	--	--
Sexuality					
Heterosexual	355	94.4	--	--	--
LGBQ	20	5.3	--	--	--
Greek affiliation					
Yes	84	22.3	--	--	--
No	291	77.4	--	--	--
Past Victimization					
Yes	102	27.1	--	--	--
No	274	72.9			
Past Victimization Course					
Yes	42	11.2	--	--	--
No	334	88.8	--	--	--
CJ Major					
Non-Major	328	87.2	--	--	--
CJ Major	47	12.5	--	--	--
Age	--	--	19.66	2.97	18-49
MRMA Scale			18.02	5.3332	11.00 -31.00

Bivariate Results

Next, bivariate analyses were employed to examine the relationship between variables, and the significant results of the Chi-Square test of independence and t-test are presented. As expected by the researcher, cross-tabulation results revealed a significant association between respondent's biological sex and the dependent variable feeling safe on campus ($\chi2 = 16.242$; df = 1; p =.000). More specifically, a significantly greater percentage of females (26.9%) reported feeling unsafe on campus in comparison to males (9.2%). A significant relationship was also found between respondent's biological sex and all the other dependent variables of the study. Specifically, cross-tabulation results revealed a significant association between participant's biological sex and the dependent variable fear of sexual assault by a known offender ($\chi2 = 12.032$; df = 1; p =.000), with a significantly higher percentage of females (27.9%) reporting being afraid of sexual assault by a known offender in comparison to males (12.2%). Regarding biological sex and the dependent variable fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender ($\chi2 = 104.405$; df = 1; p =.000), a larger percentage of females (70.0%) reported being fearful of sexual assault victimization by a stranger offender than males (14.5%). Similar findings were observed between participant's biological sex and the dependent variable crime prevention behavior on campus ($\chi2 = 45.082$; df = 1; p =.000), with a significantly greater percentage of females (57.1%) reporting avoiding places on campus out of concern of being victimized than males (20.8%). Interestingly, a significant association was also found between participant's race and the fear of sexual assault by a known offender variable ($\chi2 = 14.079$; df = 1; p =.000), with a significantly greater percentage of non-Whites (41.4%) reporting being fearful of being sexually victimized by a known offender than Whites (19.0%).

Further, cross-tabulation analysis also showed that participant's experience with any past attempted/completed sexual victimization and the dependent variable feeling safe on campus ($\chi2$

= 8.878; df = 1; p =.004) were significantly associated. Specifically, a significantly greater percentage of respondents who had had any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (30.7%) reported feeling unsafe on campus when compared to those who did not have any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (16.7%). Likewise, a significant relationship was identified between participant's experience with past attempted/completed sexual vicitimization and the dependent variable fear of sexual assault by a known offender ($\chi 2 = 6.305$; df = 1; p =.018). More specificatly, a larger percentage of participants who had had any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (31.4%) reported being afraid of sexual assault by a known offender in comparison to those who did not have any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (19.2%). Regarding past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience and the dependent variable fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender ($\chi 2 = 9.969$; df = 1; p =.002), a significantly greater percentage of participants who had had any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (63.7%) reported being fearful of sexual assault victimization by a stranger offender than those who did not have any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (45.4%). Finally, similar findings were also seen between participant's past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience and the dependent variable crime prevention behavior on campus ($\chi 2 = 5.778$; df = 1; p =.019), with a greater percentage of participants who had had any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (54.5%) reporting avoiding places on campus out of concern of being victimized than those who did not have any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience (40.5%). None of the other categorical, dichotomous independent variables were significantly associated with the outcome variables at the bivariate level.

Independent sample t-tests were also employed to investigate significant associations between the continuous independent variables and the dichotomous outcome variables. When examining age and the MRMA scale scores and the dependent variable fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender, several significant associated were identified. First, age and the dependent variable fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender (t=2.068, p=.039) were significantly associated. Those who reported being more fearful of being sexually victimized by a stranger were on average younger (M = 19.35, SD = 2.6) than those who report not being fearful of sexual assault by strangers (M = 19.98, SD = 3.29). Second, when examining the MRMA scale and the outcome variable fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender (t=3.319, p=.001), those who reported being fearful of being sexually victimized by a stranger scored lower (M = 17.1; SD = 5.0) on average on the MRMA scale compared to those who reported not being afraid of being sexually victimized by a stranger offender (M = 18.9, SD = 5.4). Similar results were seen between the MRMA scale scores and the outcome variable crime prevention behavior on campus (t=2.423, p=.016). Participants who reported avoiding places on campus out of concern of being victimized reported lower scores on average (M = 17.27, SD= 4.85), when compared to those who reported not avoiding places on campus (M = 18.59, SD = 5.61).

