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## She Asked For It: Statistics and Predictors of Rape Myth Acceptance

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### *Abstract*

*Where rape exists, there are people who believe in cultural myths about rape causes and victims. Acceptance of these rape myths increases and decreases based on many predictors; the present study investigated how rape myth acceptance varied in different populations on the campus of a small, private, liberal arts university. Although overall rape myth acceptance on campus was relatively low, analyses revealed that female participant sex, knowing a victim, and being able to identify contextual sexual assaults were predictive of lower rape myth acceptance. Additional hypotheses and research questions were tested but showed non-significant results. The findings of this study can be used to advise faculty and staff regarding specific programs aimed at further lowering rape myth acceptance on campus; specific details and suggestions are discussed.*

*Keywords: Rape myth acceptance, sexual assault, campus climate*

Rape can happen to anyone. In fact, a low estimate is that approximately 25% of women will be raped or will experience an attempted rape in their lifetime (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisiewski, 1987; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape can occur despite the person's age, race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, weight, height, or geographic location. What many people do not understand is that rape can also occur to anyone despite what kind of clothes he or she is wearing, whether he or she was drinking alcohol, how sexually experienced he or she is, what he or she was doing the night of the incident, or the relationship he or she has with the rapist. The purpose of the current study was to understand these misconceptions by investigating rape myth acceptance. Specifically, the current study investigated rape myth acceptance at one small, private, liberal arts university.

### **Rape Myth Acceptance**

Rape myths and the acceptance of those rape myths are a huge reason why many people do not believe that anyone, despite their history, can be a potential rape victim. Burt (1980) was the first to define rape

myths; she defined them as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217). Although this definition of rape myths was necessary because it defined a prevalent aspect of society, it was incomplete and not operationally defined.

Many people have come to use the Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) definition of rape myths because that definition allows for a combination of Burt's (1980) definition and the feminist, social learning, and evolutionary theories of rape. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) defined rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). The authors elaborate further by saying that rape myths are best understood as stereotypes that are sometimes accurate and many times not; those scenarios that confirm the stereotypes tend to be the ones that are publicized the most in the media, confirming social expectations and perpetuating the myths.

Rape myths reinforce false beliefs about the definition of rape, who the victims of rape are, and how to prevent rape from occurring,

ultimately shifting the blame from the perpetrator to the victim (Iconis, 2008; Smith, 2014). For example, many rape myths convey the idea that only men rape and only females are victims, stranger rape is the only kind of rape, perpetrators who are drunk cannot be held responsible for their actions, rape happens when someone's sex drive is out of control, there has to be a weapon present for the incident to be considered rape, and only bad people get raped (Aronowitz, Lambert, & Davidoff, 2012; Carmody & Washington, 2001; Fisher & Pina, 2013; Hockett, Saucier, Hoffman, Smith, & Craig, 2009; Iconis, 2008; McMahan, 2010; Smith, 2014; Staros, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

The general public's acceptance of rape myths has serious negative ramifications on the physical and psychological functioning and development of survivors (Aronowitz et al., 2012; Moor, 2007). Rape myths, directed at both male and female victims, can downplay the severity of rape or sexual assault; in turn, rape myths also create the assumption that rape and sexual assault are not true offenses for any given reason (e.g., the woman was asking for it because she wore provocative clothing or the man should have fought off the perpetrator; Fisher & Pina, 2013). Additionally, victims who believe these victim-blaming myths suffer worse outcomes than victims who reject these myths (Katz & Burt, 1988). One result could be the inability to report the rape out of fear of revictimization; approximately 16% of total rapes in the United States ever get reported to proper authorities (Smith, 2014; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Because fear of revictimization causes many people not to report rapes, many of the statistics and rates on rape are reported inaccurately (usually as an underestimate; Burt, 1980).

### **Colleges and Universities**

Unfortunately, a common place for rapes to occur is college or university campuses.

