

# “Men Cannot Be Raped”: Correlates of Male Rape Myth Acceptance

Journal of Interpersonal Violence  
2021, Vol. 36(13-14) 6391–6417  
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DOI: 10.1177/0886260518817777  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jiv



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## Abstract

Despite the increased attention surrounding rape and sexual assault, research on male victims remains limited, particularly concerning the adherence to rape myths. Rape myths, which are false beliefs that are widely accepted, contribute to the justification and normalization of sexual violence by offenders and focus on the actions and behavior of victims while minimizing the harm. Addressing the gaps in the research, the present study examines how demographics, personal experiences with rape (i.e., being or knowing a survivor), and belief systems relate to rape myth adherence for male victims. The sample consisted of 1,220 adults in the United States who completed an online survey via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The number of myths endorsed ranged from 0 to 21 with a mean of 4.1 ( $SD = 4.7$ ). In the final model of the hierarchical regression, results indicate rape myth acceptance was positively associated with individuals who were male, older, and more likely to believe males falsely report rapes to law enforcement at a high rate. Of the gender and sexuality attitudinal scales, individuals who adhered to female rape myths, held negative attitudes toward homosexuals, accepted traditional sexual double standards, and believed in traditional social gender roles were more likely to adhere to male rape myths. Findings demonstrate that rape myths operate similarly for male and female victims. Sexual assault programming and interventions need to address that males can be victims of sexual violence and the myths associated with male victimization in addition to generally challenging the adverse belief systems that serve as the foundation for rape myths generally.

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**Keywords**

rape myths, male victims, sexual assault, female offenders

**Introduction**

The issue of rape and sexual assault remains a highly charged and sensitive topic. Emerging from a feminist framework and the broader movement on violence against women and women's rights in the mid-1970s, there has been significant advancements in reforming rape law, such as rescinding the marital rape exemption, and in society's response to sexual assault (Spohn & Tellis, 2012). Yet within this context, rape had largely been conceptualized as involving male offenders and female victims, and as a result, progress has been much slower during this period in the recognition of male rape victims (see Fisher & Pina, 2013; Fuchs, 2004; Graham, 2006); some states still have gender-specific rape laws (Rumney, 2007). However, even when focusing on male victims, researchers have typically focused on specific subpopulations, including institutionalized populations (i.e., prison and jail inmates), gay and bisexual men, and the child sexual abuse of boys, with a paucity of literature on noninstitutionalized adult males in the general community (Graham, 2006; Melanson, 1998). This viewpoint has produced significant harm, as Mezey and King (1989) argue: "the politicization of rape as a feminist issue may contribute to the isolation and suffering experienced by the male victim" (p. 208). Framed in this gendered way from the onset, the issue of male victims of sexual violence has typically been downplayed or ignored by the scientific community (Javaid, 2017; Stemple & Meyer, 2014).

Contributing to the male offender–female victim paradigm, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Summary Reporting System (SRS), which is the United States's authoritative source of national-level crime statistics, had defined rape in gender-specific terminology until 2012: "the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will," where carnal knowledge is defined as "the slightest penetration of the sexual organ of the female (vagina) by the sexual organ of the male (penis)" (FBI, 2004, p. 19). Under this strict definition, male victims, female offenders, and other acts of rape (e.g., sodomy) had previously been excluded. Given its influence on national and local policy as well as academics, operationalizing rape in this manner is highly troubling and contributes to the biases male victims encounter. Bierie and Davis-Siegel (2015) estimated that the old definition undercounted sexual assaults by 40%, and of these missed cases, approximately 26% involved a male victim, with the error rate increasing over time.

Research on male sexual victimization has been hampered as well due to the incorrect belief that it is rare due to low disclosure and prevalence rates

(Fuchs, 2004; Javaid, 2017; Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Contributing to this, most nationally representative studies measuring prevalence and incidence in the United States have excluded males (National Research Council, 2014). Other public health and epidemiological studies including males have reported prevalence rates ranging from 1.7% to 7.2% for completed rapes, although all were hampered by small samples (Basile, Chen, Black, & Saltzman, 2007; Black et al., 2011; Elliott, Mok, & Briere, 2004; Sorenson, Stein, Siegel, Golding, & Burnam, 1987; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). By focusing on completed rapes, which requires penetration of the victim, those studies exclude female offenders and certain acts of sexual violence, particularly those males are likely to experience while understating the perception of the prevalence of male sexual violence.

Results from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS) indicate approximately a quarter of males (23.6%) experience some form of sexual violence over the course of their lifetime, which includes rape, being made to penetrate an individual, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact (Black et al., 2011). Furthermore, these results indicate that when comparing the number of men (1,267,000) who were made to penetrate within the last year, which is rarely captured by studies on male victimization, this was nearly equivalent to the number of women (1,270,000) who had been raped, and importantly, this still would not be captured by the updated Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) definition. Retrospective studies relying on broader definitions of what constitutes sexual violence have noted higher rates (Bullock & Beckson, 2011). For instance, in a recent study of college males, Turchik and Edwards (2012) found slightly more than half had been victims of sexual violence at least once since the age of 16. Based on the most severe incident, 21.7% reported unwanted sexual contact, 17.1% experienced rape, and 12.4% experienced sexual coercion.

The vast majority of victims do not report incidents to the police, with studies indicating not only underreporting to be more likely among males than females but males also taking significantly longer to disclose or seek medical and/or mental health services, if they do at all (Pino & Meier, 1999; Tewksbury, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005). Tjaden and Thoennes (2006) reported of all the male victims who were raped since their 18th birthday; only one in eight had their victimization reported to law enforcement. Males who report their victimization must not only deal with similar issues females face when reporting such as disbelief but also contend with structural barriers due to lack of services and support systems (Banyard et al., 2007; Kassing & Prieto, 2003; Page, 2010; Walker et al., 2005).

