RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE AND BYSTANDER ATTITUDES ON CAMPUS: UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

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Rape Myths and Bystander Attitudes

• Rape Myths:
  • Based on gendered stereotypes, beliefs about the context in which sexual assault/rape occurs.

  Burt (1980)

• Bystander Approach:
  • Approach to sexual assault prevention program which acknowledges an entire community’s role

  Attitudes = One’s willingness to intervene

  (Banyard, Moynihan, and Plante 2007; Potter 2012)
Patterns in Research

• RMA and bystander attitudes usually have statistical relationship

• “At-risk” groups:
  • Men
  • Members of fraternities/sororities
  • Student athletes
  • Those who have never received sexual assault education

(Banyard, Moynihan, and Plante 2007; Hayes-Smith and Levett 2010; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. 2011; MacMahon 2010; Murnen and Kohlman 2007)
Research Questions

• Are RMA and bystander attitudes correlated?
• Do certain groups subscribe to rape myths more than others?
• Do certain groups have more/less positive bystander attitudes than others?
• Does rape/sexual assault education affect RMA and/or bystander attitudes?
Methodology

- **Random sample** using registrar’s list of Discovery courses
- Visited **four** classes total, in which students took surveys
- **Anonymity** ensured
- **Measures:**
  - **Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Revised**
    Original: Banyard, Plante, Moynihan (2005); Revised by McMahon and Farmer (2011)
  - **Bystander Attitudes Scale – Revised**
    Original: Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1999); Revised by McMahon, Postmus, and Koenick (2011)
  - Four questions asking about familiarity with SHARPP
  - Demographics
Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Greek</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Athlete</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Random sample of UNH undergraduate students (N = 186)
Table 2. Correlation of RMA and Bystander Attitudes

- Keep in mind:
  - **RMA**: High score = MORE rape myth acceptance; low score = LESS rape myth acceptance
  - Bystander Attitudes: Higher score = MORE willingness to intervene, lower score = LESS willingness to intervene

- Correlation → **-.393***
  - ***Correlation is significant at the .01 level
  - Source: Random sample of 186 undergraduate students at UNH (N=186)

- As rape myth acceptance increases, willingness to intervene in situation involving sexual violence decreases
Table 3. Rape Myth Acceptance by Gender, Greek Affiliation, and Athletic Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Difference in Means</th>
<th>Standard Error of Difference in Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>2.472</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>.337*</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>2.135</td>
<td>.622</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greek</strong></td>
<td>2.399</td>
<td>.718</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Greek</strong></td>
<td>2.211</td>
<td>.616</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Athlete</strong></td>
<td>2.539</td>
<td>.465</td>
<td>.316</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Athlete</strong></td>
<td>2.223</td>
<td>.646</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the .10 level

Source: Random sample of 186 undergraduate students at UNH (N=186)
Table 4. Bystander Attitudes by Gender, Greek Affiliation, and Athletic Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Difference in Means</th>
<th>Standard Error of Difference in Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.336</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td>-.291*</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.628</td>
<td>.579</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>3.466</td>
<td>.609</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.117</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Greek</td>
<td>3.546</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athlete</td>
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<td>.534</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Athlete</td>
<td>3.539</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the .10 level

Source: Random sample of 186 undergraduate students at UNH (N=186)
Table 5. Correlation of Rape Myth Acceptance and Familiarity with SHARPP

- Correlation $\rightarrow -0.165^{**}$
  - ***Correlation is significant at the .05 level
- Source: Random sample of 186 undergraduate students at UNH (N=186)
- As familiarity with SHARPP increases, rape myth acceptance decreases
Table 6. Correlation of Bystander Attitudes and Familiarity with SHARPP

• Correlation $\rightarrow \ 0.168^{**}$
  • ***Correlation is significant at the .05 level
• Source: Random sample of 186 undergraduate students at UNH (N=186)
• As familiarity with SHARPP increases, willingness to intervene in situation involving sexual violence increases
Discussion: Main Points

- RMA and bystander attitudes are correlated statistically
  - As RMA decreases, willingness to intervene increases
- Gender is related to RMA and bystander attitudes
  - Men: More support for rape myths, less willingness to intervene
- Familiarity with SHARPP does affect students’ RMA and bystander attitudes
  - Positive effect on both variables – decreases RMA, increases willingness to intervene
Discussion: Limitations

- Sample **size**
- Sampling **method**
  - Stratified sampling may be better for measuring at-risk groups
- **Gendered** approach, gendered language
  - Only captures attitudes toward rape with male offender, female victim
- Social desirability **bias**
Discussion: Implications…

• **For UNH:**
  - Create campaigns involving men’s role in prevention
  - Increase presence of SHARPP, spread awareness

• **For future research:**
  - Continue exploring “at-risk” groups w/ larger, representative samples
    • Especially men’s attitudes
  - Qualitative research → ?