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Abstract

This paper aims to examine implicit beliefs regarding rape myths, and the effects of rape myths, on a mid-sized, public college campus. The current study employs an anonymous survey that contains questions regarding victim blaming, rape denial, rape myth-misinformation, as well as the effects of rape culture and rape myths. Results from the collected data support previous literature which has noted a relationship between gender and rape myth endorsement (Rollero and Tartaglia 2018; Bernard, Loughnan, Marchal, Godart, and Klein 2015), as well as a relationship between gender and feelings of safety on campuses (Fairchild and Rudman 2008). More specifically, the findings presented in this research show that men are more likely than women to endorse the rape myth that clothing choices are factors in sexual assaults, that consent cannot be revoked once given, and to deny sexual assaults. The study also revealed that women are more likely to feel unsafe walking on their college campus at night compared to men. Although this research shed light on rape myths and rape culture on the studied campus, further research needs to be conducted across campuses that vary in demographic characteristics, in order to yield generalizable results.

Introduction

In 2016 Brock Turner, a Stanford University student, was convicted of three counts of sexual assault that took place the previous year and was sentenced to six months in county jail (Neary 2019). Turner's sentence was cut in half, and he was released after only three months of jail time (Neary 2019). Chanel Miller, the victim of the 2015 sexual assault, whose identity was concealed until 2019, explained that Turner "took away my worth, my privacy [...] my confidence, my own voice" (Neary 2019). Before Miller made her identity public she was known as the "unconscious intoxicated woman" to the world (Neary 2019). The sexual assault of Chanel Miller, the media haze around the circumstances of the case, and the miscarriage of injustice exemplify the scope of rape culture in the United States.

Miller's case is traumatic and disheartening, yet as a demographic group, women have reported shared experiences with objectification, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual violence for many years (Fairchild and Rudman 2008; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). As a result, many women find themselves fighting an uphill battle against an environment that is conducive to and normalizes such acts of sexual oppression, otherwise known as rape culture (Boswell and Spade 1996). Rape culture is perpetuated by rape myths, statements and sentiments which discredit victims and privilege perpetrators (Klement, Sagarin and Skowronski 2018), which is rooted in misogyny and gender-based inequality. Rape culture and rape myths have become dominant sociocultural phenomena that are especially active on college campuses. The pervasiveness of rape culture has garnered the attention of many researchers who have made college and university campuses the settings for important sociological studies (Kilimnik and Humphreys 2018; Rollero and Tartaglia 2018; Barnett et al. 2017; Wade 2017; Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; Burnett et al. 2009; Boswell and Spade 1996). The current study aims to expand

upon previous research, as an examination of the prevalence of rape myths within the context of a mid-sized, public university.

Literature Review

Rape Myths

Rape myths are statements and sentiments that aim to minimize the traumatic assault, and more often than not, shift blame and accountability from the rapist to the victim (Klement, Sagarin and Skowronski 2018). Many commonly endorsed rape myths within rape culture are; the rape did not actually occur, the rape was the victim's fault, the victim was claiming a false rape as a means of revenge, or the rape was actually consensual sex (Reling et al. 2017). As one can imagine these rape myths, and the acceptance of them, prove to be particularly harmful to survivors of sexual assault. Rape myths are essentially any counter claim to a rape accusation aimed to discredit the victims and dismiss their case (Klement, Sagarin and Skowronski 2018).

Many studies on rape myth acceptance use college students as their sample to draw from. As previously mentioned, rape myth acceptance and rape culture is particularly lively on college campuses, making them a necessary institution to investigate. Previous literature suggests that rape myth acceptance can affect the way people view and label sexual violence as rape (Sasson and Paul 2014). The extent to which a person engages with rape myth acceptance can also affect the amount of responsibility and blame they assign to the victim of the assault (Sasson and Paul 2014). Rollero and Tartaglia (2018) sampled male and female students from public universities, and discovered that students who harbored hostility towards women endorsed rape myths at a greater rate. In addition to this finding, the researchers uncovered that male participants had greater rate of sympathy for other men, and endorsed the "he didn't mean to" myth more readily (Rollero and Tartaglia 2018). Previous literature has also shown that male participants typically

report more victim blame, than their female participant counterparts (Bernard et al. 2015). The endorsement of myths such as "he didn't mean to" shifts the blame of the rapist, and attributes blame to the victim.

In a similar study, researchers provided college students with written rape scenarios and used the responses of participants as a mock jury. These researchers found that participants who tended to believe in rape myth acceptance, also believed in greater accuser responsibility of the assault, and lower credibility of the accuser (Klement, Sagarin and Skowronski 2018). Essentially, endorsement of rape myths also correlated to the belief that the accuser should have greater responsibility in the rape. The same participants that endorsed the rape myths also believed that the perpetrator should get a lesser prison sentence (Klement, Sagarin and Skowronski 2018). Similarly, Sasson and Paul (2014) supplied vignettes depicting rape to participants and asked them to define the event and explain their reasoning. Researchers concluded that participants that experienced less rape myth acceptance and less perpetrator empathy reported greater empathy for rape victims (Sasson and Paul 2014). Other studies have found that rape myth acceptance does not predict for sexual consent norms; in other words, the acceptance of rape myths does not correlate to an awareness of consent, or a discussion of consent when engaging in a sexual encounter (Kilimnik and Humphreys 2018).

Barnett, Hale and Sligar (2017) conducted a study with men and women college students in regards to understanding how masculinity and femininity correlated to rape myth acceptance. In this study, researchers concluded sexual dysfunctional beliefs about genders were a better indicator of how heavily a participant engaged in rape myth acceptance, as opposed to the hypothesized indicators; masculinity and femininity (Barnett, Hale and Sligar 2017). This correlates to other findings discussed in the previous literature, similar to what Reling et al.

(2017) and Wade (2017) touched on when concluding male college students have a transactional view of sex. Many college students, males in particular, view hookups as a sexual conquest to help them gain esteem amongst peers, specifically fellow male peers (Reling et al. 2017). This dysfunctional view of sex is a dominant discourse perpetuated by men, and allows male college students the ability to control the rhetoric surrounding hook-ups and sex (Wade 2017; Burnett, Mattern, Herakova, Kahl, Tobola, and Bornsen 2009). Wade (2017) noted that men have more control, even in cases of consensual sex. One specific example of such control is the way in which sex priorities the male orgasm over females, and does not encourage reciprocity of sexual activities (Wade 2017). Past literature from 2009, and even 1996, has indicated that the male-dominant discourse, and those who partake in it, perpetuate rape myths such as women were "asking for it", and often objectifies women by calling them derogatory names like slut, bitch, and whore (Burnett et al. 2009; Boswell and Spade 1996). However, the previously mentioned literature is still relevant today, and historically, there has not been much change in rape myths. Fraser (2015) explains that the rape myth she was "asking for it" is supported by the dangerous ideology that a women's sex appeal is a weapon against her, and used as an excuse for violating her boundaries.

Rape myth acceptance extends beyond the bounds of universities. Even authoritative institutions, like the police force, participate in rape myth acceptance (Phipps et al. 2017). Phipps et al. (2017) explained that police officers displayed rape myth acceptance when investigating assaults, including the notions that women were simply regretful of sex afterwards, or even that women were lying about the rape. When authoritative figures in communities begin to believe rape myths it becomes normalized behavior for others to accept them too. Bevens et al. (2018) explains that because a potential confidante may be a woman it does not immediately make her

empathetic towards a sexual assault victims' story or feelings. Women do engage in rape myth acceptance and in victim blaming, albeit less than their male counterparts, but still at an alarming rate. Bevens et al. (2018) notes that rape culture is deeply ingrained in society, making it extremely difficult for rape victims to find a safe confidant.

Rape Culture in College

Boswell and Spade (1996) were among the earliest researchers to define rape culture as an environment where sexual harassment, assault and violence are normalized, through given values and beliefs. Furthermore, Boswell and Spade (1996) make the distinction that rape culture is the general environment where rape is promoted and normalized, not where individual incidents of rape occur. In more recent research, Wade (2017) notes that rape culture is tied closely to hookup culture on college campuses, which promotes casual sex. Within college campuses, Greek life is known for having parties and supplying spaces for hooking up (Wade 2017; Boswell and Spade 1996). The qualitative case study by Boswell and Spade (1996), found that both male and female students noted that fraternities dominated the campus social life, and that meaningful interactions were difficult to establish outside of Greek life. Greek life has persisted to be a space for hooking up as Lisa Wade's 2017 book, "*American Hookup: The New Culture Of Sex On Campus*", explains that hookup culture is most prevalent on Greek row. Boswell and Spade (1996) initially found that high-risk fraternity parties, with skewed gender ratios and poor environmental conditions, were places to seek a sexual partner, as opposed to low-risk parties with equal gender ratios and a friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, previous researchers observed behaviors at high-risk fraternities included heckling women that walked past, calling women derogatory names, brothers discussing sexual exploits in detail, and letting other brothers watch sexual encounters with a woman, unbeknownst to her (Boswell and Spade 1996). Boswell and Spade's (1996)

research has been further supported by Wade, as recently as 2017. Wade (2017) states that Greek houses continue to be hotspots for alcohol fueled parties, where the bathrooms are in poor conditions, nonetheless Greek houses serve as a place to find a sexual partner.