In sum, research surrounding male victims of sexual violence remains understudied despite being identified as a hidden population more than 30 years ago.

As the research reviewed suggests both male and female victims have similar experiences and consequences surrounding their victimization, “it follows that similar social forces and ideologies work against both genders in a similar manner” (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008, p. 601). As rape myths have been found to play a central role in the misperceptions and treatment of female rape victims (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), this study investigates whether similar mechanisms are in effect for male victims of rape. In particular, this study examines the extent to which individuals adhere to rape myths for male victims and the correlates to male rape myths.

## Rape Myth Adherence

### Background

Burt (1980) defined rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists,” which result in a rape-supportive climate hostile to victims (p. 217). Building on this definition in the development of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, now one of the most widely utilized instruments, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) operationalized this as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify *male sexual aggression against women*” (p. 134; emphasis added). As the definition implies, rape myths are important because they help influence and reinforce what is and is not sexual violence, as well as who is a “credible victim” which has implications for victims, offenders, and society (Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987).

Victims may not report an incident because it does not fit their *a priori* definition of rape; they fear that they will not be believed because others hold these myths to be true or as a defense mechanism from acknowledging their own victimization in the first place as it mitigates feelings of vulnerability and fear, whereas offenders use rape myths to justify acts of sexual violence to minimize their own actions and the harm done (Cohn, Zinzow, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2013; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Supporting this, in a nationally representative study, Cohn et al. (2013) reported that of the females who did not report to the police, more than half did not identify their experience as rape despite meeting the legal definition. This is especially salient for male victims as Scarce (1997, p. 230) notes: “men, in general, do not want to identify men as being victimized by sexual crimes because there is no way to see men as ‘victims’ and still as men,” which may result in dissociation with severe consequences to men’s psychiatric and emotional well-being (Elliott et al., 2004; Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011).

The majority of the research conducted on rape myths and scale development in this area has predominately focused on female victims and male offenders (Melanson, 1998). In Burt's (1980) 19-item scale, which is the most widely used instrument (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), only one referenced a male. Yet because this refers to a young boy, it would result in a qualitatively different response by society and law enforcement as it is considered child sexual abuse (Chen & Ullman, 2010), which has its roots in British law as women and children were largely seen as men's property. The other widely used scale, the IRMA, focuses exclusively on females (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

### *Male Rape Myths*

The scant attention given to males is apparent in an early article on attribution of victim blame for male rape victims in which Whatley and Riggio (1993) comment, "there are no obvious widely held cultural myths surrounding male rape or any type of male victimization" (p. 509). However, Turchik and Edward's (2012) review of the literature on male rape myths suggests otherwise as they identified a range of myths which they classified into the following nine categories:

(a) men cannot be raped; (b) "real" men can defend themselves against rape; (c) only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) men are not affected by rape (or not as much as women); (e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) male rape only happens in prisons; (g) sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) if a victim physically responds to an assault he must have wanted it. (pp. 211-212)

Research and scale development on rape myths for male victims remained relatively rare until Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) conducted a study among college students. Their scale examined three dimensions, each with two items: male rape cannot happen, men are to blame, and lack of trauma to the victim with items repeated for a male and female perpetrator, resulting in 12 items. Results indicated that while most respondents disagreed in some manner, men were much more likely than women to endorse every item, regardless of the offender's gender. The rate of agreement ranged from 4% to 49% for men and 2% to 27% for women, with the trauma subscale presenting the most discordance. For instance, nearly half of the men agreed that a male victim was to blame for being raped by a female

and that a male should be able to escape a woman, whereas one in five men indicated it is not possible for a male to be raped by either a male or female, and a male is to be blamed for being raped by another male.

In a replication study conducted by Chapleau et al. (2008) of college students, the percentages were somewhat similar although some items decreased significantly (e.g., "it is impossible for a woman to rape a man"), which may be attributable to increased attention to rape since the initial study was conducted. Supporting the prior finding, Chapleau and colleagues found that rape myths were more likely to be adhered to by male respondents, especially when the perpetrator was female rather than male. However, Chapleau et al. (2008) identified significant problems with the psychometric properties of the scale.

In the absence of a validated scale, Melanson (1998) developed a much more rigorous instrument consisting of 22 items, the Male Rape Myth Scale (MRMS), which was the first psychometrically and theoretically based scale. Overall, Melanson (1998) reported a mean of six myths endorsed with 97% of respondents endorsing at least one. A majority of the college students agreed in some manner to four of the items: women who rape men are sexually frustrated individuals (74%), the extent of a man's resistance should be a major factor in determining whether he was raped (62%), male rape is usually committed by homosexuals (54%), and an individual would have a hard time believing a man who was raped by a woman (52%). The multivariate analysis revealed that individuals who held negative attitudes toward gay men and believed that men should be inexpressive were associated with rape myth acceptance.

The dearth of empirical work examining the origins of male rape myths and its predictors is troubling; only a small number of studies utilize multivariate regression, with most utilizing analysis of variance or some variant and include only a small number of scales relating to sociocultural attitudes, attitudes toward gender or sexuality, and behavioral factors. Of the studies conducted, the findings suggest that male rape myth acceptance is largely driven by how people believe men and women should act, with individuals who hold more traditional views toward gender and sex roles being more likely to adhere to rape myths (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012). Specifically, individuals subscribing to traditional gender roles or double standards (Davies et al., 2012; Kassing, Beesley, & Frey, 2005; Melanson, 1998; Nalavany & Abell, 2004), holding negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Davies et al., 2012; Kassing et al., 2005; Melanson, 1998; Nalavany & Abell, 2004), adhering to stereotypes about masculinity (Nalavany & Abell, 2004) and male inexpressiveness (Melanson, 1998), and the endorsement of traditional male gender roles (Kassing et al., 2005) were associated with the acceptance of rape myths. Whereas Melanson (1998) found stereotypes on

male inexpressiveness to be related to rape myth adherence, Kassing et al. (2005) found restrictive emotionality, as well as restrictive affectionate behavior for men, had no effect on rape myth adherence. However, different instruments were used as well as two different samples (college students and adult males from different countries). Both studies that included female rape myths reported a positive relationship between the two (Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2012).