Multivariate Results

Finally, four multivariate logistic regression models were estimated to examine how all the independent variables influenced each of the four outcome variables. The total sample of the current study was composed of 376 respondents, and of those, 360 respondents were included in Model 1 (Table 2), representing 95.7% of the overall sample. Notably, when analyzing the results of the logistic regression in Model 1, a significant multivariate association existed between the

independent variable biological sex and the outcome variable feeling unsafe on campus (b= 1.068, SE = .358, p< .001). Specifically, the odds of females reporting feeling unsafe on campus are 2.9 times the odds of males, holding all else constant. Further, past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization also significantly influneced participants' fear for their safety on campus (b= .737, SE = .284, p< .001). Specifically, the odds of those who reported having had a past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization experience feeling unsafe on campus was 2 times the odds of those who did not report a past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization experience. The pseudo-r-square indicates that 11.5% of the variation in the outcome variable feeling unsafe on campus is explained by the independent variables included in Model 1.

Table 2 Logistic Regression Predicting Feeling Unsafe on Campus (n = 360)

Model 1	b(SE)	OR
Age	-0.010 (0.048)	0.990
Greek Affiliation (1=yes)	0.353 (0.314)	1.423
Victim Courses	-0.142 (0.491)	0.868
Biological Sex (1= female)	1.068 (0.358)	2.910*
Race (1= Non-white)	0.227 (0.380)	1.255
Sexuality (1=LGBQ)	-0.278 (0.680)	0.757
Past Victimization (1=yes)	0.737 (0.284)	2.089*
CJ Major (1=yes)	-0.635 (0.508)	0.530
MRMA	-0.019 (0.029)	0.981
Nagelkerke Pseudo- r^2	0.115	
-2 Log-Likelihood	340.961	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

In Model 2 (Table 3), of the 376 participants of the study, 362 respondents were included in the Model, representing 96.3% of the overall sample. In Model 2, biological sex, race and past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization were significantly associated with the dependent

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variable fear of sexual assault by a known offender. Specifically, the odds of females reporting being afraid of being sexually assaulted by a known offender was 2.8 times the odds of males, when holding all else constant (b= 1.048, SE = .344, p< .001). Regarding participant's race, the odds of non-Whites reporting being afraid of being sexually assaulted by a known offender were 3.7 times the odds of Whites (b= 1.324, SE = .335, p< .001). Further, regarding participant's past sexual assault experience and fear of sexual assault by a known offender, the odds of those who reported a past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization being afraid of sexually assault by a known offender were 1.9 times the odds of those who did not have a past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization experience (b= .689, SE = .286, p< .001). The pseudo r-square indicates that 14.1% of the variation in the outcome variable fear of sexual assault by a known offender is explained by the independent variables included in Model 2.

Table 3 Logistic Regression Predicting Fear of Known Offender (n = 362)

Model 2	b(SE)	OR
Age	-0.031 (0.055)	0.970
Greek Affiliation (1=yes)	-0.007 (0.329)	0.993
Victim Courses	-0.099 (0.482)	0.906
Biological Sex (1= female)	1.048 (0.344)	2.853*
Race (1= Non-white)	1.324 (0.335)	3.758*
Sexuality (1=LGBQ)	0.139 (0.640)	1.149
Past Victimization (1=yes)	0.689 (0.286)	1.992*
CJ Major (1=yes)	-0.552 (0.496)	0.576
MRMA	0.023 (0.028)	1.023
Nagelkerke Pseudo- r²	0.141	
-2 Log-Likelihood	347.379	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

In Model 3 (Table 4), of the 376 participants of the study, 362 respondents were included in the Model, representing 96.3% of the overall sample. Similar to the results seen in the previous Model, in Model 3 biological sex, race and past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization were significantly associated with the dependent variable fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender. Specifically, the odds of females reporting being afraid of sexual assault by a stranger offender were 13.2 times the odds of males, when holding all else constant (b= 2.582, SE = .316, p< .001). Regarding participant's race, the odds of non-Whites reporting being afraid of being sexually assaulted by a stranger offender were 2.7 times the odds of Whites (b= .998, SE = .377, p< .001).

