

BEYOND HETERONORMATIVITY AND THE GENDER BINARY: INCLUSIVITY IN
RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE SCALE DESIGN AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE BYSTANDER
INTERVENTION PROGRAMMING

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BEYOND HETERONORMATIVITY AND THE GENDER BINARY:
INCLUSIVITY IN RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE SCALE DESIGN AND
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PROGRAMMING

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence perpetuates inequalities based on a range of factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, and ability status. However, the study of sexual violence in these areas has been limited leading to a lack of knowledge about its role in perpetuating social inequality. Understanding bystander intervention and its effects on violence prevention is complex and unclear. Three studies were conducted to investigate the use of language in the Green Dot Violence Prevention programming and the design of a sex and gender-inclusive rape myth acceptance scale. Study 1 employs Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the language used in the Green Dot curriculum, examining its influence on social structures and meanings. Study 2 involves survey research and cognitive interviews to explore how undergraduate college students comprehend and interpret the Gender-Inclusive Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (GIIRMAS). Study 3 utilizes the Rasch validity framework to assess the psychometric properties of the Sex and Gender-Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (SGI-RMA). Key findings in Study 1 suggest that despite the Green Dot Curriculum text's intention to promote inclusion, empowerment, unity, and change, its use of terms such as "we" and "us" (representing cisgender women) and implying the distinction with "they" and "them" (representing cisgender men) does not support the desired objectives. Study 2 revealed that while respondent's interpretation of the item in the GIIRMAS aligned with the underlying conceptual framework, further examination identified potential issues with 11 of the 19 items that require careful consideration. Study 3 demonstrated that 10 of the 19 SGI-RMA items effectively measure the underlying construct of rape myth acceptance. The findings have implication for enhancing violence prevention programs and ensuring the use of inclusive language to challenge and debunk misconceptions around sexual violence.

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DEDICATION

This is for you, Emmie, and Duane.

The dream team and my world.

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Fierstines don't quit!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
DEDICATION.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LINKING DOCUMENT	1
Introduction.....	1
Sexual Assault and Bystander Education Origins.....	2
Bystander Behavior of College Students	5
Rape Myth Acceptance and Its Impact on Bystander Behavior.....	7
Accounting for Intersectionality.....	9
Future of Sexual Violence Prevention Education	12
Conclusion.....	13
ARTICLE 1 - FROM BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TO COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ALTERISTIC'S GREEN DOT FOR COMMUNITIES	15
Introduction.....	15
Green Dot Bystander Prevention Education	16
Purpose of Study	18
Theoretical Framework	19
Method	20
Data Analysis and Trustworthiness.....	22
Analysis of Green Dot Curriculum, Step One.....	22
Conclusion and Future Considerations	29

ARTICLE 2 – UTILIZING COGNITIVE INTERVIEWING TO DETERMINE SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY IDENTITY EFFICACY OF THE GENDER- INCLUSIVE ILLINOIS RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE SCALE.....	32
Introduction	32
Rape Myths	34
Rape Myths About Male Victimization	36
Rape Myths About Sexual and Gender Minority Victimization.....	40
Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA)	43
Statement of the Problem	47
Purpose and Significance of the Study.....	49
Theoretical Framework	51
Method	53
Data Analysis and Trustworthiness.....	54
Findings.....	56
Priming	56
Framing Effects	60
Value Expressiveness	64
Demographic Impacts on GIIRMAS Items.....	69
Discussion and Implications.....	79
Updating the GIIRMAS	80
Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions	83
ARTICLE 3 - PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF A SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY-INCLUSIVE RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE SCALE	88
Introduction	88
Gender and Victim Blaming	91
History of Rape Myth Measurement.....	96

Rape Myth Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Minority Populations	98
Sex and Gender Identifiers and Intersecting Identities	99
Study Purpose and Significance	104
Method	106
Item Pool	107
Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample	109
Ethical Considerations.....	111
Data Analysis: The Rasch Model.....	112
Results	117
Content Aspect of Validity	117
Substantive Aspect of Validity	122
Structural Aspect of Validity.....	126
Generalizability Aspect of Validity.....	128
External Aspect of Validity.....	130
Consequential Aspect of Validity.....	131
Strengths and Limitations.....	132
Discussion and Implications.....	134
SUMMARY	136
REFERENCES	143
APPENDIX A. STUDY 2 INFORMED CONSENT	184
APPENDIX B. GIIRMAS SURVEY ITEMS	186
APPENDIX C. GIIRMAS CONGITIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	190
APPENDIX D. GIIRMAS CONGITIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	198
APPENDIX E. STUDY 3 INFORMED CONSENT.....	200
APPENDIX F. SGI-RMA SURVEY ITEMS.....	202

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>Page</u>
1:	Survey Item: Have you experienced any of the following?.....	77
2:	Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants.....	110
3:	Global Fit Statistics for Rating Scale Model (RSM) verses Principal Component Analysis (PCA)	114
4:	19 Item-Statistics - Misfit Order (by Outfit MNSQ)	116
5:	10 Item-Statistics - Misfit Order (by Outfit MNSQ)	119
6:	Polarity Statistics for Items with Disordered Response Categories.....	123
7:	Hypothesized Item Difficulty Rank	126
8:	DIF Statistics by Gender and Sexuality	129

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1: Wright Map.....	121
2: Category Probability Curves for Response Categories (RSM).....	125
3: Scree Plot of Eigenvalues after PCA	127

LINKING DOCUMENT

Introduction

Sexual violence remains a significant global, social, and legal issue that is unyielding. Nearly 1 in 5 women (18.3%) and 1 in 71 men (1.4%) in the United States have been raped at some time in their lives, including completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration or alcohol/drug-facilitated completed penetration (CDC, 2021). The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects (NCAVP) estimates that 1 in 10 LGBTQ+ survivors have experienced sexual and around half (61%) of transgender people and bisexual women will experience sexual violence at some point in their lifetimes (2016). More than half (51.1%) of female¹ victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% by an acquaintance; for male victims, more than half (52.4%) reported being raped by an acquaintance, and 15.1% by a stranger. Most female victims of completed rape (79.6%) experienced their first rape before the age of 25; 42.2% experienced their first completed rape before the age of 18 years (CDC, 2021). Additionally, the social, economic, and health consequences of sexual assault estimate the lifetime cost of rape is \$122,461 per victim, or a population economic burden of \$3.1 trillion over victims' lifetimes (CDC, 2021). Government sources pay an estimated \$1 trillion (32%) of the lifetime economic burden (Peterson et al., 2017). In 1980, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) began studying patterns of violence. This grew into a national program to reduce the death and disability associated with

¹ The terms *female*, *male*, *men*, *women*, *transgender*, or any similar term for sex or gender reflect the terms used by the authors of each cited study. Language from the original studies were retained. This researcher makes the distinction between gender (men and women) and sex (male and female).

injuries outside the workplace. In 1992, CDC established the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) as the lead federal organization for violence prevention. The NCIPC works to prevent violence and its consequences so that all people, families, and communities are safe, healthy, and free of violence (CDC, 2021). The anti-rape movement endeavored to provide services for victims, raise awareness about sexual assault through public education campaigns, and is committed to stopping violence before the first occurrence; this level is referred to in public health discourse as primary prevention (Koss & Harvey, 1991).

Sexual Assault and Bystander Education Origins

Sexual assault prevention education originated from feminist community organizations advocating for survivors and raising awareness about violence against women (. Early feminist efforts centered its sexual assault prevention messaging on the idea that the act of rape is a means to perpetuate patriarchal social norms; men are typically aggressive, and women are passive; that women must manage the risk and threat of violence; and that the fundamental issue was men's behavior (Cargill, 2008; Carmody, 2003; Lees, 1997). Radical feminist approaches to sexual assault prevention resisted 'institutionalizing' prevention efforts (Campbell, Baker, & Mazurek, 1998) and were skeptical that institutionalized crime and control responses that would make men accountable for sexual violence. Therefore, liberal feminist efforts in sexual assault throughout the 1970s lobbied for legislative reform, strengthening services for victims, and providing comprehensive training of professionals working with victims. Feminist movements have adapted over time to confront the diversity in women's experiences and behaviors relevant to sexual assault and other forms of violence against women (Carmody, 2009; Mason, 1997).