A number of demographic variables have been found to be related to rape myth adherence. The most consistent finding in the literature relates to gender—males are significantly more likely to adhere to rape myths (Davies et al., 2012; Davies & McCartney, 2003; Kassing & Prieto, 2003; Nalavany & Abell, 2004; Rosenstein, 2015; Sleath & Bull, 2010; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Researchers have also found that those who are older (Kassing et al., 2005; Nalavany & Abell, 2004; cf. Rosenstein, 2015), less educated (Kassing et al., 2005), and identify as heterosexual (Davies & McCartney, 2003) have higher levels of rape myth acceptance.<sup>1</sup> Only one study examined race and found that individuals who were White had lower levels of rape myth acceptance (Rosenstein, 2015).

Importantly, these myths are prevalent on both the micro- and macro-level of society. As Melanson (1998) notes, “to the extent that these individuals continue to believe and perpetuate myths about male rape victims, male victims will continue to be discouraged from reporting their assaults or seeking treatment for their physical and psychological injuries” (p. 89). Understanding the attitudes and beliefs that support the acceptance of male rape myths is important given that both lay people, who may serve as jurists or potential bystanders, and professionals who interact with rape victims, such as criminal justice practitioners (Cook & Lane, 2017; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Page, 2010), counselors/counselors-in-training (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Kassing & Prieto, 2003; Shechory & Idisis, 2006), medical treatment providers (Anderson & Quinn, 2009; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996), and judges (Fuchs, 2004), are susceptible to them. For instance, in a study on victim services available to males in Georgia, a law enforcement officer remarked that “most males that are fondled or sodomized are males that want to be sodomized . . . we just don’t see that many adult males, so that leads me to believe that there is just not a problem” (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996, p. 445).

While important, the current research on male rape myth adherence suffers from several limitations. Nearly all of the studies on male rape myth acceptance have been conducted utilizing solely undergraduate university students (cf. Davies & McCartney, 2003; Kassing et al., 2005) in Canada (Melanson, 1998), the United Kingdom (Davies et al., 2012; Javaid, 2017; Sleath & Bull, 2010), and the United States (Chapleau et al., 2008; Nalavany & Abell, 2004;

Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Specifically, most respondents tend to be psychology majors required to partake in surveys as part of their course or major requirement. While understanding rape myths among college students is important, particularly because this population is at an increased risk of both sexual victimization and offending, the limitations of using a college sample have been widely documented. As these surveys have been done in-person, such studies may have underestimated rape myth adherence, threatening the validity of their findings. Furthermore, every study lacks geographic coverage as samples are drawn from one location and are homogeneous, thus limiting the generalizability.

## **Present Study**

Given the relative lack of knowledge concerning adherence to male rape myths, the purpose of the present study is to gain a detailed understanding of the correlates, in particular, attitudes toward gender and sexuality, that are associated with the acceptance of male rape myths. The study builds on prior work on male rape myths and extends the body of literature by utilizing a diverse national sample of adults residing in the United States. Based on prior studies, it was hypothesized that being older, male, and heterosexual would be positively related to male rape myth acceptance, whereas individuals who were more educated, was a victim or knew a victim, and believed false reports to be low, regardless of the victim gender, would be less likely to accept male rape myths. Finally, respondents who adhere to female rape myths, have negative attitudes towards gay men, accept traditional gender roles, and believe in double standards were hypothesized to be positively associated with the acceptance of male rape myths.

## **Method**

*Data collection and procedure.* The participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (hereinafter MTurk, <http://www.mturk.com>), an online labor market launched in 2005 where individuals perform various HITS (Human Intelligence Tasks) for compensation. While originally developed for commercial purposes, MTurk has been increasingly used in the social, behavioral, and clinical sciences (Shapiro, Chandler, & Mueller, 2013). Due to the novelty of online labor markets, there has been a significant amount of research conducted on MTurk participants with a consensus that participants' data are reliable and valid, and in some cases superior than data that had been conducted in-person, even though participants self-select which HITS (i.e., surveys, experiments) to complete (Behrend, Sharek, Meade, & Wiebe, 2011;

Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Furthermore, MTurk offers several distinct advantages over traditional research methods conducted in-person: access to a diverse population, ease and speed of recruiting respondents, and reducing the effect of social desirability, all at a significant reduction in cost (see Mason & Suri, 2012, for a review). Researchers have shown that the privacy offered by online surveys not only has implications for the disclosure of sensitive information resulting in more honest answers, but the quality of data is also enhanced and less likely to have missing data (Kreuter, Presser, & Tourangeau, 2008).

To further ensure the validity of data collected, a number of measures were taken. As MTurk allows international workers, individuals who did not have a U.S. Internet protocol (IP) address were unable to proceed past the consent page. Two distinct attention checks were used to screen out inattentive respondents and two questions probed how honest the respondent was at the end of the survey (Berinsky, Margolis, & Sances, 2014). Respondents were removed for failing the attention checks and if they indicated they were not honest. The survey protocol and data collection instruments were reviewed and approved by the university's institutional review board prior to administration.

*Participants.* The sample size was guided by a power analysis using the R package "pwr," resulting in an initial sample of 1,406 participants to ensure an adequate sample after removing respondents for data issues to detect a small effect ( $f^2 = .02$ ) in the regression models (Champely, 2017). Because of excessive missing data, attention checks, honesty items, and testing of outliers, this resulted in a final sample size of 1,220 respondents. All participants in the study were residing in the United States at the time of the survey and were 18 years old.