This idea is supported by the fact that women in college or at a university are more likely than high and middle school girls to report being sexually coerced (Anderson, Simpson-Taylor, & Herrmann, 2004). Additionally, women between the ages of 16 and 24 are the most at risk for sexual assault (Iconis, 2008). It has been found that 18–21% of women in college reported being sexually assaulted and 7% reported being the victim of attempted or successful rape in one academic quarter (Gidycz, Hanson, & Layman, 1995). Lastly, women who have already experienced dating violence are at greater risk for revictimization during college than are women who have not experienced dating violence (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003). Based on these statistics, this study focused on college students as the population for investigating rape myth acceptance.

### **Predictors of Rape Myth Acceptance**

The study explored a variety of antecedents predicted to be associated with rape myth acceptance. It was hypothesized that rape myth acceptance would be correlated with (1) participant sex, (2) academic year in school, (3) experience with sexual assault and rape training, (4) being a sexual assault perpetrator, and (5) being or knowing a victim. Four additional research questions were presented. Each variable is briefly reviewed below.

**Participant sex.** Although general rape myth acceptance is low for both sexes, much research has identified that men are more accepting of rape myths than are women (Anderson et al., 2004; Aronowitz et al., 2012; Boakye, 2009; Currier & Carlson, 2009; Hockett, Saucier, Hoffman, Smith, & Craig, 2009; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; McMahan, 2010; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). This could be because rape myths are largely a product of

and are encouraged through socialization (Boakye, 2009; Ellis, 1989). In many cases, boys and men learn rape-supportive rules, or circumstances in which it is acceptable to force a girl or woman to have sex (e.g., after paying for a meal and receiving no sexual favors, a man may rape a woman; Anderson et al., 2004).

Additionally, rape myths function to encourage the dominance of males over submissive females and the continuation of the patriarchal society of the United States (Bohner, Siebler, Schmelcher, 2006; Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Ceniti & Malamuth, 1984; Quackenbush, 1989; Ward, 1995). Men in the United States are encouraged to sexually exploit women, even if that means raping women, in order to fit into the ideal of masculinity (Staros, 2012). Finally, men are more likely than women to trivialize or denounce the existence of rape, degrade sexual assault victims, and disagree with the published prevalence rates of rape and sexual assault; women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to say that current rape sentences (serving between 5 and 25 years) are not harsh enough (Boakye, 2009). Based on this research, Hypothesis 1 was: Compared to women, men will be more accepting of rape myths.

**Academic year in school.** Research (Boakye, 2009; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) has found people with less education are more likely to accept rape myths when compared to people with more education. Similarly, participants who are still in high school are more likely than participants who are in college to be accepting of rape myths, but that acceptance decreases with age (Boakye, 2009). When completing a survey about situations when is it acceptable for a man to assume a woman wants to have intercourse, researchers (Anderson et al., 2004) found that middle school students were most accepting of these situations, and college

students were the least accepting of the situations. Based on this research, Hypothesis 2 was: Compared to students in their third and fourth years of college, students in their first and second years will be more accepting of rape myths.

**Sexual assault and rape training.** At least in once study, college students primarily disagree with rape myth acceptance, but “men and others who had not attended a rape awareness workshop expressed weaker disagreement with rape myths than women and individuals who had attended a rape awareness workshop” (Hinck & Thomas, 1999, p. 815). Additionally, attending a rape education workshop in which rape and sexual assault are specifically defined can be beneficial because people who know how to define rape are less likely to believe rape myths (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Male college students who did not attend a sexual assault or rape education course were among one of the most likely groups to accept rape myths, along with men who were athletes, had pledged a fraternity or sorority, and/or did not know a sexual assault victim (McMahon, 2010). In the same study, female college students who had attended a sexual assault or rape education course were one of the least likely groups to accept rape myths, along with women who knew a sexual assault victim. Based on this research, Hypothesis 3 was: Compared to students who did not receive training that defines sexual assault and rape, students who receive training will be less accepting of rape myths.

**Attempted and accomplished perpetrators.** Men who self-report greater likelihood of raping a woman are more likely to endorse rape myths than are men who report lower likelihood of raping a woman (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Male students in middle school, high school, and college who endorsed sexually coercive behaviors were more accepting of rape myths

than male students who did not endorse these behaviors (Anderson et al., 2004). People who engage in sexually aggressive behavior (e.g., someone who is willing to or has attempted to rape another person) are more likely than those who do not engage in that behavior to endorse rape myths (Abbey, McAuslan, & Ross, 1998; Acock & Ireland, 1983; Aosved & Long, 2006; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Researchers (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) found that people who are hostile and sexually aggressive toward women are more likely to endorse rape myths compared to people who are not hostile and sexually aggressive toward women. Based on this research, Hypothesis 4 was: Compared to students who have not assaulted another person, students who admit that they have attempted or completed a sexual assault or rape of another person will be more accepting of rape myths.