Campbell et al. (1998) observed that feminist community organizations have been remarkably adaptive in weathering developments in the sexual assault field while continuing to

conduct social change interventions. Interestingly, the primary criticisms of early feminist approaches to preventing sexual assault have come from within feminism. Feminist literature has highlighted the need to focus on women's agency in social and private spaces for decades (Hollander, 2005; Segal, 2000). Arguments included a need to avoid conceptualizing femininity in absolute terms as it deprives women of the agency or ability to "exert power, express desire, take control, resist, prevent or avoid" their victimization in intimate sexual encounters with men (Carmody, 2003, p. 202). Although clearly articulating that a patriarchal society created the conditions which promoted and condoned rape, feminists purported that some rape prevention education inadvertently focused education on women managing the risk of becoming a victim (Carmody & Carrington, 2000; Neame, 2003). For instance, most violence prevention programs teach self-protection skills to reduce the risk of assault and work toward developing prosocial bystander strategies to intervene when violence occurs. Prevention programs are typically organized into two categories: 1) reactive risk reduction and 2) proactive rape prevention (Edwards, 2009). Risk-reduction programs encourage women to use strategies to avoid high-risk situations, dress conservatively, and avoid alcoholic drinks to decrease their chances of sexual assault. Consequently, this precludes any sense of responsibility for preventing sexual violence from men or the broader community. Risk avoidance messages in sexual assault prevention education also fail to accommodate a critical fact: in most cases, survivors are in a relationship with or an acquaintance of the person who perpetrates violence toward them (RAINN, 2022; CDC, 2022). Consequently, Neame (2003) contends that "the most important critique of the rape avoidance strategy is its reliance on a limited conception of rape, as a surprise attack by a stranger in a public space" (p. 9). Focusing solely on a risk avoidance prevention strategy insufficiently addresses sexual assault in the context of marriage, in an ongoing intimate

relationship, or in the family. Consequently, this precludes any sense of responsibility for preventing sexual violence from men or the broader community. Risk avoidance messages in sexual assault prevention education also fails to accommodate a critical fact: Anyone can experience or perpetrate sexual violence (CDC, 2022).

Recently, postmodern, and post-structuralist feminism emphasize the role of language in the construction of the social order, difference and the instability of categories, and the contingent character of identities, thus offering differing accounts of truth, identity, and power (Beasley 1999; Lorber 2012). Intersectional feminism stresses the interconnections of gender with other forms of social difference and inequality, particularly of race/ethnicity (Beasley 1999; Crenshaw, 1991). Diverse schools of feminist advocacy and scholarship differ in the weight they give to the issue of sexual violence, their theoretical frameworks regarding this violence, and the strategies they advocate or pursue in response (Messner et al., 2015). Today, the violence prevention landscape is gender-inclusive, sex-positive, trans-inclusive, body-positive, and digitally driven (Greaves & Ritz, 2022). Advocates are calling for our culture's most powerful men to be held accountable for their behavior and have begun a radical critique of the systems of power that allow predators to target victims with impunity (Rentschler, 2017).

Therefore, stronger focus on educating potential perpetrators and addressing the environmental factors supporting rape and sexual assault is needed. Studies show that cultural constructs, such as gender norming behavior, affect the likelihood of widespread change (Kilianski & Rudman, 1998). For example, even though most men indicate they are uncomfortable with sexism and the inappropriate behavior of other men, men who have sexually assaulted women typically do not have recognition of any wrongdoing (Edwards, 2009); subsequently, reports indicate that 1 in 13 college men admit they have engaged in behaviors that

meet the legal definition of rape even though they would not identify themselves or their acquaintances as committing rape; rather, it's just 'boys being boys' (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987).

Bystander Behavior of College Students

Sexual violence, including sexual coercion and sexual assault, is a major problem on college campuses nationwide (Yule & Grych, 2020). Compared to other age groups, college-aged individuals (between 18 to 24 years of age) are more vulnerable to victimization (Baum & Klaus, 2005; Hart, 2003). Research demonstrates that 20% to 25% of college women will experience coerced sexual contact or unwanted intercourse while in college (Fedina, Holmes, & Backes, 2016; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Franklin, 2010). Moreover, 33% of college women have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and between 30% and 60% of women have reported sexual harassment (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). These experiences have produced an array of negative mental health consequences and adverse physical outcomes, including elevated startle responses, internalizing disorders, sleep disruptions, appetite abnormalities, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Brener et al., 1999; Goodkind et al., 2003). Survivors' career trajectories have also been negatively affected by difficulty concentrating, reduced academic performance, and university attrition (Huerta et al., 2006). Recent highly publicized sexual assault events on college campuses raise questions about what constitutes rape, victim-blaming, the issue of perpetrator accountability, and best practices used to reduce the occurrence of sexual assault. Therefore, the American College Health Association (2011) issued a call for colleges and universities to identify and implement sexual violence prevention strategies to reduce campus violence and foster campus environments of respect and safety. Developing and understanding of sexual violence on campus has evolved

over the last three decades and has been conceptualized as a criminal justice issue, a public health problem, and a form of violence that is the direct result of patriarchal subjugation of women and people of other marginalized genders (Fisher, Daigle & Cullen, 2009). Because a social-ecological understanding of sexual violence occurrence and prevention that locates the causes of sexual violence is now at the forefront of sexual violence prevention efforts, the CDC (2014) recommended systematically approaching violence.

Research conducted throughout the past several years has begun to look more closely at how collective action supports women's rights and gender equality (Glick et al., 2015). The bystander intervention approach to campus sexual violence has received increased attention as a promising prevention strategy (McMahon et al., 2020). Latane and Darley's (1970) situational model of intervention suggests that bystanders must first note the event, then identify it as one where intervention is needed, then take responsibility for intervention, then decide how to help, and finally, act to intervene. Bystanders could help prevent violence by disrupting unsafe situations, intervening while violence is occurring, and/or aiding those who disclose after the sexual assault has occurred (McMahon & Banyard, 2012); however, situational barriers at any of these steps could halt the bystander intervention process (Latane & Darley, 1968; 1970; Latane & Nida, 1981). Currently, sexual assault prevention and risk reduction programs are found in most United States colleges and universities. Most of these programs include mixed-gendered education including information on the pervasiveness of sexual assault, debunking rape myths and attitudes supporting rape, discussions of gender-stereotypical behavior, and pragmatic suggestions for safe dating behaviors (Bachar & Koss, 2001; Sochting et al., 2004).

Despite a multitude of research, whether someone chooses to engage in bystander intervention, particularly in violence prevention, and what impacts that engagement remains

complex, puzzling, and often ambiguous. A growing body of evaluative work demonstrates that bystander intervention education programs yield increased positive attitudes and behaviors related to sexual violence and greater willingness to intervene in prosocial ways (McMahon et al., 2015). Even though significant attention, energy, and effort have been used to create sexual assault prevention education tools over the past 20 years, there is little evidence of a decrease in sexual assaults (Edwards, 2009). Due to deeply entrenched cultural norms as well as immediate behavior choices that contribute to high rates of violence, contemporary violence prevention programming now focuses on encouraging college students to engage in bystander prevention and intervention while using proactive approaches in their communities (Edwards, 2015). Teaching students to intervene as prosocial bystanders is a common element of sexual assault prevention efforts; although these programs have revealed positive effects on participants' beliefs and knowledge, their impact on actual behavior is limited (Yule & Grych, 2020). Additionally, relying on an individual's self-reported bystander intent or willingness to intervene does not necessarily mean the person intervenes due to several factors, such as not knowing what to do or making the situation worse (McMahon & Dick, 2011). Clearly articulating prosocial bystander intervention norms, considering students' intersecting identities, may help overcome the barriers of failure to take intervention responsibility and failure to intervene (Burn, 2008).

Rape Myth Acceptance and Its Impact on Bystander Behavior

People often have strong beliefs about the nature and underlying causes of rape. Unfortunately, many of these beliefs are distorted and inaccurate; early researchers, such as Brownmiller (1975), introduced the concept of "rape myths" to describe them. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) defined rape myths 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). Others suggested that rape myths serve as a cognitive lens through which people process and interpret information related to sexual violence, specifically toward women (Bohner et al., 2009). Likewise, Ryan (2011) posited that rape myths can shape the sexual scripts that, in turn, structure and guide sexual attitudes and behavior. Bohner et al. (2009) established four types of rape myths: (a) those that blame the victim, (b) those that contend that claims of rape are often false, (c) those that excuse the perpetrator, and (d) those that suggest that only certain types of women are raped. Several researchers have attempted to characterize rape myth acceptance on college campuses. Research corroborates that male students are more accepting of rape myths than their female counterparts (Beshers & DiVita, 2020; Edwards et al., 2011; Elias-Lambert & Black, 2016; Grubb & Turner, 2012; McMahon, 2010). In addition, students in fraternities/sororities, particularly men have higher rape myth acceptance than students who are not in fraternities/sororities (Canan et al., 2016; Bannon et al., 2013; Ortiz & Thompson, 2017), some current research found that athletes are more inclined to report rape myth acceptance than nonathletes (Young et al., 2017; Boegen et al., 2020;), and sexual assault survivors are more likely to discount rape myths (McMahon, 2010). Rape myth acceptance has also been associated with contributing to the “rape-prone culture” on many campuses (Canan et al., 2016; Hayes et al., 2016; Beshers & DiVita, 2020).

