

# Evaluating Rape Myth Acceptance on Loyola University Chicago Campus

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## INTRODUCTION

- The term “rape myth” was coined in 1980 and defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (McMahon, 2010)
- Research has demonstrated that acceptance of rape myths serves as a predictor in the actual perpetration of sexual violence (McMahon, 2010) It is crucial to understand the specific rape myths that exist on Loyola University Chicago’s campus
- Previous research has shown that men and people with no previous experience with sexual assault endorse more rape myths (Struckman-Johnson, 1992)
- To our knowledge, no one has looked at the interaction between gender identity and previous experience with sexual assault predicting male or female rape myth acceptance

### Hypotheses

- When people have no previous experience with sexual assault, I anticipate that men will endorse significantly more female rape myths compared to women. When participants do have previous experience with sexual assault, I expect this gender difference will be weaker
- I do not expect to see a significant difference in male rape myths between women and men when there is no previous experience reported, but if people do have previous experience with sexual assault, men will endorse more male rape myths compared to women

## METHODS

### Participants:

- 343 undergraduate students (25.7% male, 70.9% female, 3.4% preferred to self describe)
- Students were an average of 21.69 years of age (27.1% freshman, 24.8% sophomores, 23.9% juniors, 24.2% seniors)

### Procedures:

- Participants were asked to complete several online questionnaires measuring basic demographic information and individual acceptance of female and male rape myths via Qualtrics.
- Participants in each class were entered into a lottery pool for the chance to win 1 out of 18 gift cards as compensation for participating.

### Measures:

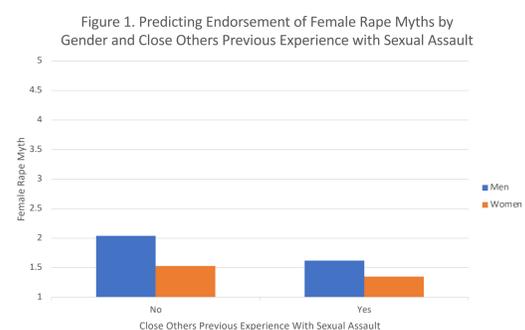
- **Close Friend or Family Member Previous Experience with Sexual Assault:** Participants responded yes = 69.5%, no = 30.5%
- **Female Rape Myth Acceptance:** The 19-item Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt, 1980) was used (e.g., “If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for what happened.”). For each item participants rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). All items were averaged together to form the female rape myth acceptance scale ( $\alpha=.91$ ).
- **Male Rape Myth Acceptance:** The 5-item Male Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Struckman-Johnson, 1992) was used (e.g., “It is impossible for a woman to rape a man.”). For each item participants rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). These five items did not have good internal consistency, therefore we analyzed each item separately.

## RESULTS

- Overall, participants in this study showed low levels of both female ( $M=1.49$ ) and male (all  $M_s<1.75$ ) rape myth endorsement. Results indicate differences in the strength of disagreement with different female and male rape myths.

### Female Rape Myths

- ANOVA analyses revealed a significant 2 (Gender: male, female) X 2 (Previous Experience: yes, no) interaction predicting female rape myth acceptance  $F(1,292)=3.97, p<0.05$ . As depicted in figure 1 below, for participants who had no close friends or family members with previous experiences with sexual assault, men reported more positive endorsements of female rape myths than women  $t(37.55)=3.50, p<0.01$ . For participants who did have close friends or family members with previous experiences with sexual assault, men still endorsed more female rape myths than women, but this effect was significantly weaker  $t(66.37)=3.90, p<0.01$ .