**Knowing a victim.** As briefly mentioned in the section on sexual assault training, female students who know a sexual assault victim are more likely than female students who do not know a sexual assault victim to be accepting of rape myths; the same is true for men (McMahon, 2010). Additional research (Banyard, 2008; Burn, 2009) found that bystanders, or people who have witnessed and/or intervened in a rape or sexual assault incident, are less likely than non-bystanders to accept rape myths. It is possible that personally knowing a victim or personally intervening in the past increases empathy for victims, which would also decrease victim blaming and acceptance of rape myths. Based on this research, Hypothesis 5 was: Compared to students who do not know a rape or sexual assault victim, students who know a rape or sexual assault victim will be less accepting of rape myths.

## Research Questions

Due to the lack of consistent research on the topics, the following research questions were also addressed in the current study:

1. Will participants' sexual orientation have any association with rape myth acceptance?
2. Are students who get drunk on a regular basis (weekly or daily) more or less accepting of rape myths than students who do not get drunk on a regular basis (less than weekly)?
3. Are victims of relationship violence, sexual assault, or rape more or less accepting of rape myths?
4. Are people who acknowledge contextual sexual assault in fictional rape scenarios more or less likely to accept rape myths?

## Method

### Participants

This study included 211 participants from a small, private, liberal arts college. Participants were 72 men (34.12%) and 139 women (65.88%); ethnicity was 80.54% White/Caucasian, 4.33% Hispanic/Latino, 2.88% African-American, 2.88% Asian, and 3.37% mixed. Education was 23.22% first-years, 26.07% sophomores, 22.75% juniors, and 27.49% seniors; one graduate student completed the survey, but the data for this student were eliminated from the statistics for lack of a comparable population. The students were recruited via campus-wide emails and announcements. The entire campus had about 850 students at the time of the survey, translating into about a 25% response rate for the overall undergraduate student body.

### Materials

**Predictor variables.** Participant gender, year in school, and sexual orientation were

self-reported in the demographic section of the survey. Participant drinking habits were assessed with a single item asking, "Since the beginning of the school year, about how often have you consumed enough alcohol to get drunk?" Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) through 4 (*once or twice a week*) and 5 (*daily or almost daily*). Attendance to a sexual assault workshop that defined sexual assault and rape was also assessed via a single item asking if the participant had, during his/her time at the college, received training in which behaviors were defined as "sexual assault." Responses were simply dummy coded for "yes" or "no." Being a victim, being an attempted or accomplished perpetrator, and knowing a victim of sexual assault, rape, or relationship violence were also self-report items that were simple "yes" or "no" answers that, again, were dummy coded for analysis.

Finally, acknowledgement of sexual assault was measured by participants reading about three fictional scenarios (adapted from Bennett & Banyard, 2016). Each scenario described a situation which could be interpreted as assault or harassment; for example, one scenario describes a man telling his friends that he plans to attend a party where women will be "wasted" and that he will thus "definitely be taking one home." Participants respond to each scenario by indicating, on a 7-point Likert scale (where 1 = *definitely no* and 7 = *definitely yes*), whether each situation "is a problem." Scores were summed to create a composite score with a possible range of 3–21; higher scores indicate greater acknowledgment of perceived sexual assault. The mean for this sample was 16.87 ( $SD = 4.33$ ), and internal consistency was high,  $\alpha = 0.88$ .

**Outcome variable: Rape myth acceptance.** Participants completed the Revised Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (McMahon, 2010). The scale contained 19

items such as, "When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble" and, "Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim that it was rape." Responses range from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Scores are averaged for one composite score for rape myth acceptance. Possible scores thus ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater rape myth acceptance. The mean for this sample was 1.94 ( $SD = 0.72$ ), and internal consistency was excellent,  $\alpha = 0.94$ .