Based on a host of previous research, the behavior of victims, bystanders, and potential perpetrators is undeniably influenced by rape myth acceptance. College women who strongly endorse rape myths, for example, are less likely to disclose or report a rape, either because they do not view their experience as rape; rather, they feel responsible, or they fear being blamed for the assault (Szymanski et al., Aronowitz et al., 2012; Katz & Nguyen, 2016). Rape myth endorsement has been linked to greater odds of committing sexual assault (Loh et al., 2005); in

addition, empirical research indicates increased correlations between rape myth acceptance and self-reported rape proclivity (Bohner et al., 2005). Among women, agreement with rape myths predicts lower awareness of cues about their risk of sexual assault victimization (Yeater et al., 2010) and lower likelihood that they will label their own experience of sexual assault as rape (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). Some studies have shown that men with high scores on rape myth acceptance assessments, as well as men who are informed that their male peers believe in rape myths, showed lower intentions of seeking consent (Becker & Wright, 2011; Hust et al., 2013; Gable et al., 2021) and higher scores on measures of the propensity to rape (Loh et al., 2005; Bohner et al., 2009; Chapleau et al., 2007; Adolffson, 2018). Lastly, college students who could intervene in situations where a peer is at risk for sexual violence can be thwarted by the impact of rape myth acceptance. Both men and women who endorse rape myths indicated that they are less likely to be proactive bystanders in situations where their actions could prevent a rape than those who do not endorse rape myths (McMahon, 2010; Powers et al., 2015; Elias-Lambert & Black, 2016).

Accounting for Intersectionality

Sexual violence reproduces inequalities of gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, ability status, citizenship status, and nationality. Yet, its study has been minimal with consequences for knowledge about the continuous revival of social inequality. Current research conceptualizes sexual violence as a mechanism of inequality that is made more effective by the silencing of its usage by tracing legal and cultural contestations over the definition of sexual violence in the United States (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, & Johnson, 2018). Black women are disproportionately vulnerable to many forms of sexual violence (Ritchie, 2017) and Indigenous women are also consistently found to be at elevated risk for IPV and sexual assault (Wahab &

Olson, 2004). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals endure higher rates of IPV and sexual violence (Mellins et al. 2018, Messinger 2017) and past victimization is a risk factor in future victimization (Mellins et al. 2018, Walker et al. 2017, Western 2015).

Outrage to unchecked sexual violence has resulted in movements like #MeToo and the election of more than 100 women to the most diverse U.S. Congress in 2018 (Battaglia, Edley, & Newsom, 2019). New research purports that the complex intersections of sexual violence and multi-marginalized identities and lived experiences of children, cisgender femmes, and non-binary individuals worldwide need to be examined earnestly. Battaglia et al. (2018) implore that in the recent political and social era, open racism and (hetero/cis) sexism have become normalized in everyday life. Political polarization has generated tensions, open hostility, and dichotomous language that encourages “us versus them” narratives and prevents the “both/ and” (Pew, 2014). Complexities of identities are not represented in contemporary political, feminist, patriarchal, and hegemonic languages, resulting in effacing of marginalized voices. Sexual assault advocates submit that it is crucial that white cis-hetero people be disruptors to stand up against the wrongs perpetrated on marginalized bodies by white systems and that “White silence is violence” (Battaglia et al. 2018). Researchers argue that marginalized voices must be centered and call for intersectional scholarship, activism, and advocacy for and about the most vulnerable voices. Today’s students come to campus less seasoned and more diverse than previous generations, which raises the stakes for personal development as part of the college experience (Hong & Marine, 2018). Because of this, Bonami (2018) proposed that campus communities be willing to acknowledge biases that operate across collegiate environments to both privilege and disadvantage at the intersection of gender, race, sexuality, ability status, and socioeconomic status. Rothman (2018) challenges campuses to be leaders in anti-bias, civil rights, and human

rights practices to more impactfully reduce sexual violence against women and non-majority groups. Researchers in prevention science recognize that an intersectional approach is needed that acknowledges various positionalities (e.g., racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic, religious, and prior victimization), how they work together, and impact experiences of campus sexual violence (Christensen & Harris, 2019). A bystander approach informed by these frameworks urges a centering of minoritized identities and how they are impacted by systems of oppression that may lead to different experiences as bystanders and unique needs to support acting to prevent violence (McMahon, Burnham, & Banyard, 2020). This could include asking students about their perceived roles as bystanders, how they view their ability to engage in prosocial action and barriers to action, and what type of support they need to successfully intervene.

Whether someone chooses to engage in bystander intervention, particularly in violence prevention, and what impacts that engagement continues to be complex, abstruse, and ambiguous. The popularity of bystander intervention programs as a method to engage bystanders to prevent sexual assaults on college campuses continues to gain momentum and empirical support (Rojas-et al., 2019). Along with this momentum comes the need to better understand the factors influencing an individual's willingness and decision to intervene in sexually violent situations. As college campuses grapple with increasing sexual assault infractions, challenging the status quo in campus-based prevention programming is imperative (Bonomi, 2018). Accounting for students' various positionalities could be the spark needed to design significant violence prevention efforts that can break through the problematic reality and tradition on college campuses of privileging some voices over others.

Future of Sexual Violence Prevention Education

Historically, sexual assault has been regarded primarily as something men do to women; however, recent research has demonstrated that it is much more complex and multidimensional, requiring more than simplistic explanations (Caldwell, Swan, & Woodbrown, 2012). Conjointly, in the face of continued inequalities among genders that augment interpersonal violence perpetration and normative behavior, there is a growing belief that discrimination and sexist attitudes are no longer prevalent resulting in an impression that sexism is outdated (Conn et al., 1999). Furthermore, regardless of the promise of bystander intervention programs, little is known about the bystander intervention experiences of minoritized students such as students of color, LGBTQ+-spectrum and transgender students, and the intersections thereof (Harris 2017; Linder 2018). When the elements such as race, gender, and sexuality delineate within social hierarchies they interact and interweave, the results are unique identities within, and outcomes for, individuals (Cox et al., 2019). Because many violence prevention bystander training approaches do not account for these complexities, collective engagement often stops short when the early feminist discourse of gender inequality as the root of interpersonal violence is rejected. Sexism and violence are complicated, challenging, often overwhelming, and interconnected in ways that continue to challenge our ability to explain them; therefore, how we move beyond identifying existing inequities and taking action to improve the health and safety of those most impacted can seem insurmountable. Identifying risk factors while enhancing and strengthening protective factors, and continued inquiry into the culture of protection and intervention may lead to new tools and solutions for violence prevention intervention (Fabiano et al., 2003). Campus efforts to interrupt these processes by raising awareness, implementing Title IX informed response

mandates, and requiring student participation in various bystander training initiatives have yielded slight change.

Prevention programs geared toward teaching cisgender women to protect themselves from male cisgender violence do not seem to be the answer to far-reaching cultural change. Well-meaning people believe they do not need to engage in bystander violence prevention educational strategies because they would not commit sexual assault. Because of this, there is often little to no acknowledgment or understanding of how ingrained and systemic sexist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, paired with silence and inaction, contribute to the overwhelming rates of sexual violence in their campus communities (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Hong & Marine, 2018). Only recently have researchers begun to critically examine the gender-dichotomous instruments used to measure the beliefs and attitudes behind rape myth acceptance and the current bystander education curriculum (Johnson et al, 2021; Schulz & Koon-Magnin, 2017). To comprehensively measure rape myth acceptance and bystander behavior beyond heteronormativity and the gender binary, an examination of current tools used to measure bystander beliefs, attitudes, and whether a student chooses to intervene in a potentially sexually violent situation allows for a representative measure of rape myth acceptance for LGBTQ, heterosexual, and cisgender communities alike is also necessary.

Conclusion

Sexual violence contributes to the perpetuation of social inequalities based on a range of factors including gender race ethnicity class age sexuality and ability status; however, the examination of sexual violence within these contexts has been limited resulting in a lack of understanding about its role in sustaining social inequality. The complexities and impact of bystander intervention and preventing violence remain unclear. To address these gaps, three

studies were conducted. Study 1 utilized Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the language employed in the Green Dot violence prevention curriculum exploring its influence on social structures and meanings. Study 2 involved survey research and cognitive interviews to investigate how undergraduate college students comprehend and interpret the Gender Inclusive Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (GIIRMAS) designed to be inclusive of diverse sexes and genders. Study 3 employed the Rasch validity framework to assess the psychometric properties of the Sex and Gender Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (SGI-RMA). These studies aim to enhance our understanding of language perceptions and measurement tools in the context of sexual violence prevention and addressing social inequality inequalities.