Drinking and having hookups are routinely normalized behaviors in college students (Wade 2017; Burnett et al. 2009; Boswell and Spade 1996). Ward, Seabrook, Grower, Giaccardi, and Lippman (2017) explained that those who self-objectify feel poorly about their sexual abilities and often use alcohol to feel more sexually confident. College aged students are amongst the biggest users of alcohol to facilitate sexual feelings (Ward et al. 2017). Wade (2017) suggests that the usage of alcohol consumption prior to hookups is to frame sexual activity as casual and meaningless. The ability to prime sexual encounters as casual further supports the notion that hookup are a form of social currency; the more hookups one has, the greater social esteem a person will also have (Reling et al. 2017). The action of hooking up with an attractive person can bolster one's popularity, and on the other hand, also harm it if the hook up is with someone deemed unattractive (Wade 2017). Fredrickson and Roberts noted in 1997 that women especially feel the pressure to engage in sex they may not always want, and are expected to remain passive about such encounters. Just over a decade later, Burnett et al. (2009) suggested that viewing casual sex as a way to gain social status is particularly harmful because people will engage in sex they don't feel comfortable with. More recently, Reling et al. (2017) supported these past ideas of harmful casual sex, by concluding that the idea of a sexual hookup as "normal" or "harmless" correlated to a higher level of rape myth acceptance by college aged students

In 2009, Burnett et al. observed that some college campuses have training and awareness about sexual assault, yet most of the information is in regards to stranger. However, in 2018

Kilimnik and Humphreys noted that contemporary sexual violence education and policies have been ineffective in curbing nonconsensual sexual encounters. A lack of information about acquaintance rape and date rape result in students having differing views about what date and acquaintance rape consist of (Burnett et al. 2009), similarly, many students have differing definitions of hooking up (Wade 2017; Boswell and Spade 1996). Most female students note that they hookup with men they care about, and it usually consists of kissing and touching, but not penetrative intercourse (Boswell and Spade 1996). On the other hand, male students share the belief that hooking up is having sex while intoxicated with women they do not care about (Boswell and Spade 1996). It is believed that sexual education can help unify students' understanding of consent (Kilimnik and Humphreys 2018). Researchers Kilimnik and Humphreys (2018) call for education that is more comprehensive of consent and communicating consent, such as forming and discussing sexual boundaries and learning initiation strategies to exchange consent. Sexual education that is skill-based and aims to establish consent in ways applicable to real life is suggested to be better suited for college campuses (Kilimnik and Humphreys 2018). Furthermore, Rollero and Tartaglia (2018) urge that prevention programs should focus on deconstructing sexist attitudes as they correlate to greater hostility towards women, and subsequently support rape myths.

Not only do differing definitions of hooking up make sexual encounters confusing for students, but a focus on stranger rape from colleges can cause confusion and muting of students (Burnett et al. 2009). A lack of communication around acquaintance rape and date rape causes students to be less educated when it comes to sexual assault, and can perpetuate a cycle of victimization (Burnett et al. 2009). Burnett et al. (2009) concluded that within college campuses, the dominant belief posits that stranger rape is more likely to occur, and date rape can be avoided

if women take the necessary precautions. Women often go to parties with trusted friends and monitor the amount of alcohol consumed by them self or their friends, in order to moderate the potential for date rape (Burnett et al. 2009). These precautions are closely related to victim blaming rape myths, where women feel pressured to take responsibility, or responsibility is imposed onto them, for rape (Burnett et al. 2009). Contemporary research has also expanded these findings, noting that are less likely to report rape if it occurred while intoxicated (Oliver 2015). Furthermore, when female victims report rape they are often asked about what they were wearing at the time of the assault, if they resisted, or if their encounter could be seen as consensual (Oliver 2015). Wade (2017) explains that hookup culture, an often risky sexual culture, feeds into rape culture. However, Wade (2017) explains that hookup culture, and subsequently rape culture, is not an individual issue, but rather a climate that students are unable to escape from.

Contributors to Rape Culture

Rape myths and rape culture are directly tied to rape; without one you would not have the other. However, to understand rape myth acceptance, researchers must understand how to differentiate between consensual sexual encounters and nonconsensual sexual encounters. Researchers Jozkowski and Peterson (2013), explain that the longstanding criteria to identify a nonconsensual sexual encounter as rape, is when one party uses physical force, intimidation, intoxication, and/or verbal threats to obtain sex from another unwilling party. With the rise of female voices speaking out against sexual assault there has been a push for asking for and giving consent to sexual partners. The labelling process for assault is difficult for victims, who often feel confused as to how the assault could have happened to them and put themselves on trial (Burnett et al. 2009). Survivors of sexual assault typically do one of two things; acknowledge

their assault, or do not acknowledge the nonconsensual sexual encounter as assault (Kilimnik and

Humphreys 2018). Researchers have concluded that one major reason why victims, as well as

third parties, do not label assaults as rape is due to common portrayal of rape; which is that the

assault is violently perpetrated by a stranger and the victim is expected to fight back (Kilimnik

and Humphreys 2018; Sasson and Paul 2014). However, this archetype leads female victims

who feel like their assault does not align with this criterion, to not label it as rape (Kilimnik and

Humphreys 2018). Kilimnik and Humphreys (2018) found that out of nearly 300 undergrad

students, 62.8% reported a nonconsensual sexual encounter, yet only 32.8% of the participants

said encounters as sexual assault. Third parties also reflect this idea; one study found that

participants who labeled a vignette as a sexual assault or sexual aggression, as opposed to rape,

did so because the vignette did not fit their conceptualization of stereotypical rape (Sasson and

Paul 2014). When third parties become aware of a rape they often ask questions such as, "did

you say no?" and "did you fight back?", which can enforce the idea of the stereotypical rape as

well as cast blame on the victim (Kilimnik and Humphreys 2018; Sasson and Paul 2014; Burnett

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When survivors do not label their nonconsensual sexual encounter as rape, they

experience lower level of depression compared to their acknowledged counterparts (Wilson,

Newins and White 2017). This finding is supported by the rationale that when one does not label

their assault as rape, they simultaneously avoid the label of victim as well, and therefore do not

seek mental health aid (Wilson, Newins and White 2017). However, Wilson, Newins and White

(2017), note that when survivors acknowledge their rape they have healthier coping skills, do not

self-blame as severely, and do not rely as heavily on alcohol in the wake of their assault.

Still, grey areas where consent is not explicitly stated to the other party, or parties,

involved can make labelling nonconsensual sexual encounters as rape increasingly difficult

(Burnet et al. 2009). Historically, many women, especially female undergraduates, have reported

to feel pressured to opt-in to hookup-culture, or to have sex with men due to a dominant

discourse posed by the long-standing practice of female objectification (Wade 2017; Burnett et

al. 2009; Boswell and Spade 1996). Many students engaging in hook-up culture find it especially

difficult to approach sexual situations and identify consent (Burnett et al. 2009). In a study by

Jozkowski and Peterson (2013), the researchers found that college students specifically vary in the way they grant consent to one another. Some undergraduates sampled utilized one or two ways to communicate consent, while others communicated consent based on the circumstances of their situation (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013). Essentially, this means that giving and receiving consent can look different depending on the context of the situation. For example, students in relationships used nonverbal cues to communicate consent to their partner(s), with behaviors like showing mutual interest and responding positively to initiated sexual activities (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013). Nonverbal consent cues can be used effectively when all parties involved feel comfortable and equal in power to their partner(s) (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013).

Objectification and Self-Objectification

Rape myths are rooted in the sexism within our society, and a main facet of sexism is objectification. Researchers Fredrickson and Roberts first coined the term objectification theory in 1997. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explained that objectification theory provides a theoretical framework that positions female bodies in a sociocultural context where they routinely encounter sexual objectification. The constant objectification of women can have extreme consequences, one of which is self-objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Self-objectification socializes girls and women to internalize the belief that they are objects, and as a result they even treat themselves as objects whose purpose is to be looked at (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Calogero (2004) further added onto Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) research, by expanding objectification theory to encompass the both blatant and subliminal ways that Western society sexually objectifies female bodies (Calogero 2004). Years later, Gurung and Chrouser (2007), conducted a study of objectification where photos of female athletes in either sensual clothing or their athletic clothing were shown to participants. This research showed that female

athletes in sensual clothing were more likely to be perceived as incompetent and less capable, in contrast to the control group who saw the same athletes in their sportswear and perceived them as more capable (Gurung and Chrouser 2007).