### Procedure

All participants in the study accessed the survey through the EverFi.com interface after receiving a campus-wide email with the survey's URL. The materials for this study were included among others in a large campus climate survey sponsored by the university's office of student affairs; only a small portion of the scales used in the original survey were utilized for the current research. The first screen of the survey provided consent information and required participants to click "yes" before proceeding. All participants were given an unlimited amount of time to complete the questionnaire. Order of materials was: demographics, general climate questions, violence inventory, various other surveys, contextual perceptions of sexual assault, and rape myth acceptance. Following the conclusion of the questionnaire, participants were shown a screen thanking them for their time and telling them the general nature of the study. In return for their participation, students were given the opportunity to place their name in a drawing to win one of four \$50 Visa gift cards. This study was approved by the hosting institution's Internal Review Board for ethics.

## Results

### Descriptive Analyses

All means and standard deviations for the individual rape myths are included in Table 1. The most accepted rape myth was, "If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally," with an average acceptance of 2.60 ( $SD = 1.23$ ). The next highly accepted myths were, "Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away" and, "Women who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim that it was rape," at  $M = 2.40$  ( $SD = 1.13$ ) and  $M = 2.32$  ( $SD = 1.12$ ), respectively. The most rejected rape myth was, "If the accused 'rapist' doesn't have a weapon, you can't call it rape," with an average acceptance of 1.43 ( $SD = 0.80$ ). The next most rejected myths were, "If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape," and, "If a woman goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped," at  $M = 1.44$  ( $SD = 0.75$ ) and  $M = 1.52$  ( $SD = 0.79$ ), respectively.

### Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that men would be more accepting of rape myths than women. As expected, rape myth acceptance scores were higher in males ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) than females ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ),  $t(202) = 2.22$ ,  $p = .027$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

### Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stated students with more education would be less accepting of rape myths than students with less education. Before the analysis was conducted, all data from first-year and sophomore students were combined to form the under-class group ( $n = 104$ ); juniors and seniors were combined to form the upper-class group ( $n = 106$ ). As predicted, rape myth acceptance scores were higher in the under-class group ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) than the upper-class

group ( $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), but the results were not significant,  $t(202) = 1.29$ ,  $p = .200$ . An additional correlation was run between rape myth acceptance and the participants' year in school. Indicative of the hypothesis, rape myth acceptance was negatively correlated with year in school [ $r(202) = -.12$ ], but again, the results were only approaching significance,  $p = .100$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

### Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis stated that students who have attended a sexual assault workshop would have lower rape myth acceptance than students who do not attend a workshop. The mean rape myth acceptance for people who recalled attending a workshop was 1.93 ( $n = 172$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) compared to 1.90 ( $n = 37$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) for participants who did not recall attending a workshop. There was almost no difference in rape myth acceptance based on attending a workshop and not [ $t(200) = 0.19$ ,  $p = .854$ ]; therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

### Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis stated that perpetrators would be more accepting of rape myths than non-perpetrators. Although there was a slight difference in rape myth acceptance between perpetrators ( $n = 7$ ,  $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) and non-perpetrators ( $n = 201$ ,  $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ), the difference was not significant,  $t(199) = 0.22$ ,  $p = .829$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. Note, however, that the small sample size in the perpetrator group means this result is questionable; see the Discussion for more.

### Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis stated that participants who knew a victim would be less accepting of rape myths than participants who did not know a victim. A t-test supported this hypothesis,  $t(202) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .001$ . As expected, rape myth acceptance scores were lower for those who knew a

victim ( $n = 43$ ,  $M = 1.57$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) than those who did not know a victim ( $n = 164$ ,  $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

### Research Question 1

The first research question asked: Will participants' sexual orientation have any association with rape myth acceptance? Due to the lack of diversity in sexual orientation among the student population, sexual orientations were divided into two groups: heterosexual ( $n = 181$ ) and other orientations (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, questioning;  $n = 21$ ). Although there was a slight difference in rape myth acceptance between heterosexual participants ( $M = 1.94$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) and participants of other orientations ( $M = 1.88$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), a t-test analysis determined that sexual orientation did not have predict rape myth acceptance levels,  $t(202) = 0.37$ ,  $p = .711$ . In other words, people of different sexual orientations are in no way more or less susceptible to rape myth acceptance.