### *Dependent variable*

*Male Rape Myth Scale (MRMS).* This 22-item scale was developed by Melanson (1998) to measure stereotypical and prejudicial beliefs regarding male rape by both male and female offenders (e.g., "Most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting off the woman") as well as gender-neutral myths (e.g., "A man can enjoy sex even if it is being forced upon him"). Each item is measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores reflecting greater adherence; the scale is summated. Melanson reported high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .90$ ), test-retest reliability ( $t = 0.89$ ), and convergent validity. Studies using this instrument have reported strong internal consistency, ranging from .85 to .99 (Davies et al., 2012; Kassing et al., 2005; Rosenstein & Carroll, 2015; Sleath & Bull, 2010). In the current study, scores ranged from 22 to 127 ( $M = 45.7$ ,  $SD = 20.5$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ ).

*Independent variables.* Three groups of variables were included based on prior research: demographics, rape items, and gender/sexuality attitudinal scales. Respondents were asked a limited number of demographic information. Gender of the respondent was coded as a dummy variable, with 1 = *male* and 0 = *female*. Age was measured as a continuous variable and standardized at the mean prior to estimating the regression models. While originally measured using multiple categories, due to low cell counts, *sexual orientation* was entered as a dummy variable, with 1 = *LGBTQ* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) and 0 = *heterosexual*. Similarly, *race* was recoded as a dummy variable and was coded as 1 = *Non-White* and 0 = *White*. *Ethnicity* measures whether the individual identified as Hispanic and was coded as 1 = *Hispanic* and 0 = *non-Hispanic*. *Education* was measured as an ordinal variable: *high school degree or less* (reference category), *some college* (i.e., some college, certificate, trade school, or 2-year degree), *4-year degree*, and *advanced degree*.

Respondents were asked questions that were related to their experiences of sexual violence occurring after the age of 14 using five screening items from the National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). A dummy variable was then created to indicate *sexually victimized*, coded as 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*. Respondents were asked if they *know victims* who were a rape victim identical to the ones queried and was dummy coded as 1 = *yes* and 0 = *does not know victims*. Respondents were asked what percentage of reported rapes to law enforcement they believe are false for *males* and *females*, respectively. Due to the significant skew, both were recoded as an ordinal variable: *less than 10%* (reference category), *11% to 20%*, and *more than 20%*. The range for the reference category was selected as studies estimate that 2% to 10% of reported rapes by women are false (see Lonsway, 2010).

*Modified Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA).* This study utilized the modified version of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, originally developed by Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999). IRMA represents the most reliable and psychometrically sound instrument and has been used extensively by researchers (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). As Payne et al. (1999, p. 61) note, rape myth measures “are necessarily time and culture bound” due to the use of colloquial language and slang which quickly becomes outdated; the revised scale by McMahan and Farmer (2011) was used, reflecting these changes in the vernacular and reduced the number of items from 22 to 19. While only a limited number of studies have utilized this updated scale, they have reported acceptable reliability for the entire scale ( $\alpha > .86$ ) and subscales (e.g., Debowska, Boduszek, Dhingra, Kola, & Meller-Pruniska, 2015; Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). Items range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*), and the

mean of the scale was taken. Higher scores are associated with the rejection of myths. The reduction in items resulted in five subscales: *she asked for it* ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ), *he didn't mean to* ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ), *he didn't mean to (intoxication)* ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ,  $\alpha = .65$ ), *it wasn't really rape* ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ), and *she lied* ( $M = 3.8$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ). An example of an item is "If a woman doesn't say 'no' she can't claim rape."

*Attitudes Towards Gay Men (ATG)*. Originally developed by Herek (1984), this scale assesses attitudes toward homosexuality. The revised, shortened form was used, consisting of five items. Values range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The additive scale ranged from 5 to 25, with higher scores associated with negative attitudes toward homosexuals ( $M = 10.8$ ,  $SD = 6.5$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ). An example of an item is "Male homosexuality is a perversion."

*Double Standard Scale (DSS)*. This 10-item scale (Caron, Davis, Halteman, & Stickle, 1993) was used to assess the acceptance of traditional sexual double standards. Items range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*), and higher values on this measure indicate greater support of gender equality. The mean of the scale was used and ranged from 1 to 5 ( $M = 3.9$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ). An example of an item is "In sex, the man should take the dominant role and the woman should assume the passive role."

*Social Roles Questionnaire (SRQ)*. This 13-item scale (Baber & Tucker, 2006) comprises two subscales. Items range from 0% to 100%; higher scores are associated with the acceptance of gendered stereotypes adopted by men and women. The gender-transcendent subscale assesses the degree to which individuals think about gender in nondichotomous ways and consists of five items (e.g., "People can be both aggressive and nurturing regardless of sex";  $M = 14.3$ ,  $SD = 15.6$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ), whereas the gender-linked subscale measures individuals' beliefs that individual roles are associated with gender and consists of eight items (e.g., "Men are more sexual than women";  $M = 37.6$ ,  $SD = 24.0$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Social Desirability (SD)*. To control for SD, Strahan and Gerbasi's (1972) "X1" scale was used, which is a shortened form of the scale originally developed by Crowne and Marlowe (1960). Individuals were presented with 10 true-false statements, with higher scores indicating exaggeration of good behavior. The additive scale ranged from 0 to 10 ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 2.3$ ,  $\alpha = .70$ ). An example item is "There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone"—answering false on this item would result in a higher SD score.

*Analytic procedure and diagnostics.* All data cleaning and analyses pertaining to the survey data were performed in *R* 3.5.1 using the base packages unless otherwise indicated (R Development Core Team, 2017). A hierarchical regression model was estimated to assess the relationship between the independent variables and male rape myth adherence. The variables were entered in three stages: demographics, rape items, and gender/sexual attitudinal scales. The scales were standardized at their mean prior to estimating the models. As the dependent variable is continuous, the analysis uses ordinary least squares regression. Because of the significant positive skew in the dependent variable ( $\Upsilon = 0.90$ ) and violations of normality assumptions, the natural log was taken requiring a log-linear model (Fox & Weisberg, 2011). Due to this transformation, it is necessary to back-transform the independent variable by exponentiating the beta coefficient, similar to odds ratios in logistic regression (Benoit, 2011).