Table 4 Logistic Regression Predicting Fear of Stranger Offender (n = 362)

Model 3	b(SE)	OR
Age	-0.085 (0.047)	0.919
Greek Affiliation (1=yes)	0.180 (0.304)	1.198
Victim Courses	-0.245 (0.440)	0.783
Biological Sex (1= female)	2.582 (0.316)	13.218*
Race (1= Non-white)	0.998 (0.377)	2.714*
Sexuality (1=LGBQ)	-0.848 (0.621)	0.428
Past Victimization (1=yes)	0.674 (0.292)	1.961*
CJ Major (1=yes)	-0.391 (0.442)	0.676
MRMA	-0.011 (0.026)	0.989
Nagelkerke Pseudo- r^2	0.395	
-2 Log-Likelihood	374.673	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Further, regarding participant's past sexual assault experience and fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender, the odds of those who reported a past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization being afraid of sexual assault by a stranger offender were 1.9 times the odds of those

who did not have a past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization experience (b= .674, SE = .292, p< .001). The pseudo r-square indicates that 39.5% of the variation in the outcome variable fear of sexual assault by a stranger offender is explained by the independent variables included in Model 3.

In Model 4 (Table 5), of the 376 participants of the study, 359 respondents were included in the Model, representing 95.5% of the overall sample. Consistent with extent research and the previous models, in Model 4 biological sex was significantly associated with the outcome variable crime prevention behavior on campus. Specifically, the odds of females reporting avoiding places on campus out of concern of being victimized were 5.2 times the odds of males, when holding all else constant (b= 1.666, SE = .279, p< .001).

Table 5 Logistic Regression Predicting Crime Prevention Behavior (n = 359)

Model 4	b(SE)	OR
Age	-0.004 (0.038)	0.996
Greek Affiliation (1=yes)	0.220 (0.275)	1.247
Victim Courses	-0.180 (0.390)	0.836
Biological Sex (1= female)	1.666 (0.279)	5.291*
Race (1= Non-white)	-0.241 (0.331)	0.786
Sexuality (1=LGBQ)	1.172 (0.574)	3.229*
Past Victimization (1=yes)	0.297 (0.257)	1.345
CJ Major (1=yes)	0.205 (0.386)	1.227
MRMA	0.014 (0.024)	1.014
Nagelkerke Pseudo- r^2	0.187	
-2 Log-Likelihood	439.972	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Interestingly, although in the present investigation respondent's sexuality showed to have no significant association at the bivariate level, significant results were observed when controlling

for other variables at the multivariate level in this model. Specifically, the odds of LGBQ participants reporting that they avoid places on campus out of concern of being victimized were 3.2 times the odds of heterosexual respondents (b= 1.172, SE = .574, p< .001). The Nagelkerke pseudo r-square indicates that 18.7% of the variation in the outcome variable crime prevention behavior on campus is explained by the independent variables included in Model 4.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Given high rates of sexual victimization among college students, numerous studies have investigated students' fear of victimization, in particular, fear of sexual assault and rape on campus (Allen, 2013; Archer, 2019; Fedina et al., 2016; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009), and to what extent fear affects their lives on campus (e.g., avoidance of certain places) (Fisher & Sloan III, 2003). The current study adds to the existing literature by exploring college students' fear of sexual assault with a specific focus on how respondents' demographics (e.g., biological sex, race, sexuality), past attempted/completed sexual victimization, and acceptance of male rape myths influence fear of sexual victimization by strangers and known offenders, as well as feelings of safety on campus and avoidance behavior. To achieve this purpose, the study explored two main research questions: "To what extent do college students fear being the victim of sexual violence?" and "What individual-level characteristics influence college students' fear of sexual violence and perceptions of safety on campus?" Results will be discussed in light of these inquiries.