Contemporary research on objectification theory has also supported a correlation between sexualization, the implication of sexual desires or actions attributed to a person, and objectification. Fasoli et al. (2017) concluded women who are sexualized are perceived more often as sexual objects, thus female bodies are objectified through sexualization. Furthermore, this study proved that simply seeing a woman undress permitted participants to regard the woman as a sexual object (Fasoli et al. 2017). This study also revealed that the less clothing a woman wears correlates to a higher perception of incompetence, making her a sexual target (Fasoli et al. 2017). The research of Fasoli et al. (2017) supports the previous research of Gurung and Chrouser (2007), by suggestion that even the mundane task of undressing is sexualized, as well as wearing more sensual clothing, both of which create a perception of incompetence.

An overt form of objectification via social interactions is catcalling. Catcalling, also known as street harassment, is sexual harassment that includes objectifying women by making remarks on their appearances (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016). For instance, Fairchild and Rudman (2008) conducted a study of 228 female volunteers with an average age of 19, and found that 32% of participants reported catcalls, whistles, or stares once a month and 40% reported unwanted sexual attention. Furthermore, Fairchild and Rudman (2008) suggest that street harassment can occur at any time or place, even when women walk to work or even to the grocery store, and in these instances women and their bodies are the targets and they are made to feel humiliated and undermined. Fairchild and Rudman's (2008) observations were supported by Keller et al. in 2016. Keller et al. (2016) discuss the formation of a blog by women aimed to

spark conversation on their shared experiences of street harassment. The researchers analyzed the blog and found that 47% of the posts were about women's stories of street harassment (Keller et al. 2016). These stories ranged from acts of whistling, staring, horn honking, and/or comments on females' bodies (Keller et al. 2016). Some women are able to resist feelings of objectification that occur due to street harassment by confronting or reporting the harasser and talking about the experience with others (Fairchild and Rudman 2008). Conversely, women who are passive about sexual harassment, such as ignoring or denying it, report greater feelings of self-objectification (Fairchild and Rudman 2008). Recent research has expanded on the previously noted findings to suggest that more frequent experiences of objectification, and subsequently self-objectification, lead women to perceive themselves as though they are at a greater risk of being a victim of gender-based crimes (Donnelly and Calogero 2017). However, responses to sexual harassment and objectification are complex, because when women blame themselves for the harassment they self-objectify, yet when shrugging off the harassment as a form of flattery women are then complicit in sexual objectification (Fairchild and Rudman 2008). Objectification feeds into rape culture, as many studies have concluded that higher sexual objectification is often linked with greater leniency to perpetrators of sexual assault (Klement, Sagarin and Skowronski 2018; Bernard et al. 2015). This link to rape culture is also evident in findings that show sexual objectification correlates to a higher level of victim blame in cases of acquaintance rape (Bernard et al. 2015). As noted, previous literature has detailed the normalization of sexual objectification, especially in studies where college undergraduates were sampled (Donnelly and Calogero 2017; Ward et al. 2017; Bernard et al. 2015; Calogero 2004).

Self-objectification is a by-product of objectification theory, and occurs when women view themselves as objects based on what society regards as desirable (Bevens et al. 2018). Not

only is lack of perceived competence present in objectification, but it is also present in self-objectification (Bevens et al. 2018). In instances of self-objectification women internalize their own appearances in comparison with beauty ideals, and the over emphasis of outward looks rather than competence (Bevens et al. 2018). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) were among the first researchers to note that women who feel as if a male gaze upon them internalize that form of objectification into shame and anxiety. This finding was supported by Calogero (2004), in a study of 105 female undergraduates who anticipated either male or female gaze, and then completed self-report measures. Calogero (2004) found even the anticipation of the male gaze made participants feel greater shame about their bodies, as well as more social anxiety. Furthermore, Fairchild and Rudman (2008) also found that women often feel ashamed that their bodies leave them feeling dehumanized in the eyes of a male, and experience anxiety about what he may think of them, and at times fear rape. Women are generally aware of objectification and habitually monitor their physical appearance to mediate it (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Recent research has expanded on this to show that stranger harassment positively correlates to self-surveillance (Donnelly and Calogero 2017). Donnelly and Calogero (2017) also conclude that the more experiences with stranger harassment, the more women monitor their appearance. Both original and contemporary research suggest the phenomenon of the male gaze positions men in control, while relegating women to lack control or agency of their presence, and even life experiences (Donnelly and Calogero 2017; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997).

Self-objectification plays a role in the perpetuation of rape myth acceptance. (Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) observed that women who objectify themselves do so because greater societal institutions instruct them to value the ideal appearance. Furthermore, women who do not fit an ideal appearance, such as obese women, experience less educational and economic

attainments than their parents, greater job discrimination and hostility in work environments, and an overall negative affect on their social mobility (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Self-objectification is built on the processes by which women internalize their own appearances in comparison with beauty ideals, and the over emphasis of outward looks rather than competence (Bevens et al. 2018). When one female objectifies her own body, she may do so to other women, creating a cycle of objectification as well as perpetuating rape culture (Bevens et al. 2018). In Bevens et al. (2018) researchers evaluate how self-objectification relates to sympathy and support for female victims of sexual assault. The researchers found that women with greater self-objectification also experience greater sympathy and support for rape victims (Bevens et al. 2018). This is because women experience objectification starting at a young age, so they may feel relate and feel sympathy for those who have been assaulted and objectified (Bevens et al. 2018).

Self-objectification can result from social media usage as well. As Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian (2017) explain, people who use Instagram have the power to edit or enhance their photos in order to adhere to an idealized appearance society has defined as acceptable. Fardouly et al. (2017) found that viewing photos on Instagram that align with societal beauty ideals, such as women who have larger breasts, lead to an increase of women internalizing the beauty ideal against their own appearances. Women view images and compare themselves to the beauty ideal that is portrayed, which results in greater self-objectification; they feeling poorly about themselves and believe they should look like a celebrity on Instagram (Fardouly et al. 2017). Sexual objectification, and self-objectification, occurs early on in girls' adolescence (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Girls who experience pubertal changes also experience a change in ownership of their body; they learn that their body belongs less to them and more to others

viewing them (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Contemporary research from Trekels et al. (2018) supported Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) research when noting that female adolescents are more likely to engage in self-objectification since they see images of idealized appearances and try to emulate them, by sexualizing themselves. Trekels et al. (2018) also showed that social media and women's magazines forced young adolescent women to self-objectify themselves against beauty ideals, which meant these young women found their self-value by how closely they resembled the standard beauty ideal. This is a unique example of self-objectification because images in media and magazines are often altered to be more attractive, so women are self-objectifying against the impossible. These two case studies, Fardouly et al. (2017) and Trekels et al. (2018), reiterate the notion that women of all ages are constantly being bombarded with images of sexualized female bodies, which causes women to internalize negative feelings and make them hyper aware of their appearance. Women who experience self-objectification have also been known to be hyper aware of their bodies (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997), and even restrict their movements or routines for fear of sexual assault (Donnelly and Calogero 2017; Fairchild and Rudman 2008). Self-objectification relates back to rape myths and rape culture because some women blame themselves for their assault, explaining that they dressed provocatively or that they did not fight back, despite the fact that the assault is not their fault at all (Burnett et al. 2009). Recent research has also established a positive relationship between objectification and rape myth acceptance (Papp and Erchull 2019). Papp and Erchull (2019) found that women who endorse rape myths allow themselves to distance themselves from objectification and self-objectification. In essence, if women endorse rape myths, such as victim blaming, they are able to find dissimilarities from themselves and victims (Papp and Erchull 2019).

Methodology

Recruitment

Data was collected from participants aged 18 years or older, majoring in Sociology, Psychology, Education, and Criminal Justice at Bridgewater State University (BSU) through an anonymous survey link. The four previously mentioned majors were sampled due to their unique perspectives regarding sexual assault. Sociology is an academic discipline that has done extensive work on rape culture and sexual assault within society. Psychology often discusses sexual assault in relation to a person's own experiences. Criminal Justice views sexual assault in as a criminal offense and prosecutes such crimes. Education is the largest major at BSU thus offers a large pool of participants to the study, and is often privy to the subject matter of the study. There were two major research questions within the current study. The first is; what are participants' implicit beliefs about rape myths? The second research question is: how do rape myths and rape culture affect participants' feelings of safety on campus? With these research questions and participant requirements in mind I began to draw my sample.

A recruitment flyer with a brief outline of the research, approximate duration of the study, the researcher's contact information, and the anonymous survey link was sent to faculty members in Sociology, Psychology, Education, and Criminal Justice departments. See Appendix A for a full recruitment flyer. Faculty members in the four areas of study then forwarded the anonymous link via email to their majors, and students decided whether or not to participate. Participants were also recruited through an online post to BSU's student forum (available on the BSU application for enrolled students) which included the anonymous survey link. Participants gave consent by agreeing to participate in the first question of the survey, as well as through the act of submitting the survey.