The *R* package “car” (Fox & Weisberg, 2011) was used for regression diagnostics. Due to heteroscedasticity, regression models were estimated with White robust standard errors using the *R* package “lmtest” (Zeileis & Hothorn, 2002). Testing of outliers (e.g., Cook’s distance, Bonferroni-adjusted studentized residuals) resulted in the removal of 10 respondents. While the scales were all significantly correlated except for the SD scale ( $p > .05$ ), variance inflation factors indicated multicollinearity was not an issue. As the number of variables included in the regression models increases the likelihood of a Type II error, the Benjamini–Hochberg correction is used to recalculate the  $p$  values (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995).

## Results

Demographics and rape items are presented in Table 1. Of the 1,220 participants, a slight majority (50.5%) were male. The mean age was 35.0 years ( $SD = 11.3$ ) and 11.9% identified as LGBTQ. Concerning their education attainment, a plurality of respondents indicated some college (40.7%), followed by a 4-year degree (36.3%); only 11.6% had a high school degree or less. Nearly one in six (17.5%) identified as non-White and 5.7% were Hispanic. Approximately 20% indicated they were a victim of a completed sexual offense and nearly half (44.8%) knew a victim. While endorsements were high concerning false reports, it was substantially greater for female victims. Whereas 81.6% of respondents believed false reports for males to be less than 10%, only 56.9% of respondents believed this to be the case for females. Specifically, whereas 10.7% respondents believed at least 20% of reports by males to be false, this more than doubled to 22.3% for female victims.

**Table 1.** Respondent Characteristics ( $n = 1,220$ ).

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Male	617	50.5
Age ( <i>M/SD</i> ) <sup>a</sup>	35.0	11.3
LGBTQ	145	11.9
Education		
H.S. or less	142	11.6
Some college	497	40.7
4-year degree	443	36.3
Advanced degree	138	11.3
Hispanic	69	5.7
Non-White	213	17.5
Sexually victimized	272	22.3
Know victims	547	44.8
Percentage false reports—Males		
0-10	995	81.6
11-20	94	7.7
> 20	131	10.7
Percentage false reports—Females		
0-10	694	56.9
11-20	254	20.8
> 20	272	22.3

Note. Values may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2 presents the individual male rape myth items ranked by any agreement. Overall, the number of myths endorsed ranged from 0 to 21 with a mean of 4.1 ( $SD = 4.7$ ). Approximately 20% of respondents did not adhere to any male rape myths. For individual items, the percentages ranged from a low of 9.8% (“A man who allows himself to be raped by another man is probably homosexual” and “Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting off the man”) to a high of 44.1% (“Women who rape men are sexually frustrated individuals”). One in three respondents believed a man’s resistance to be crucial in determining whether he was raped, would doubt a man who was raped by a woman, and thought that male rape was committed by homosexuals. Slightly less (25%) endorsed rape myths based on male sexual insatiability: Men can enjoy forced sex and would enjoy being raped by a woman. Further testing showed that male respondents were significantly more likely to endorse every myth than females (results not shown).

**Table 2.** Male Rape Myth Adherence Rank-Ordered by Any Agreement.

Item	Scale Responses (%)						Any Agreement
	1	2	3	4	5	6	%
Women who rape men are sexually frustrated individuals.	28.6	15.5	11.8	20.7	15.2	8.2	44.1
The extent of a man's resistance should be a major factor in determining whether he was raped.	41.0	17.2	9.8	14.8	10.4	6.8	32.0
I would have a hard time believing a man who told me that he was raped by a woman.	39.8	18.2	10.7	15.0	8.6	7.7	31.3
Male rape is usually committed by homosexuals.	36.1	18.4	14.6	14.8	10.0	6.0	30.8
A man can enjoy sex even if it is being forced upon him.	41.2	20.8	13.0	14.4	7.5	3.0	25.0
Most men would not enjoy being raped by a woman. <sup>a</sup>	41.1	21.1	12.9	12.4	6.2	6.3	24.9
Most men who are raped by a woman are very upset by the incident. <sup>a</sup>	41.4	23.7	15.5	8.7	5.7	5.0	19.4
Most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting off the woman.	55.7	14.4	11.2	9.2	6.8	2.7	18.7
Many men claim rape if they have consented to homosexual relations but have changed their minds afterward.	41.5	22.8	18.8	11.4	4.3	1.2	17.0
Any healthy man can successfully resist a rapist if he really wants to.	48.4	22.6	12.1	8.6	4.9	3.3	16.8
If a man obtained an erection while being raped, it probably means that he started to enjoy it.	56.4	18.3	9.3	8.9	4.9	2.2	16.1
It is a terrible experience for a man to be raped by a woman. <sup>a</sup>	55.9	18.2	11.8	6.3	3.7	4.1	14.1

*(continued)*

**Table 2. (continued)**

Item	Scale Responses (%)						Any Agreement
	1	2	3	4	5	6	%
Most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not being more careful.	58.9	16.9	10.4	7.9	4.3	1.7	13.9
If a man engages in necking and petting and he lets things get out of hand, it is his own fault if his partner forces sex on him.	55.1	19.3	12.3	8.0	4.2	1.2	13.4
No self-respecting man would admit to being raped.	58.8	16.2	11.7	7.2	4.2	1.9	13.3
If a man told me that he had been raped by another man, I would suspect that he is homosexual.	62.9	14.8	9.5	7.7	3.6	1.5	12.8
Men who parade around nude in a locker room are asking for trouble.	64.1	16.4	7.3	7.5	3.3	1.4	12.2
A man who has been raped has lost his manhood.	66.1	15.5	7.0	5.8	3.9	1.6	11.4
Male rape is more serious when the victim is heterosexual than when the victim is homosexual.	66.3	13.9	8.7	5.3	3.8	2.0	11.1
Most men who have been raped have a history of promiscuity.	57.6	20.7	10.9	7.2	3.0	0.7	10.8
Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting off the man.	68.4	13.7	8.1	5.1	3.7	1.1	9.8
A man who allows himself to be raped by another man is probably homosexual.	70.8	12.8	6.6	5.3	3.1	1.3	9.8

Note. Any agreement may not add to 100% due to rounding. 1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*.