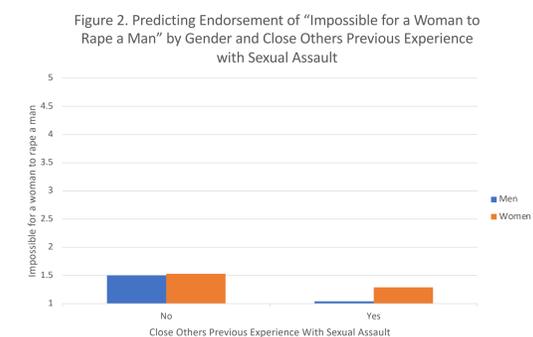


### Male Rape Myths

- We examined all five male rape myths separately (because of low internal reliability we were not able to average them together). For three of the male rape myth items there was no significant interaction between gender identity and close friends or family members previous experience with sexual assault predicting endorsement of male rape myths. Below we summarize the results from the two items where we did find significant interactions.

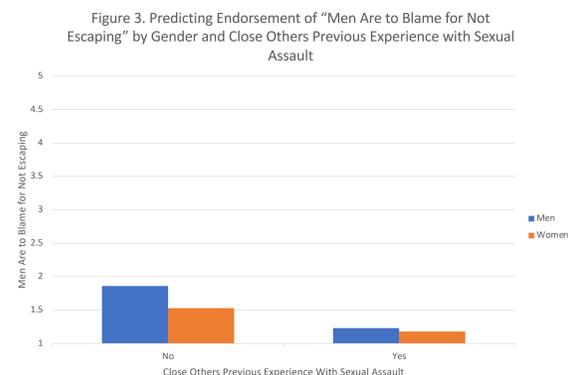
#### Male Rape Myth Item 1: Impossible for a woman to rape a man

- ANOVA analyses revealed a significant 2 (Gender: male, female) X 2 (Previous Experience: yes, no) interaction predicting the male rape myth that it is “impossible for a woman to rape a man”  $F(1,283)=4.86, p<0.05$ . As depicted in Figure 2 below, for participants who had no close friends or family members with previous experiences with sexual assault, men and women did not differ in their endorsement of the item that it is impossible for a woman to rape a man  $t(37.07) = 1.19, p=0.24$ . However, for participants who did have close friends or family members with previous experiences with sexual assault, women reported a more positive endorsement than men to the item that it is “impossible for a woman to rape a man”  $t(173.92)=-3.02, p<0.01$ .



#### Male Rape Myth Item 3: Men are to blame for not escaping

- ANOVA analyses revealed a significant 2 (Gender: male, female) X 2 (Previous Experience: yes, no) interaction predicting the male rape myth that “men who are raped by women are to blame for not escaping”  $F(1,282)=8.58, p<0.05$ . As depicted in Figure 3 below, for participants who had no close friends or family members with previous experiences with sexual assault, men reported a more positive endorsement than women to the item that “men who are raped by women are to blame for not escaping”  $t(34.95)=2.55, p<0.01$ . However, for participants who did have close friends or family members with previous experiences with sexual assault, men and women did not differ in their endorsement of the item that “men who are raped by women are to blame for not escaping”  $t(81.99)=0.57, p=0.57$ .



## DISCUSSION

- When participants reported no previous experience with sexual assault, men endorsed significantly more female rape myths and the myth that “men should be blamed for not escaping” than women. These effects were weaker or disappeared for participants with experience with sexual assault.
- When participants reported no previous experience with sexual assault there was not a significant difference between men and women’s endorsement of “whether it is possible for a man to be raped by a woman.” When participants reported having previous experience with sexual assault, women (surprisingly) endorsed significantly more of this male rape myth.
- These findings suggest that gender identity and having close friends or family with previous experiences with sexual assault interact to predict endorsement of rape myths.
- One of the limitations of this study is that we may have used a measure of rape myths that gets low endorsement. Future research should examine whether rates of rape myth acceptance are more normally distributed when different measures of rape myth acceptance, like the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression Scale, are administered.
- Future research should also examine rape myth acceptance through the use of open-ended responses instead of a self-report measure. Open-ended reports will possibly give deeper insight into participants’ beliefs about rape myths that may not be captured by existing measures.

## REFERENCES

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- This research was supported by my incredible faculty mentor Dr. Tracy DeHart, the Self and Social Interaction (SASI) Lab, and the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership. This study was funded by the Loyola Fellowship Office and the Carroll and Adelaide Johnson Scholarship.