Procedure

Voluntary participants completed an online survey containing questions that pertained to rape culture, rape myths, as well as demographic questions. The survey also contained hypothetical scenarios in which participants were asked to choose an answer they thought best fit the described situation. All questions in the survey adapted a two gender binary (man-woman) in order to maintain consistency amongst questions. Participants were notified that the survey was anonymous and there would be no identifiable data collected. Participants consented to the survey through the first question which again acknowledged the anonymity of the survey, and then asked them if they wished to continue. Participants who did not wish to continue, or participants whose major was not one of the four sampled disciples (11.3%) were forced to quit the survey. One respondent was removed from the data due to an explicit and inappropriate response to the self-described gender identity question.

In total, 45 participants were forced to quit and one respondent was removed. Besides the first two questions of the survey, no other questions forced respondents to quit. However, some respondents chose to not answer certain questions, which resulted in slightly flocculating counts for questions. After consent was given participants answered and completed the survey by pressing submit. Since this research involved human subjects, it was approved by BSU's Institutional Review Board before any data was collected. The approval of the university's Institutional Review Board ensures the anonymity and protection of all participants in the study.

Participants

Participants were 289 students at BSU, who were majoring in Sociology (97), Psychology (40), Education (135), and Criminal Justice (49). Participants primarily identified as

women (179), but also included men (38), non-binary (5), and transgender (1). In total, there were only 6 non-binary or transgender identified respondents, therefore these two gender categories are grouped into one when analyzing the data. A majority of respondents identified their sexual orientation as straight (173), while other respondents identified as gay or lesbian (3), bisexual (33), queer (8), asexual (3), and 4 respondents chose to self-describe as pansexual or not sure. Most respondents were aged 18-20 (98), with the 21-23 age group close behind (89 respondents), and the remaining respondents were 24 or older (37). The majority of participants were white (187), followed by Black/African-American (21), Hispanic/Latinx or Spanish origin of any race (14), Asian (12), Cape Verdean (5), Indigenous/Native American (2), and three respondents chose to self-describe (mixed ethnicity, Black/Haitian, and multicultural).

Data Analysis

The survey was generated using online software provided by Qualtrics, and generated a shareable online link to forward to faculty members and students. The complete survey is available in Appendix B. Data was analyzed using the available resources provided by Qualtrics, including the utilization of crosstabs and coding. Data in cross-tabulations was analyzed to show total counts of answers, the column percentages, and statistical significance. Statistical significance can be found in the cross-tabulations in the "Statistical Significance" row. If the value in the row is <.05, then the data is statistically significant. Cross-tabulations that did not yield statistically significant results can be found in Appendix C.

Survey questions were grouped into four major categories; Victim Blaming, Rape Denial, Rape Myth Misinformation, and Rape Culture/Rape Myth Effects, all of which pertain to specific facets of rape culture and rape myths (expanded upon in the findings section). The

Victim Blaming (VB) category included questions three questions, the Rape Denial (RD)

category included two questions, the Rape Myth Misinformation (RMM) category included three

questions, and the Rape Culture and Rape Myth Effects (RC/RM) category contained two

questions. The questions in each category were treated as dependent variables and were analyzed

in conjunction with two major independent variables, gender identity and major.

One question was examined independent of the structured categories. The question

depicted in Figure 5.1 and 5.2 was not grouped into any of the four categories due to the wide

scope of rape myths covered in responses. The responses include both victim blame ("It is her

fault for not verbalizing 'no'") and rape denial myths ("The assault never happened"), while also

addressing rape myth misinformation that victims seek/enjoy assault ("She secretly wanted the

assault to happen"), thus making it a cross-categorical question. Due to the structure of the

question in Figure 5.1 and 5.2 (respondents are asked to select all that apply) the cross-tabulation

(Figure 5.1) was not able to be tested for statistical significance; however the breakdown of

responses by gender can still be seen. The bar graph (Figure 5.2) serves as a comprehensive

graphic to view the scope of responses. The cross-categorical seeks to understand respondents'

implicit beliefs regarding various rape myths. The bar graph can be viewed in Appendix C,

Figure 5.2.

In total, the survey contained four open ended questions, three of which offered

participants the option to self-describe their race and/or ethnicity, their sexual orientation, and

their gender identity. Therefore, the only question that was coded for was a non-demographic

question, which asked respondents to identify which measures of self-defense they use to protect

themselves when walking on campus at night. Qualtrics offers the ability to search for keywords

in open-ended questions, tag such responses, and organize the tags into parent topics, in order to

find common themes in the data. Answers were examined and coded for four major areas of self-defense. A diagram of reported self-defense measure, with counts, can be seen in Appendix C, Figure 6.

Findings

For all crosstabs in Appendix C, gender identity was used as the independent variable against various survey questions. As noted in the recruitment/participants section, the sample is predominantly straight, white, women identified students at BSU, however the gender identity demographic yielded consistent statistically significant results. In preliminary analysis, cross-tabulations were also run using the major demographic (Sociology, Criminal Justice, Psychology or Education) as an independent variable. The major demographic had a more even spread of responses than the gender identity demographic, yet when tested as an independent the variable the major demographic yielded no statistically significant results. This initial finding suggests that gender is connected to, or a factor in, respondents' answers to the survey questions. However, the current study cannot establish a relationship between a respondent's major and their beliefs towards rape myths.

Victim Blaming

Categorization of the survey questions served as a way to organize the data and make connections across questions. The VB category was formed by grouping questions that highlight common rape myths where the responsibility of the assault is placed on victims. Within this category, questions refer to common rape myths like, "she led him on," or "she is a flirt/slut" (question 5). Another common rape myth explored in this category is the idea that victims are to blame for their sexual assault due to their clothing choices (question 11). The VB category also

includes questions that point to rape myths which blame women for their assault because they were intoxicated (question 12). As previous literature has explained (Wade 2017; Boswell and Spade 1996), alcohol consumption on college campuses is especially evident, and many victims are blamed for sexual assault if they drank to the point of inebriation. All questions can be seen in Appendix C.

In Appendix C, Figure 1.1 seeks to understand participants' perceptions of sexual entitlement and is crossed with gender identity. In this figure, question 5 prompted participants to answer with "I disagree", "Depends on the circumstance, and "I agree", and were recoded into numerical values. The answer "I disagree" was substituted with 0, and the answers "Depends on the circumstance" and "I agree" were substituted with 1 and 2, respectively. Figure 1.1 shows that 98.2% of respondents disagree with the statement; if a woman is flirting with a man, and shows sexual interest in him, he is entitled to have sex with her. However, the results of this cross-tabulation are not statistically significant, therefore research cannot say with confidence that gender identity affects how a participant responds to a victim blame myth such as "she led him on," or "she is a flirt/slut".

Figure 1.2: Victim's Attire as a factor in Potential Sexual Assault by Gender Identity

Q11: If a woman wears clothes that are low cut, short, or tight, and experiences sexual harassment or assault, her clothing was a factor in the assault.

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Victim's Attire as a factor in Potential Sexual Assault	Disagree	24 63.2%	5 83.3%	154 86.0%	183
	Depends on the circumstance	7 18.4%	1 16.7%	21 11.7%	29
	Agree	7 18.4%	0	4 2.2%	11

(VB)	Total	38	6	179	223
	Statistical Significance				0.00718

In Figure 1.2 pictured above, participants' beliefs about a victim's attire as a factor in a potential sexual assault are run against gender identity. Like question 5, question 11 was recoded as follows; "I disagree" was substituted with 0, "Depends on the circumstance" with 1, and "I agree" with 2. The variation among choice percentages was more noticeable in this report. For example, 82.1% of the total respondents chose "I disagree", and 12.9% chose "Depends on the circumstance", leaving the remaining 4.9% of the respondents selecting "I agree". Although majority of the participants disagree with the victim-blame rape-myth that more provocative clothing choices factor into a victim's assault, when it comes to men only 63.2% reject this rape myth. Furthermore, 18.4% of men endorse this myth, as shown by the selection of the "I agree" choice. It is also apparent that the average choice of the men identified group was 0.6, as compared to the overall average of 0.2. The men in the sample were more likely than any other gender identification groups to stray from the "I disagree" category. This cross-tabulation yielded statistically significant results, meaning that there is a relationship between a respondent's gender identity and their view on a whether or not a woman's clothing choice is a factor in a sexual assault. In this case, men identified participants endorse victim blaming at a higher rate than women, non-binary, and transgender participants.