**ARTICLE 1 - FROM BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TO COMMUNITY
MOBILIZATION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ALTERISTIC'S GREEN
DOT FOR COMMUNITIES**

Introduction

The bystander intervention model is a favorable approach to the prevention of sexual violence (Jouriles, et al., 2018; Katz & Moore, 2013, Kettrey & Marx, 2019; Storer et al., 2018). Training programs based on this model have been widely implemented on college campuses in the United States, often as the preferred initiative for preventing sexual assault (Orhoski et al, 2018, White House Task Force, 2014). However, bystander prevention programs are typically organized into two categories: 1) reactive risk-reduction, and 2) proactive rape prevention (Edwards, 2009). Risk-reduction programs encourage potential victims to use strategies to avoid high-risk situations, decreasing their chances of sexual assault. This risk-averse discourse is evident when messages are given, especially to young women, to avoid certain places, dress conservatively, and avoid alcoholic drinks. Consequently, this precludes any sense of responsibility for preventing sexual violence from men or the broader community.

Risk avoidance messages in sexual assault prevention education also fail to accommodate a critical fact: in most cases, survivors are in a relationship with or an acquaintance of the person who perpetrates violence toward them (Smith et al., 2017; Ullman, 2020). Consequently, Neame (2003) contends that “the most important critique of the rape avoidance strategy is its reliance on a limited conception of rape, as a surprise attack by a stranger in a public space” (p. 9). Focusing solely on a risk avoidance prevention strategy insufficiently addresses sexual assault in the context of marriage, in an ongoing intimate relationship, and family. Conversely, proactive rape

prevention programs focus on educating potential perpetrators and addressing the environmental factors supporting rape and sexual assault.

The anti-rape movement endeavored to provide services for victims, raise awareness about sexual assault through public education campaigns, and is committed to stopping violence before the first occurrence; this level is referred to in public health discourse as primary prevention (Koss & Harvey, 1991). When examining these prevention efforts, most teach self-protection skills to reduce the risk of assault and work toward developing prosocial bystander strategies to intervene when violence occurs. Proactive rape prevention programs focus on educating potential perpetrators and addressing the environmental factors supporting rape and sexual assault. Studies show that cultural constructs, such as gender norming behavior, affect the likelihood of widespread change (Kilianski & Rudman, 1998). For example, even though most men indicate they are uncomfortable with sexism and the inappropriate behavior of other men, men who have sexually assaulted women typically do not have recognition of any wrongdoing (Edwards, 2009). Prevention programs geared toward teaching women to protect themselves from violence do not seem to be the answer to far-reaching cultural change. Considering violence impacts everyone, providing alternatives to a historical two-pronged approach designed separately for men and women could create the cultural norm shifts needed to end interpersonal violence.

Green Dot Bystander Prevention Education

Scholars have explored the impact of bystanders on intervention behavior in emergencies for the past 50 years (Darley & Latane, 1968). Investigations have centralized on the role of observers in interrupting crime to protect potential victims. Intervention research has translated the bystander model for the prevention and intervention of gendered violence and most recently,

has been examined through the lens of diffusion of innovation theory (Johnson, 2005; Edwards, 2015). Although evidence suggested that interventions that engage bystanders in violence prevention increase bystander intentions to intervene, cultural shifts because of these programs have not been measured (Coker et al., 2015).

Latane and Darley's (1970) situational model for bystander intervention provides a foundation for understanding when bystanders act to interrupt sexual assault integrating five steps for prosocial responding: bystanders must notice the situation, perceive the risk to potential victims, take responsibility to intervene, decide to act, and then act. Additionally, Burn's (2009) situational model of sexual assault prevention to sexual violence and provided a more nuanced the perspective of bystander behavior as it relates to gender-based violence theorizing that barriers bystanders face at each step that can inhibit intervention; for example, bystanders evaluate the worth of potential or actual victims based on various characteristics, such as how they dress and their consumption of alcohol. Additionally, gender-based attitudes may also predict the kinds of barriers the individuals perceive to intervening; that is the reason for not intervening when presented with the opportunity to do so.

Green Dot, a violence prevention program created in 2007 by Dorothy Edwards, sought to enhance the willingness of bystanders to intervene by 1) inviting people to reconsider their role in violence prevention efforts, 2) inspiring others to believe they can make a difference, 3) engaging them in education that equips them with the knowledge and skill they need to take action, 4) strengthening newly learned behaviors through reinforcement, and 5) sustaining the changes through the integration of key messages (Edwards, 2015). The Green Dot bystander intervention program focuses on bystander training to engage students in actions to reduce sexual violence by empowering students to actively engage with their peers in both reactive and

proactive responses (Coker et al., 2015). Coker et al. (2015) examined rates of violence by type among college undergraduate students attending one campus with Green Dot's bystander intervention and two campuses without bystander programs. Utilizing an observational comparative design, Coker et al. (2015) examined whether the Green Dot strategy 1) reduced violence acceptance, 2) increased bystander willingness, efficacy, intentions, and behaviors, and 3) reduced violent victimization and perpetration on the participating campus in comparison to the two campuses not participating in bystander programming. The researchers surmised that Green Dot's bystander training likely impacted violent victimization because the training focuses on changing the student's ability to proactively identify and avoid risky situations, to create safer environments through social networks, and to intervene when precarious situations occur. Also, they found the efficacy of the training was likely greater for females than males because young women tended to perceive themselves more acutely to be at risk of sexual violence or dating violence.

Because bystander behaviors are targeted at reducing the perpetration of violence, particularly among men, it is important to determine the missing element connecting strategy adoption to tangible behavior change. The social norms approaches may be particularly relevant when men perceive that other men will intervene in a potentially harmful situation. The research also implies that men's perceptions of norms, whether accurate, exert a strong influence on one's own consideration of consent and willingness to intervene (Edwards, 2009).

Purpose of Study

After scanning the research and various violence prevention curricula, the Fargo-Moorhead Community, led by the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center, adopted Alteristic's Green Dot Community violence prevention education programming to anchor their current violence

prevention practices. After implementing the program in 2018 and 2019, and once again in 2021 and 2022, the Fargo-Moorhead community engagement efforts have appeared tentative and arduous. When the FM Green Dot Community Coalition utilized the curriculum in five separate trainings, males were less likely to engage in the Green Dot violence prevention training (FM Green Dot, 2020). Because bystander behaviors are targeted at reducing the perpetration of violence, particularly among men, I intimate the importance of examining the missing element connecting strategy adoption to engagement and tangible behavior change. Therefore, this study focuses primarily on the gendered language used throughout the Green Dot curriculum asking the question:

1. “How does the language of *Step 1: Inviting People to Reconsider Their Role in Prevention* encourage a balance or imbalance of power among genders?”

Theoretical Framework

Framed by feminist theory, this critical discourse analysis aligns with existing literature by showing the dissonance in discourses within the Green Dot curriculum. Feminist theory focuses on viewing the social world in a way that elucidates the structures that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, and in doing so, promotes the pursuit of equality and justice. Feminist theory is not only about women; it is about the world, engaged through critical intersectional perspectives (Cott, 1987). Most feminist theory is skeptical of dualistic thinking, oriented toward fluid processes of emergence rather than fixed realities in one-way relationships and committed to being a political as well as an intellectual process. It is rooted in and responsible for movements for equality, freedom, and justice. Three important contemporary questions within feminist theory concern (1) subjectivity, narrative, and materiality; (2) global neoliberal geopolitics; and (3) global ecologies (Ferguson, 2017). Feminist theorists apply the

tools of intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and the intertwining of scholarship and activism to address these questions. While feminist theorists aspire to contribute to their academic fields, their primary responsibility is to contribute to positive social change (Ferguson, 2017). At its root, a core tenet of “feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry” (Lather, 1992, p. 91). However, one cannot exclude the multiple socially constructed identities and systems of power that influence and interact with gender. To use a framework that focuses on one single aspect of identity, such as gender, paints an incomplete picture of any situation.

Some feminists argue that a lexicon of violence has been developed; however, “Like other social institutions and practices, language is seen as serving the interests of the dominant classes” (Ehrlich & King, 1994, p. 59). In a patriarchal society, there has been recent contention to a lexicon that specifically names violence dominantly acted out by men because it often leads to men not engaging in violence prevention work. For example, the Green Dot Community curriculum attempts to gently invite all genders to engage in violence prevention efforts through “rebranding” the dichotomous “male versus female” brand that permeates past violence prevention work (Edwards, 2014). Therefore, the connection between language and social practice must not be underestimated, especially when analyzing sexual violence and intimate partner violence discourses. Language cannot exist without socially constructed meanings. Social context creates language and language creates social contexts, they are both constantly changing and evolving (Rogers, 2011).