Specifically, in order to better explore the first research question, the current study subdivided this question into three more specific questions, which are: (1a) "Do students feel safe from rape and sexual assault on campus?"; (1b) "Are students more fearful of situations involving stranger offenders compared to known offender?" and (1c) "Do students avoid certain places and/or take precautionary measures to prevent being victimized on campus?" Regarding students'

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feelings of safety from sexual victimization on campus, results indicated that male students feel safer from rape and sexual assault on campus when compared to females. Importantly, this finding is supported by previous research examining fear of crime among college students which has found strong and consistent evidence that biological sex predicts fear of both sexual and nonsexual crimes (Archer, 2019; Ferraro, 1996; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009). Drawing from numerous previous investigations, females' fear of sexual violence is likely tied to their differential risk of sexual victimization compared to males. As previously discussed, this differential risk has been consistently reported in studies of sexual assault and rape (Fisher et al., 2016; Hilinski, 2009). Therefore, it is possible that this result is tied to the fact that the likelihood of women experiencing this type of victimization is higher in contrast to males' risk.

Although no single theorical perspective can account for the observed pattern, the vulnerability perspective may be an especially helpful explanation for this finding. Specifically, from the lens of the vulnerability perspective, it is possible that since females are the most common targets of sexual victimization, they may perceive themselves to be more vulnerable to rape and sexual assault (Fisher et al., 2016), hence the differences in their feeling of safety on campus. Alternatively, the difference observed across sexes in feelings of safety on campus can be attributed to the differential socialization of males and females. More specifically, the socialization perspective holds that through both primary (e.g., family and friends) and secondary sources (e.g., media) of socialization, females and males are taught to fear different things (Lane et al., 2014). Drawing from this perspective, females are taught to be more fearful of rape and sexual assault (Lane et al., 2014) than males, who are socialized to not view themselves as potential victims of rape and sexual assault.

Additionally, the findings indicated that individuals who had had a past sexual assault victimization experience also reported feeling more unsafe from rape and sexual assault on campus than those who did not have any past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization experience. Similar to the previous findings, this result is consistent with past research examining the relationship between fear of sexual assault and past sexual assault victimization (Archer, 2019; Fisher et al., 2016). Among the consequences of sexual assault victimization, such as changes in behavior, anxiety, and depression (Archer, 2019; Shin, 2011), the increase in fear of sexual assault has been considered the strongest emotional response among college students who have been victims of such crimes (Barberet et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2016; Fisher & Sloan III, 2003; Wilcox et al., 2006). Taking into account the findings of the extant literature, it is possible that to those who had had a past sexual victimization experience, feeling unsafe from rape and sexual assault is an emotional response directly associated with their previous victimization. According to Archer (2019), this can be explained from the perspective of Agnew's General Strain Theory, to say that since past sexual victimization is likely to lead to adverse outcomes such as, depression and anxiety, it is possible that the overall feeling of unsafety from sexual victimization on campus reported by 30.7% of students is being driven by their past sexual assault victimization experience.

Before proceeding to discuss other findings, it is important to mention, that a limitation of the study is the fact that this was a sexual assault-crime only emphasis, meaning that the measures utilized to assess fear asked specifically about "fear of rape and sexual assault." In light of that, the fact that a greater number of females reported feeling unsafe on campus, does not necessarily mean that males feel safe. For instance, in a study conducted to investigate gender differences in use of self-protective behaviors on campus, Woolnough (2009) found that although women were more likely to avoid places out of concern of being victimized, males were more likely to carry

self-protection devices (e.g., pocket knives). Therefore, future studies should investigate other types of victimization on campus, in addition to sexual victimization, in order to better understand males' fear of crime on college campuses and how it may differ from female students.

When evaluating the findings with regard to differences in fear of sexual violence by stranger versus known offenders, the current results indicate that females are more afraid than males of being sexually victimized by stranger offenders, confirming the results of prior research (Barberet et al., 2003; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997). Additionally, students who had reported any past sexual victimization experience also reported being more fearful of being sexually victimized by both known and stranger offenders than those who did not have a past attempted/completed sexual assault victimization, which is also consistent with past research (e.g.,Bachman et al., 2011; Ferguson & Mindel, 2007; Kanan & Pruitt, 2002).