<sup>a</sup>Indicates a reverse keyed item.

**Table 3.** Hierarchical OLS Regression Results Predicting Male Rape Myth Adherence.

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i> (RSE)	Exp(B)	<i>b</i> (RSE)	Exp(B)	<i>b</i> (RSE)	Exp(B)
Male	0.215 (0.024)	<b>1.24***</b>	0.139 (0.023)	<b>1.13***</b>	0.057 (0.016)	<b>1.06***</b>
Age	0.024 (0.012)	<b>1.02*</b>	0.030 (0.011)	<b>1.03**</b>	0.017 (0.008)	<b>1.02*</b>
LGBTQ	-0.235 (0.036)	<b>0.79***</b>	-0.177 (0.032)	<b>0.86***</b>	-0.029 (0.022)	0.97
Education						
H.S. or less <sup>a</sup>						
Some college	-0.076 (0.041)	0.93	-0.032 (0.038)	0.97	-0.016 (0.025)	0.98
4-year degree	-0.095 (0.041)	<b>0.91*</b>	-0.023 (0.039)	0.98	-0.010 (0.026)	0.99
Advanced	-0.178 (0.049)	<b>0.84***</b>	-0.076 (0.045)	0.92	-0.022 (0.032)	0.98
Hispanic	0.010 (0.051)	1.01	-0.013 (0.046)	0.99	0.020 (0.028)	1.00
Non-White	0.116 (0.032)	<b>1.12***</b>	0.065 (0.029)	<b>1.07*</b>	0.006 (0.019)	1.03
Sexually victimized			0.022 (0.027)	1.02	-0.011 (0.019)	0.99
Know victims			-0.102 (0.027)	<b>0.90***</b>	-0.023 (0.015)	0.98
Percentage false reports—Males						
0-10 <sup>a</sup>						
11-20			0.090 (0.046)	<b>1.09*</b>	0.055 (0.031)	<b>1.06*</b>
> 20			0.211 (0.040)	<b>1.24***</b>	0.164 (0.029)	<b>1.15***</b>
Percentage false reports—Females						
0-10 <sup>a</sup>						
11-20			0.177 (0.028)	<b>1.19***</b>	-0.006 (0.024)	1.01
> 20			0.341 (0.032)	<b>1.45***</b>	-0.013 (0.028)	1.01
IRMA-A					-0.075 (0.012)	<b>0.93***</b>
IRMA-B					-0.083 (0.010)	<b>0.92***</b>
IRMA-C					0.003 (0.010)	1.00
IRMA-D					-0.034 (0.010)	<b>0.97**</b>
IRMA-E					-0.032 (0.012)	<b>0.97**</b>
ATG					0.047 (0.011)	<b>1.05***</b>
DSS					-0.042 (0.011)	<b>0.96***</b>
SRQ-GT					0.042 (0.010)	<b>1.04***</b>
SRQ-GL					0.079 (0.012)	<b>1.08***</b>
SD					-0.008 (0.007)	0.99
<i>F</i>	22.07 (8, 1,211)***		38.74 (14, 1,205)***		112.40 (24, 1,195)***	
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.12		.30		.69	
Δ <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	—		.18		.39	

Note. Bolded coefficients are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . All continuous variables were standardized at their mean prior to entering them into the models. OLS = ordinary least squares; RSE = robust standard errors; H.S. = High school; IRMA = Modified Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance; A = she asked for it; B = he didn't mean to; C = he didn't mean to (intoxication); D = it wasn't really rape; E = she lied; ATG = attitude toward gay men; DSS = Double Standard Scale; SRQ = Social Roles Questionnaire; GT = gender transcendent; GL = gender linked; SD = Social Desirability.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The hierarchical regression analysis predicting male rape myth adherence is presented in Table 3 and revealed significant main effects. When entering only the demographic characteristics of the respondents in Model 1, all the

variables reached significance with the exception of the ethnicity of the respondent. Gender exhibited the strongest effect, with males more likely to adhere than females,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.24, p < .001$ , as well as individuals who were older,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.02, p < .001$ , and non-White,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.12, p < .001$ . Respondents who identified as LGBTQ were less likely,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.79, p < .001$ . Relative to those with a high school degree or less, individuals with a 4-year degree,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.91, p < .001$ , and an advanced degree,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.84, p < .001$ , were less likely adhere to rape myths. However, this model only explained 12% of the variation.

In Model 2, the amount of variation explained by the model increased to 30% ( $\Delta R^2 = .18$ ). When adding the variables pertaining to the rape items, the only demographic item that was no longer significant was education, and all other effect sizes were weakened. Of the rape items, individuals who knew a victim were less likely to adhere to rape myths,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.90, p < .001$ , although being a victim themselves was not associated with rape myth. Both percentage false reports for male and female victims exhibited large effects and had a monotonic relationship: Higher estimates of false reports, regardless of the gender of the victim, were associated with greater rape myth adherence although this effect was stronger for female victims.