Method

Because language plays a fundamental role in both upholding and challenging the status quo, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be used to examine how language utilized in the

Green Dot curriculum is used to both influence and endorse social structures and meanings (Rogers, 2011). CDA views language as a tool with which to gain and exercise hegemonic power and focuses on the power of language, so it proved a useful tool for the analysis of how gendered language is used in the Green Dot curriculum. For this study, three of Gee's (2014) Seven Building Tasks were used to examine Green Dot's Step One: The Gender Divide text. Gee's (2014) work often emphasizes the connection between language, power, and social identities and argues that discourse is not simply a reflection of social reality but actively shapes and constrains our understanding and actions. As I read the text, I identified the 'social practice' created by the texts and the relationships that build an identity of an active bystander in violence prevention. This process helped to understand the impact on whether someone chooses to participate in community violence prevention education efforts due to the language used in The Gender Divide portion of the curriculum (Rogers, 2011). The text analysis attended to the building tasks; (1) Identities: What identities of the creators and readers are being constructed from the language used in the learning standards? (2) Relationships: What relationships between the content creators and the readers are the curriculum creators seeking to create? and (3) Politics: What perspective on social goods (public goods, available resources for all people) are this piece of language communicating? To answer each question, I read The Gender Divide text several times, to refamiliarize myself with the content of the document. Next, I read the document, carefully considering each question, and looking for language that would provide answers to the specific building task question. After reading for answers to each of the four building tasks, I made notes in the grid I created, writing in the appropriate section keywords, emerging themes, or patterns. After reviewing the text several times, I revisited the research question and used the notes, themes, and observations collected and began to form answers to the research question by

analyzing the four building tasks. Once the grid was complete, I began to review the data and develop emerging themes.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Using CDA as the methodology for this study requires me to consider my personal and professional experiences, biases, and values. To ensure the validity of this work, I will address my own experience with the Green Dot curriculum (Fairclough, 2010). I am a cis-gender female with 24-years of experience as a clinical social worker. For four and a half of those years I served in a variety of roles at the local rape crisis center including the Child Abuse and Neglect Community Action Network Coordinator, Human Trafficking Survivor Case Manager, Community Outreach Services Coordinator, and the most recent role as the Prevention Education Director of the agency. The agency where I worked has close working partnerships with law enforcement, county social service agencies, schools, and other non-profit organizations. I was a member of a statewide group, the North Dakota Coalition for Abused Women's Services, which researched and adopted the Green Dot Community violence prevention curriculum for the state of North Dakota. I was also the lead in developing relationships with Fargo-Moorhead community stakeholders to implement Green Dot training throughout the area. The Fargo-Moorhead Green Dot network collected participation data from each training which showed more engagement among those participants identifying as female and less engagement among those who identify as males. This data is what led to my curiosity about the language in the curriculum thus emerging into the CDA research for this course.

Analysis of Green Dot Curriculum, Step One

The overarching goal of the Green Dot violence prevention strategy is "The permanent reduction of power-based personal violence-including but not limited to sexual assault,

dating/domestic violence, stalking and child abuse” (Edwards, 2014, p. 9). To reach that goal, the Green Dot Violence Prevention Strategy is designed to accomplish the following objectives: 1) Power-based personal violence will not be tolerated, and 2) everyone does their part to maintain a safe community. To change the cultural norms, Green Dot seeks to engage the community in new behaviors through awareness, programming, and education. The strategy focuses on inviting people to reconsider their role in prevention, inspiring people to believe things can be different and their contribution matters, engage people in education that will equip them with the motivation, knowledge, and skill they need to take action to strengthen new behaviors through reinforcement, practice, and multiple exposures to key messages, and sustain changes through integrating key messages into permanent infrastructure, replenishing the pool of early adopters, and providing growth opportunities.

Step One of the Green Dot violence prevention programming to “Invite People to Reconsider their Role in Prevention” is the intentional initial step because the author believed that very few people have ever been asked to get involved with violence prevention, but most people have already considered joining prevention efforts and most people have opted not to get involved even though some form of interpersonal violence has directly impacted them (Edward, 2014). In this step, Green Dot has chosen to take its lead from the marketing industry to change the “reputation” of violence prevention. Green Dot proposed that using marketing strategies and tactics can aid in creating a new brand message, brand contact, brand associations, and brand value are paramount because they suggested: “Based on what they think and feel about our issue, people choose if they want to get involved in prevention (Edwards, 2014, p.13)”.

Emerging Themes

Gee (2014) purported that “language-in-use is a tool, not just for saying and doing things...but to build things in the world” (p. 30). Hence, Gee’s (2014) building tasks and the language in the Green Dot curriculum represent the process of building the power structures for control of the violence prevention education discourse when used throughout the Fargo-Moorhead community. Using Gee’s (2006) building tasks as the framework for the analysis, several insights were gained from components in step one, The Gender Divide. Specifically, two themes emerged from the text: 1) “Othering”-viewing or treating those who are already part of the violence prevention movement as intrinsically different from and alien to those who have not yet joined the movement- and the idea of 2) “Rebranding” the violence prevention movement from an “old brand” of ‘violence against women’ that reflects a negative and divisive stigma of victim-blaming and man-hating to a “new brand” which fundamentally changes the reputation of the violence prevention issue by being inclusive and positively identifiable. Below are examples from the text analyzed using three of Gee’s (2011) Seven Building Tasks – identities, relationships, politics, and signs and sign systems and knowledge – elucidating these two themes.

Identities

Gee (2014) suggested we use language to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role to build an identity presently and that we enact our identities by speaking or writing in such a way to attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own. Therefore, in the following passage, I asked, “What identities of the creators and readers are being constructed from the language used in The Gender Divide text? What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others, and how does this help the speaker or writer enact their own identity (Gee, 2014)?”

The curriculum constructs characters in violence prevention work whose identity is an individual who (1) is a potential victim, (2) a potential perpetrator, (3) one who is already a part of the violence prevention movement, and (4) those who are not yet a part of the violence prevention movement. Step One: The Gender Divide suggests that there have only been one of two lenses through which violence prevention programming has been filtered (women as the victims and males as the perpetrators) resulting in the alienation of ‘most’ men and women. Additionally, in this piece of text, the curriculum constructs an identity of men and women to be both polarized and dichotomous when discussing violence prevention. Participants must view the ‘gender divide’ as a destructive ‘brand.’ Gee’s (2014) construct of identities indicates that the identities created in this portion of the text align with the idea that the past dichotomous ‘brand’ of violence prevention efforts agrees with the identities created in the language of the text. Green Dot’s training manual *Gender Divide* section states:

In order to “rebrand” in a way that will compel people to reconsider their role with prevention efforts- we must be guided by some understanding of how the “old brand” took hold to begin with. It is worth revisiting some of the well-intentioned and reasonable, but perhaps faulty assumptions that guided our work. DISCLAIMER: The following points are to be considered within the parameters of establishing a brand for an education/intervention program. It should not be considered within the context of intervention,, dealing with first responders, or when talking about advanced programming for individuals already committed to the issue. For a long time, we only considered two relevant characters in violence prevention work: potential victim and potential perpetrator. Since we were framing the issue predominantly through these two roles, all of our programming – curricula, poster-campaigns, awareness, etc. – was filtered through

one these two lenses. Because of the disproportionate number of female victims in certain age-groups, and because men are disproportionately the perpetrators – we assigned pretty exclusive roles to each sex. The resulting categorization turned out to be alienating most men and women, and arguably contributed significantly to the gender divide that is such a destructive part of our “brand” (Edwards, 2015, p. 12)

Relationship

According to Gee (2014), we use language to signal the type of relationship we have, want to have, or are trying to have with our listener(s), reader(s), or other people, groups, or institutions about whom we are communicating. We use language to build social relationships. Therefore, the question I posed when reviewing the below portions of the Green Dot curriculum text was “What relationships between the content creators and the readers are the curriculum creators seeking to create (Gee, 2014)?

One important relationship for the analysis is the relationship constructed between the curriculum and participants, explicitly how the curriculum attempts to create a connection between men’s participation and the violence prevention movement through this bystander training. The Impact on Men’s Perception of the Brand emphasizes the importance of critical mass to move the prevention efforts forward, particularly the inclusion of men in the effort. The text highlights how the ‘old brand’ excludes males from the movement. An underlying theme of the prevention movement catering to women versus men is apparent. One way this is cultivated is through repeatedly stressing the limited positive messaging used to engage men. Directing participants to view past programming using “women’s” way of learning and interacting than “men’s” and using statistics and examples that highlight female victimization and male perpetration highlights this exclusionary process. Although the text’s attempt at seeking inclusion, empowerment, unification, and change, using the terms “we” and “us” (signifying

females), with the implication that there is a “they” and “them” (signifying males) does not contribute to this proposed relationship (see Figure 2). Pairing with the above identity section, this relationship governs, in a dichotomous manner, inherently calling attention to those who are already engaged in the movement and those who are not. Green Dot’s training manual section, *Impact on Men’s Perception of the Brand* states the following:

We remain among the most gender-divided movements. We are often seen as a “women’s movement” of “man-haters.” As such, despite our desperate need for critical mass to move forward with effective prevention, most of us still experience a dramatic under-representation of men aligning with us. This consistent gender divide requires that we reexamine the prevention “brand” we are creating to ensure the proactive, explicit inclusion of both men and women. Some key aspects of the brand that appear alienating to men and boys:

- The use of gender-exclusive pronouns
- Educational content that conveys the primary role of men as potential perpetrators
- The use of statistics and examples that portray female victimization, while overlooking significant male victimization.
- The creation of spaces (i.e., centers, websites, printed materials) that appeal to those who identify with more traditionally “feminine” characteristics.
- Programming that appeals more to “women’s” way of learning and interacting than “men’s” (Edwards, 2015, p.17).