### Research Question 2

The second research question asked: Are students who get drunk on a regular basis (weekly or daily) more or less accepting of rape myths than students who do not get drunk on a regular basis (less than weekly)? As mentioned before, participants were asked how often they consumed enough alcohol to be drunk during that academic school year, and answers ranged from never to almost daily. Before any analyses could be run, participants' data had to be divided into heavy versus light drinkers. Heavy drinking included participants who got drunk once or twice a week or more during the academic year ( $n = 30$ ); light drinking included participants who got drunk once or twice a month or less during the academic year ( $n = 130$ ).

The mean rape myth acceptance was 2.12 ( $SD = 0.65$ ) for heavy drinkers and was 1.88

( $SD = 0.69$ ) for light drinkers. A t-test revealed that there was only a marginally significant difference between these two groups in regards to rape myth acceptance [ $t(151) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .085$ ]. Additionally, a correlation was run between rape myth acceptance and participant drinking habits. The results were similar to the t-test in that drinking was positively correlated with rape myth acceptance [ $r(151) = .09$ ], but the relationship was not significant,  $p = .260$ .

### Research Question 3

The third research question asked: Are victims of relationship violence, sexual assault, or rape more or less accepting of rape myths? Participants were asked six questions regarding their experience as victims of relationship violence, sexual assault, or rape. Participants received one point for every circumstance in which they were victims. Therefore, possible scores ranged from 0 to 6, with higher scores indicating more experience as a victim.

The mean rape myth acceptance for victims was 1.89 ( $n = 67$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) and was 1.96 ( $n = 144$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) for non-victims. A t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between these two groups in regards to rape myth acceptance [ $t(202) = 0.69$ ,  $p = .490$ ]. An additional correlation was run between rape myth acceptance and being the victim of relationship violence. Being a victim of relationship violence was also not indicative of changes in rape myth acceptance [ $r(134) = .01$ ,  $p = .883$ ]. In other words, rape myth acceptance was no different for victims than it was for non-victims.

### Research Question 4

The fourth research question asked: Are people who acknowledge contextual sexual assault more or less likely to accept rape myths? Being more likely to identify sexual assaults in fictional scenarios was negatively correlated with rape myth acceptance [ $r(202)$



= -.33], and that relationship was significant,  $p < .001$ .

### Discussion

In general, rape myth acceptance on the target campus was quite low; overall, students disagreed with rape myths ( $M$  for the entire sample = 1.94,  $SD = 0.72$ ; with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree”). These low rates of rape myth acceptance are beneficial on the surface because they are indicative of a safe campus with few people who are willing to endorse rape. However, from a purely statistical perspective, low baseline rates may be problematic if they create a floor effect. In other words, the campus may have effective training and safe campus interventions, but the assessment of these programs is difficult to measure when rates cannot statistically decrease to a significant level. Therefore, low baseline acceptance was a scientific limitation of this study, but one that the researchers were happy to accept in terms of practical meaning. It is also possible that the portion of students who were willing to complete the survey were biased in some way such that their answers were not representative of the entire campus; perhaps people who refused to participate were more likely to endorse rape myths. Unfortunately, without requiring every student to complete the survey, this potential difference in the volunteers is unable to be assessed.

### Supported and Significant Findings

The results of Hypothesis 1 were not surprising; men reported higher levels of rape myth acceptance than women, replicating many other researchers’ results (Anderson et al., 2004; Aronowitz et al., 2012; Boakye, 2009; Currier & Carlson, 2009; Hockett et al., 2009; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; McMahan, 2010; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). The variable

of true interest may not even be sex; it may be gender. For example, one research team (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) found that men who adhered to gender role stereotypes, compared to men who didn’t adhere, were more likely to accept rape myths. Results such as these indicate that male populations on campus should be the targets of rape myth acceptance trainings, but that not all men should be stereotyped as being “part of the problem.” Future trainings should identify and target particular aspects of masculinity that are tied to higher or lower rape myth acceptance on campus.