The last cross-tabulation in the VB category is shown in Figure 1.3 in Appendix C, and shows participants beliefs of a victim's intoxication as a factor in a sexual assault by gender identity. The responses for the dependent variable were recoded from choices "The assault was her fault, because she got too drunk", "Depends on the circumstance", and "The assault was not

her fault" into values 0, 1, and 2 respectively. When run against the independent variable of gender identity, the average (1.9) answer selected by respondents was, "The assault was not her fault". Woman identified respondents were the only group to endorse the victim-blame rape-myth, with 1.1% of women choosing "The assault was her fault, because she got too drunk". Still, 96.6% of women did not endorse the myth, in contrast with only 84.2% of the man identified group rejecting the myth. Men were also the largest portion of the sample to choose "Depends on the circumstance" at 15.8%. Results for this cross-tabulation were not statistically significant, and as a result the study is unable to conclude if there is a relationship between gender identity and how strongly a person rejects or endorses a rape myth which blames victims for alcohol consumption.

Rape Denial

The rape denial category (RD) refers to rape myths where the sexual assault is completely denied from existing. Rape denial functions as a type of rape myth because it implies the sexual assault itself is a myth. Unlike victim blaming, rape denial focuses less on victims' presumed responsibility, and more on social norms and an archetype of what sexual assault "looks like". For instance, questions in this section refer to rape myths in which the absence of fighting back against a perpetrator, or a lack verbalizing discomfort/unwillingness to have sex, is taken as consent. Questions within this category assume that the criteria for a sexual assault involve the victim saying "no" (question 4), while also hinting at a common social misconception that people within a romantic relationship cannot be raped (question 10). Questions 4 and 10 can be seen in Appendix B.

Figure 2.1: Perceptions on the Absence of Verbal Consent by Gender Identity
Q4: If a person does not explicitly say "no" before having sex they cannot be raped.

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Perceptions on the Absence of Verbal Consent (RD)	Disagree	28 73.7%	6 100.0%	156 87.6%	190
	Depends on Circumstance	6 15.8%	0 0.0%	20 11.2%	26
	Agree	4 10.5%	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	6
	Total	38	6	178	222
	Statistical Significance				0.0021

Figures 2.1and 2.2 pertain to the RD category, which refers to rape myths that deny

sexual assaults from being possible or plausible. Figure 2.1 pictured above shows participants'

perceptions on the absence of verbal consent by gender identity. The answers for this question

were recoded into the following; 0 for "I disagree", 1 for "Depends on the circumstance" and 2

for "I agree". In this cross-tabulation, the average response was 0.2, which is closest to value 0,

meaning that the average response for this question "I disagree". When looking closer men

identified participants had the most diversity among responses; 73.7% disagreed, 15.8% felt it

depended on the circumstance, and 10.5% agreed with the statement posed by the question, "If a

person does not explicitly say 'no' before having sex the cannot be raped". Thus, 10.5% the men

identified demographic in the study endorsed this rape denial myth. Of the women identified

respondents, 87.6% rejected the rape denial myth, 11.2% thought it depended on the

circumstance, and only 1.1% endorsed the myth. All participants who identified as non-binary or

transgender disagreed with the statement in the survey question, thus rejecting the rape denial

myth. This cross-tabulation is also statistically significant, indicating that participants who

identified as men are more likely to endorse rape denial myths in the absence of verbalizing "no"

to an unwanted sexual encounter. In other words, men identified participants engage in rape denial at a greater rate than the other sampled gender groups.

Figure 2.2 in Appendix C is a cross-tabulation for question 10 and gender identity. This cross-tabulation pertains to perceptions of potential victimization within romantic relationships by gender identity. The answers for question 10 were also recoded into the following; 0 for "He would not assault her because he is her boyfriend", 1 for "Depends on the circumstance" and 2 for "She is still capable of being assaulted, even in a relationship. This question yielded an average answer of 1.9, indicating that the average is closest to value 2; "She is still capable of being assaulted, even in a relationship". In the non-binary or transgender and women groups zero respondents endorsed the rape denial myth. Men were the only gender group to choose, "He would not assault her because he is her boyfriend" at 2.6. Data in this cross-tabulation was not deemed statistically significant. Therefore, more research would need to be done to examine if gender identity and the given rape denial myth have a correlational relationship.

Rape Myth Misinformation

The rape myth misinformation (RMM) category was formed by compiling questions in which misinformation around sexual assault is highlighted. This category contains questions that deal with understanding consent, the notion that women make false rape accusations, and the identity of sexual assault perpetrators. One specific question seeks to understand participants' definition of consent, and if they believe consent is a one-time affirmation of willingness to have sex, or if it is more fluid (question 7). The common misconception that women make false rape claims is also tested for in the RD category. A widely endorsed piece of misinformation about sexual assault on campuses is that it is often perpetrated by an individual unknown to the victim

(stranger-rape) (Burnett et al. 2009). Rape culture on college campuses brings attention to stranger-rape, but often does not warn of the rates of acquaintance-rape (Burnett et al 2009); therefore a question in this category addresses participants' beliefs regarding the occurrence stranger-rape.

Figure 3.1: Perceptions of Sexual Consent by Gender Identity

Q7: A man and woman start to have sex, but the woman changes her mind and no longer wishes to have sex. The man still has her consent.

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Woman	Total
Perceptions of Sexual Consent (RMM)	Yes	2 5.3%	1 16.7%	2 1.1%	5
	Depends on the circumstance	2 5.3%	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	4
	No	34 89.5%	5 83.3%	175 97.8%	214
	Total	38	6	179	223
	Statistical Significance				0.00398

The next rape myth category examined was RMM. In this category, questions 7, 8, and 9, were again run against gender identity. As seen above, Figure 3.1 compares participants' perceptions of sexual consent against gender identity. The answers to question 7 were recoded as follows; "Yes, she can't take back her consent once it was given" into 0, "Depends on the circumstance" into 1, and "No, she changed her mind and he no longer has consent" into 2. As a result, value 0 endorsed the rape myth, value 1 does not endorse nor reject, and value 2 rejected the rape myth. The average answer was 1.9, and the median answer was 2, indicating that the majority of respondents reject this myth. The non-binary or transgender group had a large proportion, in terms of percentage, of endorsement at 16.7%, compared to men at 5.3%, and

women at 1.1%. Still, overall data showed that 95.5% of respondents chose value 2; "No, she changed her mind and he no longer has consent". Results from this crosstab were highly statistically significant, meaning that participants who identified as men are more likely than women to believe that consent cannot be redacted once given. This can also be interpreted that men identified participants have more rigid ideas of sexual consent; whereas women identified participants have a more fluid view of consent.

In Appendix C, Figure 3.2 is a cross-tabulation which compares how often respondents believe women make false rape claims and their gender identity. The answers for question 8, ("never," "rarely," "somewhat often," "often," and "very often,") were recoded into corresponding numerical values from 0 through 4. The average answer for question 8, in conjunction with gender identity, was 1.3. This is closest to 1, meaning the average answer is the "rarely" category. The overall breakdown of data was; never= 2.7%, rarely= 68.3%, somewhat often= 22.8%, often= 4.5%, and very often= 1.8%. Of the respondents who identified as men, 31.6% believe women make false rape claims somewhat often, and 5.3% believe women make them often, and 2.6% believe they make them very often. Out of all gender groups, men had the highest percentages of respondents who believe women make false rape claims somewhat often. Non-binary respondents had a varied breakdown as follows; never= 0%, rarely= 60%, somewhat often= 20%, often= 0%, and very often= 20%. As stated, the non-binary group is small, so any variations in the group appear starker. The data across women read as; never= 2.8%, rarely= 70.9%, somewhat often= 21.2%, often= 3.9%, and very often= 1.1%. Still, the percent of respondents who believe women make r=false rape claims somewhat often, often, or very often is 29.1%, nearly one-third of the respondents. Results from this cross-tabulation are not

statistically significant; meaning that in the current study there is not an established relationship between gender and how often a respondent believes women make false rape claims.

Figure 3.3, which can be seen in Appendix C, shows a cross-tabulation for perceptions of victim-perpetrator relationships run against gender identity. Question 9 offered two possible choices, "A stranger, or someone unknown to the victim" and, "An individual who knows the victim", which were substituted for 0 and 1, respectively. The total cross-tabulation shows an average response was 1, "An individual who knows the victim", However, 10.5% of men chose the response, "A stranger, or someone unknown to the victim", whereas only 3.4% of women participants chose this response. All participants identified as non-binary and transgender participants chose the response, "An individual who knows the victim". Data from this cross-tabulation was not statistically significant, indicating that the relationship between gender identity and misinformation surrounding perpetrators of sexual assault is not identifiable in the current study.

Rape Culture/Rape Myth Effects

Lastly, the rape culture/rape myths effects (RC/RM) category is comprised of two questions that pertain to the possible effects that rape culture and/or rape myths has on students. The questions in this category investigate consent and the comfort level of students while walking alone at night. Consent is a topic in which many undergraduate students have a difficult time understanding and articulating (Burnett et al. 2009), so within this category the effects whether or not students engage in giving and asking for consent is studied (question 3). The feeling of safety is often affected by rape culture, and as a result of the fear of potential sexual assault and harassment many women change their behavior (Fairchild and Rudman 2008). A

question in this category was implemented to understand participants' feelings of safety on campus at night (question 13). The specific questions in this category can be seen in Appendix B.