Politics

Language is used to convey a perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods or to build a perspective on social goods (Gee, 2014). Gee (2014) proposed that social goods are

jeopardized when we speak or write in a way that states or implies that something or someone is “adequate,” “normal,” “good,” or “acceptable” (or the opposite) to some group in society (p. 34). To demonstrate this notion, I asked “What perspective on social goods (public goods, available resources for all people) is this piece of language communicating (i.e., what is being communicated as to what is taken to be “normal,” “right,” “good,” “correct,” “proper,” “appropriate,” “valuable,” “the ways things are,” “the way things ought to be,” “high status or low status,” “like me or not like me,” and so forth) in the text below (Gee, 2014)?

The text explicitly promotes closing the gender divide through rebranding. It reinforces political norms using mostly action verbs (closing, expanding, engages, seek, begin, increases) in promoting the benefits of the ‘new brand’ for men. These verbs reflect a preference for action, where participants are asked to act upon the information presented to them and then make changes based on the proposed dividends of inclusive behavior. They direct participants to both physically and conceptually change the existing system and to evaluate what is lacking. The behaviors would promote political norms that include providing a marketable strategy to men that will compel them to join in the critical mass proposed. Assumed is the notion that men do not already seek support and services for victimization or desire to do so. Also, in the passage, “...the numbers of young men who intersect with these issues (sexual assault and domestic violence) are not small” implies that the impact of violence on men versus women is, trivial. This text section intends to “rebrand” the violence prevention movement, based on a marketing perspective, it is unlikely they will be moved to increase their engagement when their experience with violence is minimized when the following with the section, *Expanding the Brand*, states:

Closing the gender divide by expanding our brand to be more inclusive of men has two significant benefits.

1. It expands the space for men who have been victimized to seek support and services and begin a healing journey. While a gendered component to sexual assault and domestic violence cannot be denied; neither can significant male victimization. When considering childhood sexual, physical, and emotional abuse; growing up in a domestic violence home; and the broad spectrum of sexual and physical harassment and bullying – the numbers of young men in our community who have a direct intersection with the issue is not small.
2. A brand that more effectively engages men dramatically increases the pace in our quest toward critical mass (Edwards, 2015, p.17).

Not only do the content and word choices of this piece of text “other” men, but their current perspectives on the matter are also omitted and unacknowledged. For example, instead of asking participants to consider how current violence prevention programming could include men, it offers a rationale for “what’s in it for men” if they decided to join “us” in the movement – which is an “a brand that more effectively engages men dramatically increases the pace toward critical mass.” Therefore, the political intent is to truly engage and be inclusive to men but to reach critical mass.

Conclusion and Future Considerations

Green Dot’s creator, Dr. Dorothy Edwards, suggested that the Green Dot Strategy is one in process, one that must refine, and course-correct with each evaluation, stream of data, and piece of feedback. In essence, it will be strengthened by application, scrutiny, and adaptations. “The story of Green Dot is one thread of many burgeoning around the country fueled by the same impatient insistence – ‘this violence has got to stop’ (Edwards, 2014, p. 8).” As it is written, Step One: The Gender Divide, appears to muddle feminist theory and if inclusion in the

movement is the curriculum's overall goal. Feminist theory has contributed to the importance of language used to frame violence (interpersonal violence, domestic violence, etc.), as well as maintaining a focus on gender while other theoretical frameworks aim to make scholarship and policy on violence gender neutral as it has evolved (Klein, 2013). Additionally, holistic feminist frameworks navigate the importance of anti-essentialism in interpersonal violence by including identities, relationships, and socio-political contexts at the center of research. For example, Third- World feminists discuss interwoven multiple oppressions upholding the hegemonic state. Mohanty (2003) stated, "If processes of sexism, heterosexism, and misogyny are central to the social fabric of the world we live in; if indeed these processes are interwoven with racial, national, and capitalistic domination and exploitation such that the lives of women and men, girls and boys, are profoundly affected, then decolonization at all the levels becomes fundamental to a radical feminist transformative project (p. 8)". As I understand it, this means that a feminist future does not center on power, hierarchies, or hegemony, but on community and solidarity.

Understanding the rationale behind calling out the history of dichotomous rhetoric of past violence prevention efforts, to reach the goal of inclusion and critical mass, using the term "the movement" rather than using the pronouns "we," "our," "us," "they," and "them" when Green Dot CDA is describing violence prevention efforts would be most beneficial. When asking people to reconsider their role, it would be important to rid the text of the initial disclaimer of who does not need to partake in the curriculum training. Also, the focus on rebranding and utilizing marketing strategies could be viewed as disingenuous and attempting to "pitch" the effort to men as a sales technique stating what's in it for them; rather, framing the curriculum language in a way that helps all community members understand that their actions and inactions matter when creating a safe environment for all. Lastly, focusing the curriculum on inclusive

dialogue exploring the historical nuances of violence prevention engagement, rather than seeking to “rebrand” the movement, could also aid in the call to action.

**ARTICLE 2 – UTILIZING COGNITIVE INTERVIEWING TO DETERMINE SEXUAL
AND GENDER MINORITY IDENTITY EFFICACY OF THE GENDER-INCLUSIVE
ILLINOIS RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE SCALE**

Introduction

Historically, rape has been discerned by feminist scholars as a function of sexism and a form of patriarchal control over women (Brownmiller, 1975). Despite the substantial impacts of the last 25 years of research, the prevalence of sexual violence has remained steadfast. It seems necessary to reconceptualize the work by challenging theories, methods, and strategies for dissemination and implementation moving forward. A current study by the Pew Research Center (2016) found a stark difference of opinion between women and men about whether sexism still exists. Where 63% of women believe that there continue to be major obstacles for women to get ahead, only 41% of men feel similarly (Pew Research Center, 2016). Sexist assumptions about gender, femininity, masculinity, and relationships between genders are often internalized beginning in childhood (Rhodebeck, 1996). These intimations may be reinforced by disparate societal conditions, impeding women's and girls' social, economic, and cultural participation and opportunities, including inequitable personal and professional relationships with men. These inequities can lead to sexual assault, sexual harassment, violence, and control within intimate relationships (Safe at School, 2020).

Sexual assault is a serious public health problem in the United States that profoundly impacts lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being. Sexual violence impacts every community and affects people of all genders, sexual orientations, and ages. Anyone can experience or perpetrate sexual violence (CDC, 2022). These experiences lead to a host of negative consequences for the mental and physical health and well-being of survivors. Women and girls

who are targets of sexism and sexist violence, may lose self-esteem, and feel ashamed and distrustful of themselves. They may feel powerless, fearful, and angry, yet may internalize the anger having been taught that the emotion is unfeminine. Early experiences of sexism and sexist violence may lead to a cycle of violence, as women and girls learn to undervalue themselves and their worth (Safe at School, 2020). Double standards and casual misogyny have made sexism almost invisible, yet it's still a barrier for many women and something that must be confronted (Pew Research Center, 2016). Studies have found that it's not just men who have an implicit bias against women, but women can also hold unconscious bias toward their own gender (Lewis, 2018).

Although relatively less attention has been paid to understanding the male victims of this same crime, a limited but growing body of literature has begun to provide evidence of the presence and negative consequences of male sexual assault. Prevalence rates of male sexual assault have risen to 3.8% with 1 in 26 American men reporting having experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2017). However, very few male rapes or sexual assaults appear on police files or other official records, because only a minority of male victims ever report their assault to the authorities (Davies & Roger, 2012; Walker et al., 2005). As with female victims, the effects of rape and sexual assault on males are often severe, with lasting long term psychological problems, including depression, alcohol or drug misuse, and a range of other mental health problems (Walker et al., 2005).

Research also suggests that sexual victimization is prevalent among Sexual and Gender²Minority (SGM)³ people (Rothman, Exner, & Baughman, 2011). A meta-analysis revealed that SGM people have higher rates of sexual assault victimization than heterosexuals, but the difference is larger among males (Wise & Hyde, 2012). Studies also show that bisexual men and women report more victimization than gay men or lesbians (Conron et al., 2010). Both trans women and trans men in this sample were at elevated risk for physical and sexual violence, as well as suicidal ideation and suicide attempt (Testa et al., 2012). Emerging literature suggests that sexual minority men report adult sexual assault at alarming rates, with some estimations indicating as high as 67% of men reporting lifetime experience (Gibbs et al, 2022). This epidemic of sexual violence calls for better understanding and improved responses for all survivors.