Hypothesis 5, regarding knowing a victim, was also supported and also served as a replication from past work (Banyard, 2008; Burn, 2009; McMahan, 2010). This information is beneficial because the target campus is rather small. Due to the insular and personal nature of the university, it is more likely that students will know someone who has been a victim. The problem lies in getting victims to come forward about their trauma; fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, rejection by friends and family, and shaming by society are all justifiable reasons for a victim to not speak out. Repressing reports thus not only seems to negatively affect the individual victim, but it may also decrease overall campus safety if it leads to fewer people being aware that they personally know victims of assault.

Finally, Research Question 4 yielded significant results in that being able to identify contextual sexual assaults was negatively correlated with rape myth acceptance. Although little research addresses the relationship between these two variables, this information is important for campus officials. This result implies that teaching students how to identify sexual assaults in vignettes could lead to lower rape myth acceptance. Alternatively, however, because this analysis was correlational, it

could be that people who are less accepting of rape myths are simply better at identifying contextual sexual assaults. Therefore, these results should be interpreted with caution and further explored with experimental designs that can establish causal relationships.

#### **Unsupported and Insignificant Findings**

Hypothesis 2, regarding participants' year in school, was not supported. The results from this study may be less significant than other studies because of the academic year range in question. Where this study only included first-years to seniors in college, other studies (e.g., Anderson et al., 2004; Boakye, 2009; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) included samples that ranged from middle school to college. Future research on this topic should utilize a wider academic population to see whether year in school replicates as an important variable. Other academic variables could also be explored, such as major area of study or living arrangements (e.g. living in a coed dorm versus a fraternity/sorority).

Analysis for Hypothesis 3, regarding attendance to a sexual assault workshop, found there was almost no difference in rape myth acceptance between those who attended a workshop and those who didn't. On the surface, these results are alarming because they indicate that the current sexual assault workshops on this campus are not effective in reducing rape myth acceptance. However, this result must be questioned for two reasons. First, the floor effect of baseline acceptance being low meant that decreases would be difficult to reach a significant level. Second, the very nature of this variable is that it masks the reality of a current campus policy: all students at the target university are required to take a sexual assault course or workshop before starting classes. Answers on the survey in which participants thus self-reported not attending this workshop indicates that some students either can't

remember or are unaware that they took a sexual assault workshop. Future research on this topic should incorporate populations that truly did and did not already attend sexual assault workshops. In terms of the target campus, perhaps the workshops should be more explicit, or students should be regularly reminded of their early participation.

Analysis for Hypothesis 4, regarding being an attempted or accomplished sexual perpetrator, indicated that perpetrators were only slightly more likely than non-perpetrators to accept rape myths. Although these results go against previous research (Abbey et al., 1998; Acock & Ireland, 1983; Aosved & Long, 2006; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; and Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), they are not entirely substantial. Only seven participants admitted to being completed or attempted perpetrators, and this number was not high enough to run proper analyses. In addition, people with very high acceptance of rape myths may be in denial that they are, in fact, perpetrators and thus did not self-report into this category. Future research should seek more perpetrators to compare rape myth acceptance against non-perpetrators.

The researchers thought that participants of non-heterosexual orientations might be more empathetic to myths about rape victims, because both groups experience societal disapproval for something that is out of their control. Unfortunately, the results did not support this idea. However, the current study cannot completely discount the possibility of this relationship because only 21 participants in this study indicated they had a non-heterosexual orientation, calling into question the generalizability of the finding. Future research should look further into this potential relationship.

The researchers also thought that because some sexual assaults involve alcohol to make the victim more susceptible to manipulation

(Staros, 2012), there could be a relationship between alcohol consumption and rape myth acceptance. Two analyses for Research Question 2, which addressed this relationship, found that light drinkers were slightly less accepting of rape myths than heavy drinkers, but this effect was only marginal. Similar to Hypothesis 3, the current research cannot completely discount the possibility of this relationship because only 30 participants indicated they were heavy drinkers. Therefore, future research should look further into this potential relationship as well.