The last category, RC/RM studies survey questions that aim to estimate the effects of rape culture and rape myths, in this case the respondents understanding of consent and the respondents feelings of safety regarding walking on campus at night. Figure 4.1, located in Appendix C, shows participants' perceptions of verbal consent as a necessity in a sexual encounter run against gender identity. Question 3 was recoded into the values 0, 1, and 2, for answers "I disagree", "Depends on the circumstance, and "I agree" respectively. In Figure 4.1 91.5% of respondents agreed to the statement, and thus believe you should not have sex with someone unless you have their verbal consent. In contrast, 1.8% answered "I disagree" and 6.7% answered "Depends on the circumstance". Within the group of men identified participants, no one answered with "I disagree", whereas in the non-binary group 20% answered with "I disagree". Only 7.3% of women disagreed with the statement, or thought it depended on the circumstance. Data from this cross-tabulation was not deemed statistically significant, and as a result of such findings, it is unclear if gender identity and understanding of consent have an established relationship.

Figure 4.2: Feelings of Safety on Campus at Night by Gender Identity
Q13: Do you feel safe walking on campus at nighttime?

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Feelings of Safety on Campus at Night (RC/RM)	Yes	28 73.7%	2 33.3%	41 22.9%	71
	Depends on Circumstances	8 21.1%	4 66.7%	85 47.5%	97
	No	2 5.3%	0 0.0%	53 29.6%	55

	Total	38	6	179	223
	Statistical Significance				0.00000

In Figure 4.2, question 13 and gender identity are compared. Nearly a quarter of the overall participants (24.6%) did not feel safe walking on campus at nighttime, 43.3% felt as though their feeling of safety was dependent on circumstances, and 32.1% felt safe walking on campus at night. The most contrasting data in this cross-tabulation is between men, who feel safe walking on campus at night (73.7%), and women who feel safe walking on campus at night (22.9%) Furthermore, more women feel unsafe than safe, as shown by the 29.6% who answered "No" to the question. The discrepancy in feelings of safety is further proven by statistical significance. There is a statistically significant relationship between one's gender and their feelings of safety when walking on campus at nighttime. Participants that identified as women are more likely to feel unsafe walking on campus at nighttime, and participants who identified as men are more than three times more likely than any other gender identity to feel safe walking on campus at nighttime.

Figure 5.1: Perceptions of Rape Myths in General by Gender Identity
Q6: If a woman says she is sexually assaulted, but never verbally told her rapist "no" (select all that apply):

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Perceptions of Rape Myths in General (Cross-Categorical)	It is her fault for not verbalizing "no."	4 10.5%	1 16.7%	9 5.0%	14
	She secretly wanted the sexual assault.	2 5.3%	1 16.7%	1 0.6%	4
	The assault is still valid, and should be investigated.	36 94.7%	6 100.0%	177 98.9%	219
	The assault never happened.	1 2.6%	0	1 0.6%	2

	Total	38	6	179	223

Figure 5.2: Cross-Sectional Examination of Participants Implicit Beliefs of Rape Myths

Q6 - If a woman says she is sexually assaulted, but never verbally told her rapist "no" (select all that apply):
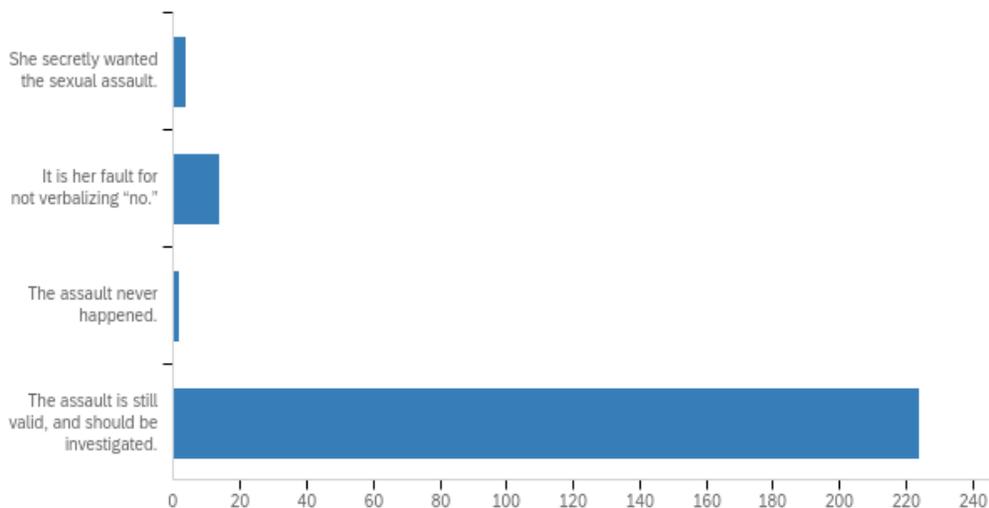

Figure 5.1 is a cross-tabulation between respondents' genders and their answers to the cross-categorical question. Question 6 allowed participants to select all answers they believed fit, therefore answers are not mutually exclusive and total percentages may be over 100%. The breakdown of this reveals that majority of respondents reject rape myths, a finding which has been supported by the previous statistically significant results of cross-tabulations. However, this question does prove that participants engage in rape myth endorsement across categories, with victim blaming being the most endorsed type of rape myth (6.3%). Within the men identified participants, 10.5% engaged in victim blaming (It is her fault for not verbalizing "no."), 5.3% engage in rape myth misinformation (She secretly wanted the sexual assault") 2.6% engage in rape denial ("The assault never happened").

Figure 5.2 in Appendix C is bar graph showing the spread of responses to a multi-categorical question. The responses in this question are not mutually exclusive, because respondents were asked to select all answers they felt applied to the hypothetical scenario posed within the question. A majority of respondents chose to reject the various rape myths by choosing, "The assault is still valid, and should be investigated" (224). Conversely, 20 responses in total endorsed rape myths. More specifically, 2 endorsed rape denial, 4 endorsed rape myth misinformation, and 14 endorsed victim blaming. The bar graph in Figure 5.2 illustrates that a majority of the study rejects rape myths; however, of the rape myths endorsed victim blaming is the most common. This visual representation is reflective of the statistically significant findings in the previous categories.

Figure 6.1: Reported Self-Defense Measures by Gender Identity
Q14: When walking on campus at night do you take measures to protect yourself?

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Reported Self-Defense Measures (Open-Ended)	Yes	7 18.4%	4 66.7%	141 80.1%	152
	No	31 81.6%	2 33.3%	35 19.9%	68
	Total	38	6	176	220
	Statistical Significance				0.00000

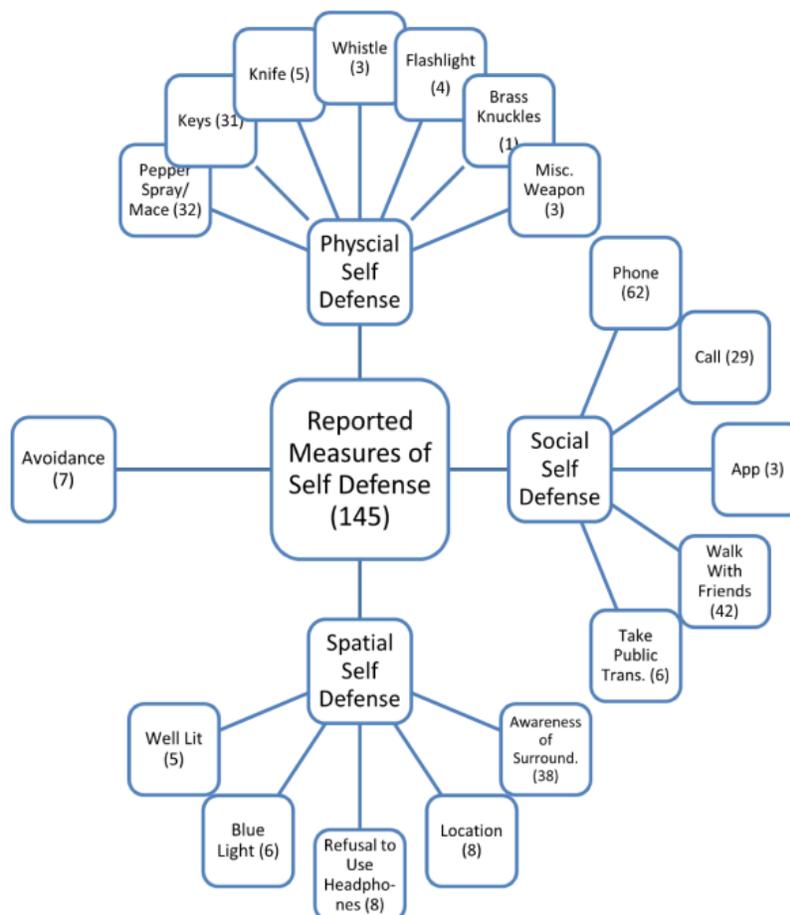**Figure 6.2: Cluster Diagram Depicting Reported Measures of Self-Defense**

Figure 6.1 is the cross-tabulation for feelings of safety on campus and gender identity.