Rape Myths

To better understand what leads to sexual violence and prevent it from occurring, scholars theorized that gender-based norms manifest in myths about rape and victims of rape (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994); which are defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Examples of rape myths include: women who wear provocative and sexy clothes are asking to be raped; all women have a secret desire to be raped; or only women with visible cuts and bruises were raped (Burt, 1980), or that male victim is to be blamed for being raped because they did not escape from their

³ Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM)- is a comprehensive term that refers to individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or who are attracted to or have sexual contact with people of the same gender and/or whose gender identity (man, women, other) or expression (masculine, feminine, other) is different from their sex (male, female) assigned at birth (USDHHS, nd.).

assailant (Yule et al, 2020). The purpose of these myths is to deny or justify male sexual aggression against women (Payne et al., 1999). The belief that only certain types of women are raped also functions to obscure and deny the personal vulnerability of all women by suggesting that only a few women are vulnerable to being raped (Payne et al., 1999).

These false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and/or perpetrators of rape that perpetuate a culture where sexual violence is excused are characterized as *rape myth acceptance* (Bell, Kurlioff, & Lottes, 1994; Buddie, 2001; Burt, 1980; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Sanday, 1981). Research has shown that while men are more accepting of rape myths, many women also hold these beliefs (Ashton, 1982; Ellis, O' Sullivan, & Sowards, 1992; Larsen & Long, 1988). In addition, women who have been raped and have high rape myth acceptance are less likely to report the crime to the police, (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), and view themselves as a possible contributor to their victimization due to sex-role socialization and the engagement of rape myths (Williams, 1984). Conversely, women who endure cuts and extensive bruises as a result of the assault (thus meeting a common rape myth) were more likely to report the crime to the police as they believed they would be supported (Feldman-Summers & Norris, 1984).

The anti-rape movement has advanced over the past 40 years by promoting an increased awareness of rape, creating more comprehensive services for victims, legislative reform, and creating policies to address the issue (Gornick & Meyer, 1998; Weldon & Htun, 2013). A result of these efforts is a cultural shift and change in the acceptable discourse regarding women and rape myths. Past overt, victim-blaming, sexist beliefs and attitudes that may have been socially acceptable 40 years ago are often no longer regarded as common. This shift toward less open victim-blaming is represented in the current judicial system. Recently, measures to block public commentary of victim-blaming have been implemented, such as rape shield laws that prevent

discussion of rape victims' sexual histories, and removal of requirements for alleged victims such as proof of resistance or corroboration by a witness (Allen, 2018; Gash & Harding 2018). Despite this progress, research illustrates that beliefs in rape myths still influence lawyers' perspectives as well as juries' and judges' decisions in rape cases to rule in favor of alleged perpetrators (Krahe et al., 2008; Randall, 2010). The change to subtle and covert rape myths has been shown to affect how society characterizes victim-blaming. It may be argued that as overt sexism, in general, has lessened, rape myths that blatantly blame women for rape have become less acceptable. Despite this change, many of the underlying beliefs that women do something that leads to the assault and that it is not entirely the perpetrator's fault still exist covertly. Rape myth acceptance consistently predicts the perpetration of violence against women (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) and can affect individuals' willingness to intervene in situations that present the risk of sexual assault by increasing victim blaming and/or lessening their appraisal of victim worth (Burn, 2009).

Rape Myths About Male Victimization

Although researchers and activist have made significant advances in increasing awareness about rape myths, research has historically focused on how rape myths serve to protect what is assumed to be male perpetrators and harm what is to be assumed as female victims. There is little research about rape myth acceptance across different subpopulations that may extend beyond the heteronormative gender binary (Johnson et al., 2021). Addressing the gaps in research about rape myth acceptance and male victims, researchers have begun to examine further how the relationship between rape myth adherence for male victims is influenced by demographics, personal experiences with rape (such as being or knowing a survivor), and belief systems (Reitz-Krueger, 2017; Walfield 2021). Because rape myths center

around the idea that only men are the sexual offenders and females are primarily the victims of sexual assault, recognition of male rape victims is often overlooked (Dolan, 2017; Graham, 2006). Some contend that rape is politicized as primarily a feminist issue, and this perspective could potentially contribute to the isolation and suffering experiences by male survivors of sexual assault (Mezey & King, 1989). The conceptualization of the offender/survivor gender divide has led the scientific community to downplay or overlook the issue of male victims of sexual violence from the beginning (Javaid, 2017; Gavey, 2018).

The full extent of male sexual victimization is obscured by traditional male gender role socialization (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Kassing et al., 2005;). Research suggests that while women experience more sexual assault overall, men are just as likely to have experienced rape (i.e. forced penetration) or attempted rape (Reitz-Krueger, 2017; Koss, 2018). Researchers also found that male victims are generally younger than female victims, more likely to have multiple offenders, receive other (nonsexual) injuries more often, and are more likely to be socially or economically unstable (Kaufman et al., 1980). Males, like females, may feel ashamed of their victimization; feel violated, helpless, and fearful; and suffer from post-rape trauma (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Walfield, 2021).

Turchik and Edwards (2012) reviewed the literature on male rape myths which suggested cultural myths surrounding male sexual assault. After conducting the review, Turchik and Edwards (2012) identified a range of myths that they categorized into nine distinct groups: (a) the belief that men cannot be raped; (b) the misconception that “real” men can defend themselves against rape; (c) the stereotype that only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) the notion that men are not as affected by rape as women; (e) the misconception that a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) the belief that male rape only occurs in prisons’ (g) the mistaken idea

that sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) the unjust belief that homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) the harmful notion that if a victim physically responds to an assault, he must have wanted it(pp. 211-212). Until 2012, the Federal Bureau of Investigations' (FBI) Summary Reporting System (SRS) had defined rape using gender specific language, thus reinforcing the male offender-female victim archetype as "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 rigid interpretation, male victims, female offenders, another form of rape, such as fondling or unwanted sexual touching, were previously excluded from consideration This operationalization of rap in the FBI's SRS is deeply concerning, given its influences on violence prevention policy and research., and it contributes to the biases male victims encounter. It is estimated that this outdated definition resulted in a 40% undercount of sexual assaults, and out of the uncounted cases, around 26% involved male victims, with the error rate increasing over time (Bierie & Davis-Siegel, 2015).

Melanson (1998) created a 22-item instrument called the Male Rape Myth Scale (MRMS) in the absence of an established validated scale. This scale was the first to be developed with a solid foundation in both psychometrics and theory. Melanson (1998) measured myths falling under six principal themes: masculinity, sexuality, pleasure, perpetrators, context, and effect. Analysis suggested a two-factor scale, with 'Blame' and 'Minimization/Exoneration' subscales. In Melanson's (1998) study participants completed 80 items intended to measure belief in male rape myths, and a criterion measure consisting of six male rape vignettes. These measures were completed on two occasions separated by a 4-week interval. Using four separate criteria of

item quality, 22 items were selected to create the Male Rape Myth Scale, a reliable and valid self-report instrument for measuring false or stereotypical beliefs about the sexual assault of adult men. In Melanson's (1998) second study, participants completed the Male Rape Myth Scale and several other personality and attitudinal measures. Results of multiple regression analyses demonstrated that belief in male rape myths can be best predicted by negative attitudes toward homosexuality and the belief that men should not have or express certain feelings. Both the overall scale and sub-scales demonstrate excellent reliability and construct validity (Cronbach's alpha: $\alpha = .89$) and are thus proposed as tools to enable the generation of future research on male rape myth acceptance, both in general and specialist populations.

In effort to enhance the experiences of male rape victims, a study investigated the connection between male rape myth acceptance, female rape myth acceptance, attitudes towards gay men, gender role and sexism measures, victim blame, and assault severity. College students agreed with four items; 1) the belief that women who rape men are sexually frustrated individuals (74%), 2) the consideration of a man's resistance as a major factor in determining whether he was raped (62%), 3) the notion that male rape is usually committed by homosexuals (54%), and 4) the perception that it would be difficult to believe a man who was raped by a woman (Davies et al., 2012). Multivariate analysis indicated that individuals with negative attitudes towards gay men and those who believed men should be emotionally inexpressive were more likely to accept rape myths. These studies suggest that male rape myth acceptance is primarily influenced by people's belief about appropriate behavior for men and women, with individuals adhering to more traditional views of gender and sex roles being more prone to accepting rape myths (Davies et al., 2012). Specifically, those subscribing to traditional gender roles are double standards, possessing negative attitudes towards homosexuals, adhering to

stereotypes about masculinity and male and expressiveness, and endorsing traditional male gender roles were associated with accepting the rape myths (Davies et al., 2012; Kassing et al., 2005; Nalavany & Abell, 2004; Melanson, 1996). Understanding the attitudes and beliefs that underpin male rape myth acceptance is crucial since individuals who may serve as jurors, bystanders, and victim service providers can be susceptible to these beliefs (Walfield, 2018).

