Evaluating Written Beliefs About Women and Men Who Experience Sexual Violence
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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” (McBride, 2010).

Research has demonstrated that acceptance of rape myths serves as a predictor in the actual perpetration of sexual violence (McBride, 2010).

Previous research has shown that men and people with no previous experience with sexual assault endorse more rape myths (Struckman-Johnson, 1992).

This study extends research conducted in my 2021 Provost Fellowship. This previous study found very low endorsement of rape myth measures which is contrary to previous research.

The goal of the current study is to have participants write about a hypothetical scenario instead of completing existing rape myth measures to eliminate possible priming effects created by directly questioning participant’s acceptance of each rape myth.

HYPOTHESIS

I predict that this study will show a two-way interaction between participant gender and gender identity of the assault survivor in predicting written responses about rape myths. I anticipate that men will write about significantly more rape myths compared to women when the survivor of the assault is male. However, we expect this effect to be significantly stronger when the survivor of the assault is female.

METHODS

Participants

- Participants in this study were 48 female identified undergraduate students at Loyola University Chicago.
- Data is still being collected from male identified undergraduate students.
- All participants were at least 18 years of age and self reported not having experienced coerced sexual contact or sexual assault within the last four years.

Procedures

- Participants were asked to complete several online questionnaires measuring basic demographic information and acceptance of male and female rape myths via Qualtrics.
- All written responses were coded by the researcher based on the five sub-categories of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt, 1980). The coder rated the extent to which the response endorsed each category of rape myth on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 = Not mentioned, 3 = Implied 5 = Explicitly stated).

Measures

- Beliefs About Men Who Experience Sexual Violence: Participants were asked to write five sentences explaining possible events that could have happened to Jane Doe (e.g., “Jane Doe woke up and believes he experienced sexual violence last night. What possible scenarios/crimes could have led up to his current situation?”). Participants were instructed to provide general statements about what might have happened and to not refer to specific real people or events.
- Beliefs About Women Who Experience Sexual Violence: Participants were asked to write five sentences explaining possible events that could have happened to John Doe (e.g., “John Doe woke up and believes he experienced sexual violence last night. What possible scenarios/crimes could have led up to his current situation?”). Participants were instructed to provide general statements about what might have happened and to not refer to specific real people or events.
- Impact of Sexual Assault on friends, family, self: Participants responded yes=62%, no=38%

RESULTS

- Preliminary analyses were conducted using repeated measure ANOVAs to determine whether being impacted by sexual assault moderated participant’s written endorsement of five sub-categories of rape myth acceptance outlined in the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. We conducted a 2(Survivor gender: Jane, John) x 2(Personally impacted by sexual assault: yes, no, between participants) repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) of people’s written endorsement of rape myths.
- As shown in Table 1 below, these repeated measure ANOVAs revealed three significant main effects of being impacted by assault. None of the other main effects or interactions were significant. Further analyses were used to identify the specific nature of each significant main effect.
- The Jane/John within-participants manipulation was also found to be marginally significant when participants were writing about the myth that “it wasn’t really rape.” Specifically, endorsed participants the myth that “it wasn’t really rape” more when writing about John Doe compared to Jane Doe.

Table 1. Examining coded female rape myths from the Jane/John Manipulation, Impacted by Sexual Assault, and Manipulation * Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Jane/John Manipulation</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Jane/John Manipulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>Not Rape</td>
<td>3.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0*</td>
<td>3.35*</td>
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<tr>
<td>.14</td>
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Note: These repeated measure ANOVAs were based on F(1, 43). * p < .05, † p < .01

- As shown in Figure 1 below, repeated measure ANOVAs indicated that when participants reported being impacted by sexual violence, they were significantly more likely to endorse the rape myth that a “survivor asked for it” when writing about female and male survivors of sexual violence.

Figure 1. Predicting Endorsement of “Survivor Asked For It” by Impacted by Assault

- As shown in Figure 2 below, repeated measure ANOVAs indicated that when participants reported being impacted by sexual violence, they were significantly more likely to endorse the rape myth that the “perpetrator didn’t mean to” assault someone when writing about female and male survivors of sexual violence.

Figure 2. Predicting “Perpetrator Didn’t Mean To” by Impacted by Assault

- As shown in Figure 3 below, repeated measure ANOVAs indicated that when participants reported being impacted by sexual violence, they were significantly less likely than those who reported not being impacted by sexual violence to endorse the rape myth that the “survivor was lying” about the assault when writing about women and men who experience sexual violence.

Figure 3. Predicting “Survivor Was Lying” by Impacted by Assault

DISCUSSION

- Findings from this study indicate that being impacted by sexual violence moderates participant endorsement “survivor asked for it,” “perpetrator didn’t mean to,” and “survivor was lying” rape myths.
- These findings suggest that being impacted by sexual assault facilitates female identified participants endorsement or rejection of different rape myths.
- One limitation of this study was that the survey was not programmed correctly to randomize the order in which participants completed the open-ended text response questions and all participants wrote about Jane Doe first, and John Doe second. As a result, participants may have been primed to write about the same rape myths for Jane and John Doe.
- Future research should also examine written beliefs about survivors of sexual violence with a more diverse range of participants including male identified participants, non college students, and those who self identify as survivors of sexual violence so that findings can be more easily generalized.

REFERENCES


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