In both cases, however, a greater percentage of students were fearful of sexual victimization by a stranger offender – findings consistent with previous research that has found that female college students who have been sexually assaulted are more fearful of stranger offenders than known offenders (Archer, 2019; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997). These results are particularly relevant in light of the fact that recent studies have shown that the majority of female college students who have been victims of sexual assault knew the offender (Fisher et al., 2009). A possible explanation for these findings has been identified in research as the adherence to "stranger rape myths" (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997), which reinforce beliefs that have long been discredited, and are not supported by statistical evidence about rape/sexual assault, as well as the victim-offender relationship in cases of sexual violence. Notably, although these findings are of great value, one limitation of the present study is the fact that our sample was gleaned from a urban college campus, which is located in an area marked by the presence of members of the larger

community (i.e., individuals from outside of the university). This may have impacted students'

fear of being victimized by strangers on campus, since they are aware of the constant presence of

non-university individuals around the campus at all times. Therefore, future research should

investigate if/how campus location impacts students fear of being victimized by a stranger versus

known offender.

Further, the results of Model 2 indicated that non-Whites were more afraid of being

sexually assaulted than Whites by both known and stranger offenders than Whites. As reported by

the National Violence Against Women survey, Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan

native women have a higher risk of being sexually victimized when compared to White women

(Basile & Smith, 2011; Crouch et al., 2000; Rickert et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 2012). In light

of this fact, and considering that race has been identified as a factor related to higher levels of rape

and sexual assault victimization (Thompson et al., 2012), it is possible that non-White students

reported being more fearful than whites of being sexually victimized by both known and stranger

offenders because of the differential risk of sexual victimization among racial minorities.

Additionally, besides victimization risk, previous studies have also suggested that higher levels of

fear among racial minorities may be driven by their enhanced exposure to "incivilities" in

predominantly disadvantaged neighborhoods (Covington & Taylor, 1991) which is presumed to

impact their fear of crime, regardless of their actual victimization experience (Mears et al., 2013).

Notably, this leads to another limitation of the present study which did not account for

neighborhood racial composition, and campus geographical location. Thus, it is important that

future research control for these factors in order to better explain minorities higher levels of fear

of sexual victimization by both known and stranger.

Further, this study also investigated whether students avoided certain places on campus out of concern of being victimized. The current study suggests that both females and students who had had any past attempted/completed sexual victimization experience are more likely to avoid places on campus out of concern of being victimized. Notably, both the findings that females and individuals who have been sexually victimized are more likely to adopt avoidance behaviors when compared to their counterparts are consistent with prior studies (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997; Woolnough, 2009). Although, the exact cause for this pattern is not completely clear, it is possible that fear of sexual assault, past sexual assault victimization, and self-protective behavior are interrelated. Specifically, in a study conducted to investigate this potential interrelationship, Archer (2019) found that fear mediates the relationship between past sexual assault victimization and self-protective behavior, such as avoiding places. According to Archer (2019), individuals who have had a past sexual assault victimization experience express higher levels of fear of sexual assault, as well as engage in self-protective behavior. Although the limitations of the present study limit our conclusions, taking into account the study's findings in all four models, it is possible to suggest the possibility of a mediating effect of fear that could potentially explain the relationship between past sexual assault victimization and engaging in self-protective behavior. Thus, future research estimate models that explore mediation and preferably, explore this potential association utilizing longitudinal data to account for time-order in this relationship.

Several different important implications arise from the current findings. First, considering that the majority of both females and students who have been sexual victimized reported being more fearful of sexual victimization by strangers, it is possible that their self-protective measures are targeting protection mainly from strangers. If true, this pattern is worrisome, considering that acquaintance rape against college women is more common than stranger rape (Fisher et al., 2009).

Interestingly, in the present study, variables were included to investigate the potential effect of both major and exposure to victim related courses on participants' fear, and it was expected that students' exposure to subjects related to sexual victimization would impact their levels of fear on campus, notably their potential belief in rape myths (e.g., the myth of stranger rape). Nevertheless, no significant results were observed between these variables and the outcome variables examined, which may suggest that students should be exposed to other types educational programs, such as peer education that may have more of an impact of students' perceptions/beliefs surrounding sexual violence. Specifically, as a result of prior findings related to the impact of rape myths, college campuses have redirected their focus to prevention programs that target a change in students' beliefs and attitudes toward rape. Studies, however, have pointed to the fact that traditional programs conducted by professional educators have less of an effect on students when compared to peer education efforts targeting sexual violence (Kress et al., 2006; McMahon et al., 2014). According to Kress and colleagues (2006), students are not only more likely to devote their attention to peers but also to share opinions and personal experiences with them. Therefore, college and university administrators should keep in mind not only who are the most effective communicators of the correct messages about sexual victimization on campus (prevention and response), but also the effective method for conveying the information.