One research team (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994) admits that research addressing the relationship between knowing a rape victim and rape myth acceptance has yielded inconsistent results. The analysis for Research Question 3, which addressed being a victim, added to one side of the argument when it revealed that being a victim was not indicative of higher or lower rape myth acceptance in comparison to non-victims. This finding was consistent with other research (Burt, 1980; Carmody & Washington, 2001; Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987; Lefly, Scott, Llabre, & Hicks, 1993) that found being a victim is no different than not being a victim in regards to rape myth acceptance. Results such as these seem counter-intuitive, but could be due to the fact that “rape victims may experience guilt and self-blame and report an acceptance of some rape myths” as a way of understanding the trauma that occurred (Carmody & Washington, 2001, p. 434). Future research should look into ways of decreasing rape victims’ acceptance of rape myths because, as mentioned earlier in this study, victims who believe these rape myths suffer worse outcomes than victims who reject these myths (Katz & Burt, 1988).

#### **Additional Limitations and Future Research**

Another limitation of this study was the location of participant population. The target university was small, private, and targeted toward the liberal arts, so the results found on this campus may not be generalizable to other campuses in the nation; for example, universities with greater student diversity or in urban areas may yield different results. Future research should be carried out on various campuses throughout the nation and in other countries for more generalizable results.

A final limitation was the fact that a single outcome variable (rape myth acceptance) was used to test all hypotheses and research questions. Although the rape myth acceptance scale had excellent internal consistency, there was no way to test participants’ results against other similar outcome variables. Therefore, future research should include multiple outcome variables to test the utility and importance of the predictor variables identified here.

#### **Conclusions**

In sum, the present research found that female participant sex, knowing a victim, and being able to identify contextual sexual assaults were predictive of lower rape myth acceptance. This information can be taken into account at the target university, and to similar colleges and universities, to lower rape myth acceptance in a few specific ways. For example, in addition to the mandatory sexual assault workshop students are required to take, university officials could mandate male students to take an additional class or attend a specific seminar that focuses on defining sexual assault and rape. These classes and seminars could be best received when in smaller groups and conducted by other males (for example, in dorm floor programs or within sports teams). Additionally, university officials could select a memoir or biography

about a sexual assault or rape survivor as the required summer reading for students before coming to campus; the survivor could then be brought on campus for a speaking event. Having a program like this may help students to feel as if they know a sexual assault survivor, which (as the research showed) decreases rape myth acceptance. Finally, teaching students to identify sexual assault in hypothetical scenarios – and that these scenarios do, indeed, qualify as assault or rape – may help students understand the realities of assault and decrease victim blaming.

Acceptance of rape myths is a problem across the globe, and the present university is no exception. Although it can be difficult to draw conclusions from a single study, it is important to keep working on ameliorating the problem of sexual assault on campuses by understanding how to decrease the prevalence of rape overall.

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**Appendix**

Table 1: *Rape Myths Organized by Average Acceptance*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
“If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.”	2.60	1.23
“Guys don’t usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.”	2.40	1.13
“Women who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim that it was rape.”	2.32	1.12
“A lot of time, women who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.”	2.28	1.09
“When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.”	2.25	1.16
“If a woman hooks up with a lot of guys, eventually she is going to get into trouble.”	2.18	1.24
“Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.”	2.15	1.08
“Rape happens when a guy’s sex drives gets out of control.”	2.12	1.08
“Women who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.”	2.01	1.02
“If both people are drunk, it can’t be rape.”	1.84	1.04
“If a woman doesn’t say ‘no,’ she can’t claim rape.”	1.79	1.04
“A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.”	1.78	0.88
“When women go to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble.”	1.76	1.03
“It shouldn’t be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn’t realize what he was doing.”	1.73	0.98
“If a woman is raped while she is drunk, it is her fault for putting herself in that situation.”	1.62	0.91
“If a woman doesn’t physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it really can’t be considered rape.”	1.53	0.85
“If a woman goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.”	1.52	0.79
“If a woman doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape.”	1.44	0.75
“If the accused ‘rapist’ doesn’t have a weapon, you can’t call it rape.”	1.43	0.80
<b>Total Rape Myth Acceptance</b>	<b>1.94</b>	<b>0.72</b>

*Note.* Participants’ answers to all rape myths varied from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). All 19 myths met the full range of the Likert scale. Items were obtained from the Revised Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (McMahon, 2010).