Model 3 presents the full model, more than doubling the variation explained to 69% ( $\Delta R^2 = .39$ ). Only two demographic variables remained significant: gender,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.06, p < .001$ , and age,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.02, p < .05$ . While the percentage of false reports by males was still associated with male rape myth adherence, the percentage of false reports by females was no longer significant as well as knowing a victim. Of the five subscales on female rape myth acceptance, all but one was associated with male rape myth adherence: he didn't mean to (intoxication). The subscale *he didn't mean to* exhibited the largest effect size,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.92, p < .001$ , followed by *she asked for it*,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.93, p < .001$ . Aside from SD, all the other scales were significant predictors of male rape myth adherence. Individuals who hold negative attitudes toward gay men,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.06, p < .001$ , accept traditional sexual double standards,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.96, p < .001$ , and endorse traditional gender stereotypes, for the gender transcendent subscale,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.04, p < .001$ , and the gender-linked subscale,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.08, p < .001$ , were positively related to rape myth acceptance.

## Discussion

In the face of the limited research on male rape myth adherence, the goal of the present study was to evaluate this acceptance across a diverse sample of adults living in the United States. The findings indicate that most individuals adhere to rape myths to some degree—only one in five respondents disagreed

with every item. While all of the myths are demonstrably false, several of the myths that were popular are worth noting and similar to female rape myths. Nearly half agreed that when women rape, it is due to the fact they are sexually frustrated. This is troubling given that feminist scholars have successfully argued that rape is not about sex but rather power, yet for male victims, this recognition is lagging (Brownmiller, 1975; Mezey & King, 1989). In addition, one third would have a hard time believing that a male could be raped by a female. This lends credibility to other scholars who have argued the conceptualization of the male offender–female victim has resulted in far slower progress in the recognition of male victims and female perpetrators due to a lack of societal recognition and institutional neglect (Graham, 2006; Mezey & King, 1989; Rumney, 2007).

Several of the most adhered to myths downplayed the harm of rape, particularly when the offender was female, yet research indicates the consequences of male rape are far-reaching and tend to be long-lasting, similar to female victims (Banyard et al., 2007; Kimerling, Rellini, Kelly, Judson, & Learman, 2002; Larsen & Hilden, 2016; Mezey & King, 1989; Peterson et al., 2011; Tewksbury, 2007; Walker, et al., 2005). In a systematic review of 27 studies, Peterson and colleagues (2011) found distressing psychological aftereffects that often include fear, helplessness, guilt, powerlessness, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, masculinity/identity issues, sexual dysfunction, self-harm, and confusion over one's sexuality. In a nationally representative study, Elliott and colleagues (2004) found adult male victims reported greater psychological schema than females on eight of the 10 items of the Trauma Symptom Inventory scales (e.g., dysfunctional sexual behavior, sexual concerns), even though approximately 14 years had passed on average since their last victimization.

Male sexuality insatiability was another consistent theme among the adhered to items, with some individuals agreeing that victims can enjoy forced sex as well as enjoy rape committed by a woman. Research has shown that males, like females, are capable of involuntary arousal and ejaculation, especially under duress or anxiety, and that this can increase the trauma that victims experience due to the ensuing confusion over one's sexuality if victimized by a male, masculinity, feelings of self-blame, and/or responsibility, among others, despite it occurring naturally (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Fuchs, 2004; Mezey & King, 1989; Scarce, 1997; Sarrel & Masters, 1982). These myths have even permeated the court system. In one case, a judge in New York questioned a male victim who had been forced to have sex to the point of ejaculation with a woman, asking “[W]hat’s your problem? How could you *not* have liked this?” (as cited in Fuchs, 2004, p. 94).

Several other items with high agreement rates focused on the degree of resistance even though laws requiring resistance were rescinded in the 1970s and 1980s (Spohn & Tellis, 2012). However, many victims of rape do not physically resist or only do so to a limited extent as it increases the likelihood the victim may be injured (Mezey & King, 1989; Walker et al., 2005), mirroring findings for female victims (Estrich, 1987; Spohn & Tellis, 2012). Walker and colleagues (2005) reported only one in four male victims attempted to fight back in any way although they clearly communicated their lack of consent. The vast majority (87%) reacted with frozen fear, helplessness, or submission and nearly two thirds feared for their lives which runs counter to masculine gender scripts of how men should act, particularly in these scenarios. This is important as Davies and colleagues (2012) found male victims are blamed more when judged that they did not resist enough or escape.

The multivariate analysis revealed that the hypotheses were partially supported and contribute to a greater understanding of the correlates of male rape myth acceptance. Consistent with prior research, results indicate that individuals who are older and male are more likely to accept rape myths (Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2012; Kassing et al., 2005; Kassing & Prieto, 2003). However, among the demographic variables, the educational level was not related to rape myth adherence despite prior findings (Kassing et al., 2005), and neither the race, ethnicity, nor sexual orientation of the respondent was associated with rape myth adherence in the full model. While former finding runs contrast to Rosenstein (2015) who found that non-Whites had higher rape myth acceptance, this is likely a result of including the scales on female rape myths given that race was significant in the first two models and Suarez and Gadalla's (2010) meta-analysis of female rape myths found a moderate effect size between the two.

Of the gender and sexuality scales, the findings are generally consistent with prior research. Specifically, those who view gender roles in more traditional ways and believe sexual and nonsexual behavior should be evaluated differently based on one's gender are more likely to adhere to rape myths (Davies et al., 2012; Kassing et al., 2005). This double standard is important as prior research has indicated it is related to a number of negative sexual and health outcomes, including sexual violence (Shen, Chiu, & Gao, 2012). In support of the prior studies using the same instrument, homophobic attitudes also predicted rape myth acceptance (Kassing et al., 2005; Melanson, 1998). This is particularly salient given that these studies were all conducted using different samples (i.e., male adults in one community, college students, and a national sample) over a long time period. Supporting prior work, female rape myth adherence exhibited the largest effect (Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2012). Indeed, Davies and colleagues (2012) reported that female rape myth

adherence exhibited the strongest effect in the multivariate analysis to the extent there was evidence of multicollinearity and note that male rape myths and female rape myths appear to be the same construct. Collectively, these findings are in line with the research on female rape myth acceptance, suggesting the two processes are similar (Davies et al., 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Perceptions of false reports by males was a robust predictor, and while the percentage of false reports by female victims was not significant in the final model, this is likely a result of the addition of the female rape myth subscales. These results, as well as the large number of respondents who believed false reports to be higher, are troubling as Lonsway (2010) argues that

underlying skepticism that sexual assault survivors face when they disclose may be the single most damaging factor in our societal response. It may also be the most powerful tool in the arsenal of rapists because it allows them to commit their crimes with impunity. (pp. 1367-1368)