The question that serves as the dependent variable in this cross-tabulation is also an optional,

open-ended question with the responses coded in Figure 6.2 (question 14). For ease of

organization, the cross-tabulation and cluster diagram are analyzed together. Figure 6.1 shows

that 80.1% of women identified respondents do not feel safe on campus at night and as a result

take measures to protect themselves on campus at night, while only 19.9% report feeling safe on

campus at night. This data is almost the inverse of the men identified participants; 81.6% feel

safe walking on campus at night and did not report taking any self-defense measures, meaning

18.4% of men report taking self-defense measures. Also, 66.7% of non-binary or transgender identified participants report taking measures of self-defense. The results for this cross-tabulation were statistically significant which means there is an established relationship between gender and feelings of safety on campus. Women identified participants report utilizing self-defense measures at a greater rate than men identified participants. The statistical significance in Figure 6.1 echoes the statistical significance in Figure 4.2, and both cross-tabulations support the finding that women identified participants are more likely to feel less safe than men identified participants.

Figure 6.2 shows a cluster diagram of reported measures of self-defense from question 14, which asks respondents if they feel safe walking on campus at night and if not to describe any measures of self-defense they take. There were 145 total responses from the open-ended question. The responses were compiled in Qualtrics software, and were then sifted through by searching for key words which relate to each parent topic, and subsequently categorizing the responses into the appropriate parent topics. The four parent topics included physical self-defense, social self-defense, spatial self-defense, and avoidance. Parent categories are not mutually exclusive, because many respondents take multiple measures of self-defense, and therefore the counts of sub-categories will not add up to the 145 responses.

Physical Self Defense Measures

Physical self-defense measures were categorized by the reporting of objects that respondents carry, use, or have on their person while walking on campus at night. In the parent topic of physical self-defense, most respondents reported carrying pepper spray/mace (32) and using their keys as a weapon (31). Some respondents carried a knife (5), a whistle (3), and a

flashlight (4), while fewer noted they carry something that can be used as a weapon (for example a large metal water bottle), and one respondent reported wearing brass knuckles. The reported measures of physical self-defense are overtly dangerous and aim at inflicting pain on a possible perpetrator. However, these self-defense measures assume that a perpetrator will be close enough to spray with pepper spray/mace, or to jab with one's keys.

Social Self-Defense Measures

Social self-defense measures were grouped by responses containing objects that have the capacity to connect respondents to another person(s), or authorities, and also responses in which respondents make note of being in a public setting. In the social self-defense category 62 respondents made note of having their phone on their person (more specifically 29 reported being on a phone call with a friend/family member), and 42 respondents walk with friends to ensure they are not alone while walking on campus at night. Some respondents go out of their way to take public transportation (6) so they are in a setting with more people, and 3 respondents reported using apps on their phones that when activated, alert authorities of their location. These measures of self-defense are more discreet than physical self-defense measures because respondents are making a point to stay connected with people they trust or the general public at all times, and therefore may feel less of a need to equip themselves with weapons or tools.

Spatial-Self Defense Measures

Spatial self-defense measures relate specifically to respondents' surroundings, their awareness of such, and the ways they navigate such surroundings when walking on campus at night. Awareness of surroundings was the largest sub-category within the spatial self-defense parent topic, with 38 respondents staying alert of their settings. Respondents also report a refusal

to wear headphones (8), as it can obstruct their hearing and distract them. Respondents also stay aware of their location (8), making mental notes of where they are, some stay near the blue light system on campus (6) (blue lamp posts positioned around campus walkways which allow students to call authorities in case of emergency), and some respondents also make an effort to stay in well-lit areas at all times (5). Spatial self-defense measures are neutral self-defense measures since they do not aim to inflict pain on a possible perpetrator, nor do they alert third parties of a respondent's whereabouts, but it is still evident that respondents are taking precautions and not practicing avoidance.

Avoidance

The avoidance parent topic contains responses where respondents make note of blatantly avoiding walking on campus at night. The avoidance parent topic does not have any sub-categories, but within the parent topic 7 respondents report avoiding walking on campus at night. The avoidance parent topic is reflective of past literature which has made note that women often change their patterns, schedules, and actions in fear of a potential sexual assault (Fairchild and Rudman 2008). Avoidance serves as the most benign self-defense measure because it means that respondents do not engage in walking alone at night, as opposed to physical self-defense measure which assumes a need for weapons in the event of danger.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to expand upon previous literature surrounding rape myth acceptance and rape culture within the context of a college campus. Findings from the study not only support previous research, but further concurred that there is a statistically significant

relationship between gender and rape myth acceptance. The analysis of the survey data showed that a person's gender identity affects their endorsement of rape myths.

This study concludes, with statistical significance, that men identified participants endorse victim blaming at a higher rate than women, non-binary, and transgender participants. More specifically, men are more likely to believe that clothing choices are factors in sexual assaults. Of the statistically significant cross-tabulations for the VB and RD categories (Figure 1.2 and Figure 2.1, respectively) men endorsed victim blaming myths at a greater rate than rape denial myths; 18.4% to 10.5%. Men identified participants deny sexual assaults in the absence of verbalizing "no" to a rapist, more than any other studied gender groups. In other words, the men identified respondents in the study endorsed rape denial myths at a greater rate than other participants. Men identified participants are also more likely believe that consent cannot be taken back once given in a sexual encounter, suggesting a more rigid definition of consent compared to women.

Women identified participants are more likely than any other gender group to feel unsafe walking on their college campus at night, in contrast to men identified participants who feel the safe walking on campus at night. In the current study, men are more than three times more likely than women to feel safe walking on campus at nighttime. Furthermore, women identified participants are four times more likely than men to take measures of self-defense when walking in campus at nighttime. Overall, women reject victim blaming and rape denial myths, as well as rape myth misinformation, at a greater rate than men.

The current study has also shed light on the measures participants take to defend themselves while walking on campus at nighttime. The greatest reported measures of self-

defense include walking with friends, staying aware of one's surroundings, and carrying pepper spray/mace. Self-defense measures reported in the study range from dangerous to benign, but nonetheless are taken by respondents out of fear. Respondents prepare themselves for the potential of sexual assault by positioning themselves in public places with others, and carrying weapons in the event that a perpetrator is close, and staying on high alert at all times. The responses within this question reveal the fear that respondents experience from threat of sexual assault. Although the self-reported data cannot be tested for statistical significance, it is notable because it shows the scope of various self-defense measures and the different ways in which they function to protect respondents. There should be more research into how students' feelings of safety, or lack thereof, affect their day to day lives.

Upon initial review of the data I expected to find statistical significance across the academic major demographic because respondents were spread more evenly across majors than the gender identity demographic. However, as explained within the methodology section it was discovered that major and implicit beliefs regarding rape myths did not have a statistically significant relationship. Despite a more even distribution within the major demographic, there was not a strong correlational relationship between a respondent's major and their beliefs regarding victim blaming, rape denial, rape myth misinformation, and the effects of rape myths and rape culture. Since there was no statistical significance found across majors, the notion that gender identity and implicit rape myth beliefs have a stronger relationship is further supported.

The current study highlights gender based discrepancies in rape culture, such as the rejection and/or endorsement of rape myths, and feelings of personal safety on campus. However, more work should be done, with larger samples, across many campuses, in order to yield more generalizable results. Rape myths and rape culture continue to persist within society,

with college campuses being a hotbed for such ideologies. I urge colleges and various

institutions of higher education, to be aware of the dangers of rape culture and rape myths and

focus on more comprehensive education about consent and sexual assault. Sexual education

should be focused on skills that help students engage in safe, consensual sex, as opposed to fear-

induced learning that centers on the potential for sexual assault. Students have the right to feel

safe and secure on their campuses, and creating a more educated environment can achieve

greater feelings of safety. With a shared responsibility and more education about rape culture

amongst students, faculty, and administration, colleges and universities can begin to deconstruct

the harmful rhetoric that rape culture perpetuates.

Limitations

There were significant limitations to this study. One limitation to the study was the

inability to conduct a larger, more generalizable study. Due to the small sample size the findings

in the study cannot be generalized to society as a whole. The small sample size was a result of

convenience sampling, and only having one researcher conducting the study. In order to conduct

the research in the given time frame of two academic semesters, the sample was limited to

students within the research's own cohort. If there were more researchers across multiple

locations it is likely that the study could have been more generalizable and the response rate

would have been greater. The response rate remained small, which could be due to many

reasons; such as adversity to the subject matter, an unwillingness to participate, and/or reluctance

to be forthcoming about one's personal beliefs.