Another key finding of the current study was that participants who reported being sexual minority (LGBQ) were more likely to avoid places on campus out of concern of being victimized. The current study asked this question broadly, thus it is uncertain if these results are related to specifically to students' fear of sexual victimization, or other forms of victimization on campus. However, considering that studies have identified this specific student population as being at a greater risk of certain types of victimization (e.g., peer victimization) when compared to nonLGBQ

students (D'Augelli et al., 2005; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Espelage et al., 2008; Robinson & Espelage, 2012) this finding is important and could indicate that this subset of the student population is altering their behavior out of fear of being victimized on campus. Thus, future research should further investigate to determing if this finding can be replicated on other campuses and to determine why even though being LGBQ was not significantly associated with feeling unsafe in a university setting, this group appears to be more likely to avoid certain places on campus out of concern of being victimized. It could be possible that this group feels certain spaces on campus are especially risky for them given their status as gender sexual minorities.

Finally, the present study also utilized the MRMA scale to investigate whether individuals' beliefs related to male rape myths influence fear of sexual violence, as well as feelings of safety on campus and avoidance behavior. Surprisingly, however, adherence to male rape myths did not influence fear of sexual assault nor perception of safety and avoidance behavior. The individual-level characteristics of greater influence on colleges students' fear of sexual violence and perceptions of safety on campus were biological sex, race, and past sexual victimization. In the present study, most respondents scored very low on the MRMA scale. Here, while it is possible that limitations related to the measures used in the current study impacted the results of the study, it is also possible that the definitions of rape given in earlier questions in the survey, impacted students' responses to the items of the MRMA scale – which is a limitation pointed out in other studies that utilized this scale (Spruin & Reilly, 2018). Nevertheless, considering that an extensive body of research has suggested an effect of myth adherence on fear of sexual assault, we do not deny the importance of investigating the potential influence of myth adherence on fear. Thus, future research should explore the effects of traditional rape myth acceptance (i.e., myths focused on female victims of sexual violence and male offenders), including measures to investigate

victim-offender relationships as well as victim blaming. Additionally, considering that results from Models 2 and 3 showed that females reported higher odds of fearing being sexually assaulted by a stranger offender than a known offender when compared to their male counterparts, future research should explore the effects of other myths, such as "stranger rape myths" and its potential influence on fear of sexual victimization.

Lastly, even though the current study did not observe an impact of beliefs toward male rape and students' fear, it is possible that other beliefs are driving students' fear of sexual assault on campus. Perhaps students' beliefs about the effectiveness of university protective programs targeting sexual assault, for instance, is driving not only their fear, but also impacting their choice to avoid certain places on campus out of concern of being victimized. Therefore, although the limitations of the present study narrowed our discussion about the relationship between students' beliefs/attitudes and students pereceptions of safety from rape and sexual assault on campus, future research should investigate college students' beliefs toward the existing protective programs, so that their fear of sexual victimization on campus can be better explained and effectively addressed.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As previously noted, fear of sexual victimization among college students impacts not only their feeling of safety on campus, but may impact their overall college experience. Results of the present study point to elevated levels of fear of sexual assault among female college students, racial minorities, and students who have past attempted/completed sexual victimization experiences. Notably, female students and students who have had past attempted/completed sexual victimization experiences have also reported avoiding places on campus out of concern of being victimized. As such, a better understanding of students' fear of sexual assault is needed so that university administrators can develop programs aimed not only at preventing crime, but also reducing students' fear of sexual victimization on campus, some of which may be guided by misperceptions about rape and sexual assault. Further, the findings related to students' fear of being sexually victimized by a known or stranger offender point to the need of education so that students' self-protective behaviors on campus will be effective in preventing this type of victimization, instead of exposing them to a greater risk of being victimized. Importantly, programs aimed at students' self-protective behavior although necessary, should be developed in such a way that potentially unfounded fear (i.e., stranger danger) will be reduced, and victim blaming narratives will be altered. An effective approach suggested is peer education, so that victimization will be prevented, unfounded fear will be addressed, and myths will be debunked. Although the limitations of the present study have narrowed the conclusions in the present study

regarding the effects of rape myths on students' feeling of safety from rape and sexual assault on campus, the results of the present study add to the current knowledge about fear of sexual victimization among college students, providing more empirical evidence to serve as a contribution to the development of programs the will positively impact the lives of students and their overall college/university experience.

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