Changing the norms and how society approaches sex, rape, and rape myths can increase reporting rates and criminal justice outcomes. How people react to the victim's admission is incredibly salient given that victims are acutely aware of rape myths and skepticism when disclosing and societal attitudes on how individuals should act based on their gender. The results from this study can assist in education, awareness, and bystander programs that target sex and rape, including sensitive issues that males face such as concerns about their sexuality, sexual orientation, stigma, any physical response (i.e., an erection or orgasm), and the "culture of masculinity," among others, following an act of sexual violence (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Melanson, 1998; Rosenstein & Carroll, 2015; Scarce, 1997). Furthermore, acceptance of male rape myths has been shown to decrease the likelihood that bystanders would intervene regardless of whether the bystander knew the victim or not (Rosenstein & Carroll, 2015). In the only study that examined the impact of bystander programming on male rape myth adherence, Rosenstein (2015) found individuals who completed two interventions were less likely to adhere to male rape myths as well as female rape myths.

Programs designed to decrease male rape myth acceptance need to emphasize both factual information about male rape and targeting the traditional beliefs about male sexuality, sexual arousal, and masculinity. Furthermore, as the topic of rape is considered taboo, encouraging more dialogue, discussion, and reporting of these crimes should positively affect rape myth endorsement (Larsen & Hilden, 2016). Individuals who know a victim of a sexual crime are less likely to adhere to these rape myths as found in prior research, although this was not significant in the final model when including the attitudinal scales

(Navarro & Tewksbury, 2019). In a qualitative study of 25 male college students who participated in an all-male educational program, Piccigallo, Lilley, and Miller (2012) found that those who had a sexual assault disclosed to them, this experience changed their views and perceptions as the issue of sexual violence was now personal and no longer abstract.

Increasing knowledge and education generally around rape and rape myths can help to decrease endorsement of distortions used to justify sexual violence and to dispel various gender stereotypes. For instance, male victims have indicated that law enforcement and treatment professionals must offer more publicity that males can be victimized and know where to get help, which is important considering that research has indicated males are more likely to not know where to go for help in the aftermath of a sexual victimization as many of the resources are advertised for females (Banyard et al., 2007; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Walker et al., 2005).

While Melanson's (1998) scale was a significant and much needed addition to the literature, it is unlikely that it represents a single unidimensional construct. Future research should examine the underlying nature of this scale to create a multidimensional model to better understand the nuances of male rape myth adherence, similar to IRMA, particularly as the scale includes items on female offenders and male offenders as well as gender-neutral items. Similar to the changes made to IRMA by McMahon and Farmer (2011), the language used in the MRMS needs updating as well, given that the instrument is more than 20 years old. Furthermore, as male and female rape myth adherence appears to be based on similar attitudes and belief systems, future research should explore whether a gender-neutral instrument should be developed as none currently exists. However, there has been pushback toward gender neutrality within the field as this would have unintended negative consequences. Specifically, some scholars claim this would undermine feminism broadly and have a negative impact on female victims because it would fail "to effectively address issues of social and gender inequality" (see Rumney, 2007, p. 499). In addition, as Rosenstein (2015) notes, gender-neutral language may be problematic given that

sexual assault schemas are fundamentally gendered . . . while language may be gender neutral, it might not be gender inclusive—and participants might not come away with an understanding that men and women can be both victims and perpetrators. (p. 210)

The results from this study should be interpreted in light of research limitations that warrant discussion. First, a convenience sample of MTurk users was used. As individuals self-select tasks to complete, this may introduce

bias into the study. However, respondents indicated the main reason for their participation was the incentive was higher than most studies by academics which should improve the data quality and decrease any bias, particularly because respondents may have their HITS rejected for failing the attention checks (Mason & Suri, 2012). Studies have shown that MTurk workers are more likely to be ideologically liberal (Berinsky et al., 2012) and have higher levels of education (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014), which may explain the low adherence to male rape myths relative to other studies using the same instrument. Ethnic and racial minorities were also underrepresented. As the data were collected online, the survey is limited only to those with a computer and Internet access. While controls were in place to ensure only respondents in the United States could access it, individuals with a virtual private network or a proxy may set their IP address to the United States to bypass this restriction. Finally, due to the cross-sectional survey design, causality cannot be assumed.

## **Conclusion**

Limitations notwithstanding, the current study adds to the literature by using a national sample of adults in the United States and demonstrates that the majority of individuals adhere to rape myths in some form. To the extent that these myths are believed, the rate at which male victims of sexual violence both report their victimization to law enforcement and receive treatment for it will remain low, and this population will remain hidden, creating a positive feedback loop that reaffirms these myths in the public sphere. As these results indicate that the constructs that support male rape myths are similar to female rape myths, more needs to be done to counter these belief systems and the stereotypes surrounding rape and sexual assault, regardless of the gender of the victim and offender, given the significant impact sexual violence has on both the victim and the community at large.

## **Author's Note**

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2015 American Society of Criminology annual meeting in Washington, DC.

## **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## **Funding**

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The Graduate Student Association's

Graduate Research Grant Award at the University of Massachusetts Lowell partially supported this work.

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## Note

1. As most studies use college students for their sample, age was typically not included in these studies.

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