When looking specifically at participants it is apparent that the majority of the study's

participants were white, straight women. This imposes a limitation on the study, since the results,

and subsequent findings, are more likely to be skewed toward shared beliefs that the majority demographic may have. The geographical location of the study also put limits on the generalizability of the research. The study was conducted in the Northeast region of the United States, a part of the country that has been historically liberal in its sexually progressive beliefs. Furthermore, this study was conducted on a mid-sized, public college campus with a primarily white student body (75% white, 25% students of color; "Bridgewater State University." 2020). The racial make-up of the university resulted in a study with a majority of white participants. Also, within the context of universities liberal mindsets tend to prevail and can reflect in a students' personal beliefs. It is important to note that students of the sampled university are relatively familiar with the subject matter discussed in the current study. Students are required to complete sexual violence training upon orientation, and the campus police offer Rape Aggression and Defense training twice a year to students.

One particular unforeseeable limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic. The severity of this global pandemic resulted in the closure of college campuses, including BSU, and termination of in-person courses. As a result of the safety measures implemented, the study fell vulnerable to less exposure, because I was unable to employ the use of physical flyers and word of mouth, and therefore relied solely on anonymous survey links to gather data. As a result, it is possible that the response rate was affected by precautions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also important to acknowledge my own personal bias as a researcher. I have taken many courses at BSU involving gender-based inequality and have also completed the sexual violence training as required by my university. Rape culture is a topic I have studied in pervious courses, and is a subject I am personally passionate about. Furthermore, as a white, straight

woman I realize my own demographic characteristics reflect the majority of respondents who

participated in the study. However, I approached the study with caution and was mindful to use

language in the survey questions that did not impose my own personal opinions, nor my personal

beliefs. I did not pose leading or ambiguous questions, and instead took an empirical approach to

the phrasing of the questions. I also made the survey completely anonymous in order to make

participants feel more comfortable with answering openly and freely to the questions.

Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

Are you a BSU student, 18 or older, majoring in Sociology, Psychology, Education, or Criminal Justice? If so, would you be interested in filling out a 10-minute online survey?

Please Note: The survey will cover sensitive topics regarding sexual assault and sexual violence. Participants who do not complete all questions in the survey, or exit the survey page before submitting, will have their data deleted and not included in the final sample.

Qualifications:

- Currently enrolled at BSU and majoring in Sociology, Psychology, Education, or Criminal Justice
- Currently 18 or older
- Willing to participate in an approximately 10-minute survey

If interested in participating or have any additional questions, please contact:

Meghan Lewis
Departmental Honors in Sociology
m5lewis@student.bridgew.edu

Appendix B

Survey exported from Qualtrics

The Prevalence of Rape Myths on a Mid-Sized, Public College Campus

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Q1 This survey contains sensitive questions regarding sexual assault and sexual violence against women. All responses will remain anonymous. Do you wish to continue?

○ Yes

○ No

Q2 Select all Majors that apply to you (choose all that apply.)

☐ Sociology

☐ Psychology

☐ Education

☐ Criminal Justice

☐ My major is not here

Q3 You should not have sex with someone unless you have their verbal consent.

○ I agree

○ I disagree

○ Depends on the circumstance

Q4 If a person does not explicitly say "no" before having sex they cannot be raped.

○ I agree

○ I disagree

○ Depends on the circumstance

Q5 If a woman is flirting with a man, and shows sexual interest in him, he is entitled to have sex with her.

○ I agree

○ I disagree

Q6 If a woman says she is sexually assaulted, but never verbally told her rapist "no" (select all that apply):

☐ She secretly wanted the sexual assault.

☐ It is her fault for not verbalizing "no."

☐ The assault never happened.

☐ The assault is still valid, and should be investigated.

Q7 A man and woman start to have sex, but the woman changes her mind and no longer wishes to have sex. The man still has her consent.

○ Yes, she can't take back her consent once it was given.

○ No, she changed her mind and he no longer has consent.

○ Depends on the circumstance

Q8 How often do you believe women make false rape claims?

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Somewhat often

○ Often

○ Very often

Q9 When a man rapes a woman, he is usually:

○ A stranger, or someone unknown to the victim

○ An individual who knows the victim

Q10 A man is accused of sexually assaulting his girlfriend. Which of the following is true?

○ He would not assault her because he is her boyfriend

○ She is still capable of being assaulted, even in a relationship

○ Depends on the circumstance

Q11 If a woman wears clothes that are low cut, short, or tight, and experiences sexual harassment or assault, her clothing was a factor in the assault.

○ I agree

○ I disagree

○ Depends on the circumstance

Q12 A woman is intoxicated to the point where she can no longer give consent to have sex. The woman is sexually assaulted in the intoxicated state.

○ The assault was her fault, because she got too drunk.

○ The assault was not her fault.

○ Depends on the circumstance

Q13 Do you feel safe walking on campus at nighttime?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Depends on the circumstance

Q14 When walking on campus at night do you take measures to protect yourself?

○ No, I feel safe walking alone at night.

○ If yes, what measures do you take? Please type your answer

_____

Q15 How old are you?

○ 17 or younger

○ 18-20

○ 21-23

○ 24 or older

Q16 What is your race and/or ethnicity? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Black/African-American

☐ Hispanic/Latinx or Spanish origin of any race

☐ Indigenous/Native American

☐ White

☐ Cape Verdean

☐ Asian

☐ Prefer to self describe, please type your answer:
_____

Q17 What is your sexual orientation?

○ Straight

○ Gay or Lesbian

○ Bisexual

○ Queer

○ Asexual

○ Prefer to self describe, please type your answer:
_____

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Q18 What is your gender identity?

○ Man

○ Woman

○ Non-binary

○ Transgender

○ Prefer to self describe, please type your answer:
_____

Appendix C

Figure 1.1: Perceptions of Sexual Entitlement by Gender Identity
Q5: If a woman is flirting with a man and shows sexual interest in him, he is entitled to have sex with her.

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Woman	Total
Perceptions of Sexual Entitlement (VB)	Disagree	36 94.7%	6 100.0%	179 99.4%	221
	Agree	2 5.3%	0 0.0%	1 0.6%	3
	Total	38	6	180	223
	Statistical Significance				0.4988

Figure 1.3: Victim's Intoxication as a Factor in Sexual Assault by Gender Identity

Q12: A woman is intoxicated to the point where she can no longer give consent to have sex. The woman is sexually assaulted in the intoxicated state.

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Victim's Intoxication as a Factor in Sexual Assault (VB)	The assault was her fault, because she got too drunk.	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 1.1%	2
	Depends on the circumstance	6 15.8%	0 0.0%	4 2.2%	10
	The assault was not her fault.	32 84.2%	6 100.0%	172 96.6%	210
	Total	38	6	178	222
	Statistical Significance				0.0775

Figure 2.2: Perceptions of Potential Victimization within Romantic Relationships by Gender Identity

Q10: A man is accused of sexually assaulting his girlfriend. Which of the following is true?

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Perceptions of Potential Victimization within Romantic Relationships (RD)	He would not assault her because he is her boyfriend	1 2.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1
	Depends on the Circumstance	2 5.3%	1 16.7%	7 3.9%	10
	She is still capable of being assaulted, even in a relationship	35 92.1%	5 83.3%	172 96.1%	212
	Total	38	6	179	223
	Statistical Significance				0.4208

Figure 3.2: Perceptions of False Rape Claims by Gender Identity

Q8: How often do you believe women make false rape claims?

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Perceptions of False Rape Claims (RMM)	Never	1 2.6%	0 0.0%	5 2.8%	6
	Rarely	22 57.9%	4 66.7%	127 70.9%	153
	Somewhat Often	12 31.6%	1 16.7%	38 21.2%	51
	Often	2 5.3%	0 0.0%	7 3.9%	9
	Very Often	1 2.6%	1 16.7%	2 1.1%	4
	Total	38	6	179	223
	Statistical Significance				0.6251

Figure 3.3: Perceptions of Victim-Perpetrator Relationships by Gender Identity

Q9: When a man rapes a woman, he is usually:

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Perceptions of Victim-Perpetrator Relationships (RMM)	Stranger/Unknown	4 10.5%	0 0.0%	6 3.4%	10
	Known Individual	34 89.5%	6 100.0%	173 96.6%	213
	Total	38	6	179	223
	Statistical Significance				0.3816

Figure 4.1: Perceptions of Verbal Consent as Necessity by Gender Identity

Q3: You should not have sex with someone unless you have their verbal consent.

		Gender Identity			
		Man	Non-binary or Transgender	Women	Total
Perceptions of Verbal Consent as Necessity (RC/RM)	Disagree	0	1 16.7%	3 1.7%	4
	Depends on Circumstances	5 13.2%	0 0.0%	10 5.6%	15
	Agree	33 86.8%	5 83.3%	166 92.7%	204
	Total	38	6	179	223
	Statistical Significance				.10559

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