Rape Myths About Sexual and Gender Minority Victimization

Sexism, heterosexism, and cissexism shape what is visible and knowable about sexual violence for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer-identifying people (RAINN, 2022). While decades of accrued research have developed important critiques of sexism and heterosexual gender roles, researchers suggest gendered, heterosexist and cissexist stereotypes shape social understandings of sexual violence against Sexual and Gender minority (SGM) people (Mortimer et al., 2019). Because data collection instruments usually assume heterosexuality among participants and rarely assess for sexual orientation (Balsam et al., 2005), extraordinarily little is known about sexual violence victimization rates for SGM individuals. Despite more recent attempts to document the nature and scope of sexual violence for SGM people, there is little consistency in definitions of sexual violence, assault, abuse or rape among the research for this population (James et al., 2016, Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012, Mahoney et al., 2014, Rothman et al., 2011, Walters et al., 2013). Even though some studies compared sexual assault victimization by sexuality when offering respondents, the ability to identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other categories, they only offer limited gender identities (man/woman), which leads to the exclusion of transgender and gender diverse people (Mortimer et al., 2019). The few studies with SGM women and transgender sexual assault survivors illustrate that gendered, hetero-, and cis normative discourses significantly influence how sexual violence is understood.

The available research indicates that SGM people face high rates of sexual violence in their lives, in a range of different contexts.

Feminist research on gendered and sexual violence has shown that social understandings of sexual violence are often factually inaccurate, leading to attitudes that dismiss the reality of violence and blame victims/survivors for their experiences (Bieschke et al., 2007; Mortimer et al., 2019; Renzetti, 2001). Subsequently, a growing body of literature argues that social conditions create significantly unique experiences for LGBTQ+ sexual assault survivors. In a 2011 study of sexual health differences in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual individuals, observed that bisexual women reported having experienced more sexual coercion than heterosexual women, and bisexual and homosexual men reported more sexually coercive experiences in comparison to heterosexual men (Kuyper & Vanwesenbeeck, 2011). Furthermore, de Visser et al. (2007) found that bisexual or lesbian women reported more sexually coercive experiences than heterosexual women. Analyses also revealed that bisexual or gay men reported more sexually coercive experiences than heterosexual men (Johnson et al. 2016; Krahe and Berger 2013; Menning and Holtzman 2014).

Recent studies among college students also show increased rates of unwanted sex and rape among SGM college students. In a study investigating unwanted sexual contact in a large college sample, logistic regression revealed that cisgendered women and transgender individuals had a higher likelihood of experiencing a sexual assault in the past 12 months compared to cisgendered men (Coulter et al. 2017). Compared to heterosexuals, bisexual individuals had higher odds of experiencing a sexual assault, and gay and lesbians also had a higher likelihood of sexual assault compared to heterosexual men, but not heterosexual women (Coulter et al. 2017). In a large university sample, Mellins et al. (2017) similarly observed that gender nonconforming

students, bisexual women, and non-heterosexual men were at elevated risk for sexual assault. Therefore, researchers suggest that sexual violence prevention efforts should consider ethnicity and gender, and sexual identity when developing prevention programming (Coulter et al., 2017; Flanders et al., 2000; White, 2019).

While there is expansive research into rape myths as they pertain to cisgender women's experiences of sexual violence perpetrated by cisgender men, there is little research about rape myths affecting lesbians, bisexuals, queer women, or transgender and gender diverse people or how those myths might impact SGM survivors (Mortimer et al., 2019). It is argued that rape myths and stereotypes can often work to minimize and justify sexual violence, while also blaming SGM survivors for their experiences (Boyle & Rogers, 2020; Jones & Patel, 2022; Mortimer et al., 2019). For example, rape myths can include assuming the heteronormative dynamics of an aggressive man assaulting a passive woman, sexual assault only involving penile penetration (or a hierarchy of acts ordered by perceived seriousness, with vaginal and anal penetrative sexual assault perceived as more serious and other acts including oral assault, unwanted touching, groping etc. perceived as less serious), and that queer women do not have 'real' sex (read: penile-vaginal penetrative sex) (Mortimer et al., 2019; Pham, 2016; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Other rape myths, gendered stereotypes, and homophobia can include viewing Bisexual people as 'promiscuous', 'untrustworthy' and 'likely to be unfaithful' in relationships, that men's body size, physicality, sexuality and vulnerability to violence account for the likelihood of victimization (i.e., the idea that if a man is 'a bottom' he is 'a sissy' and 'asking for it'), and that not fighting back as a 'real man' may invalidate their ability to be seen as acceptable victims (Ayala et al., 2018; Javaid 2017; Mortimer et al., 2019). Viewing SGM survivors in this way directs attention away from the perpetrator and the social conditions that

make violence possible. Such standards for victims reinforce the expectation that all experience victimization in the same way, the sense that their vulnerability is homogenous (Cunniff Gilson, 2016).

These myths and stereotypes manifest in a number of ways to deny the reality of violence in queer people's lives and render violence against them as invisible, to protect the sexual status quo by justifying and legitimizing homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic violence, to blame victims and keep the focus away from offenders, and to deny sexual violence occurs among SGM persons which in turn can make it difficult for survivors to speak about and seek support (Messinger & Koon-Magnin, 2019). SGM may also have distinct experiences of sexual violence compared to heterosexual and cisgender women and men. Todahl et al. (2009) suggest these experiences are due to the overall discrimination, marginalization, and social oppression faced by SGM persons. Social understandings of and beliefs about sexual violence are also ensconced in several homophobic and transphobic discourses that construct SGM identities as 'other,' 'deviant' and perhaps 'deserving' of violence (Munson & Cook-Daniels, 2015; Patterson, 2016). In addition to the sexism that is widely acknowledged to shape many heterosexual women's experiences of sexual violence (and societal responses to this), heterosexism and cissexism can shape discourses about what sexual violence is, who experiences it and why (Messinger & Koon-Magnin, 2019).

Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA)

Created by Martha Burt in 1980, the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) is arguably the most reliable and psychometrically demonstrated rape myth scale to date (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). The scale consists of a general rape myth construct and seven subscales: (1) She Asked for It, (2) It Wasn't Really Rape, (3) He Didn't Mean To, (4) She

Wanted It, (5) She Lied, (6) Rape Is a Trivial Event, and (7) Rape Is a Deviant Event. The resulting 45-item scale was tested with a sample of 604 undergraduate students. The overall scale reliability was .93, with subscale alphas ranging from .74 to .84 (Payne et al., 1999). Burt (1980) conducted a series of studies to demonstrate the scale's construct validity through the relationship of the IRMA to empirically and theoretically related rape acceptance variables (Payne et al., 1999). The IRMA has demonstrated predictive validity through its positive correlation with men's actual rape proclivity and sexual aggression (Stephens & George, 2009) and related variables such as hostile sexism toward women in certain situations in which men should not be held entirely accountable for sexual assault. (Chapleau et al., 2007). The development of the IRMA helped to improve item wording, content validity, and criterion-related validity in measuring rape myth acceptance, which previous scales had not yet successfully and consistently achieved (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Payne et al., 1999). Because implementing a lengthy scale can be challenging, a 20-item short form of the IRMA was developed that includes items from all seven subscales and was introduced as a more parsimonious scale that assessed only general rape myth acceptance, not any of the seven IRMA sub-scales specifically (Payne et al., 1999).

The considerable progress made by the introduction of the IRMA notwithstanding, issues of validity remain, especially regarding updated language and the ability to capture subtle rape myths. The original measure, now more than 40 years old, has undergone adaptations to include cross-cultural language (Expósito et al., 2014; Bergenfield et al., 2022; Xue et al., 2019); however, with the continued focus on rape perpetrated by men against women, while this focus is critical due to the prevalence of such violence, this exclusive focus risks ignoring other vulnerable groups, including the SGM community. As noted by Payne et al. (1999), rape myth

measures “are necessarily time and culture bound. Several items use colloquial phrases that might be unclear to certain people or could quickly become outdated. This problem is not easily avoided, however, as sexual communication relies heavily on slang terminology” (p. 61). The common phrases and sexual slang that were used even a decade ago have changed on college campuses. Additionally, sexual slang and colloquial phrases differ depending on variables such as geographic location, community norms, and general student culture (Wells 1989; Grossman & Tucker, 1997; Crawford & Popp, 2003; McMahon & Farmer, 2011; McMahon et al., 2011).

With the increase of rape prevention programs over the past 20 years, rape myths have continued to become more subtle (Mason, 1997; Carmody, 2009; Lewis, 2020; Connelly & Heesaker, 2012). Research on subtle sexism serves as a framework for studying subtle rape myths. Researchers often refer to three categories of sexism: overt, covert, and subtle sexism (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Weber & Wade, 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Overt sexism includes blatant, direct, and observable treatment of women that is unequal and unfair. Covert sexism is unequal treatment of women that is intended but is deliberately hidden (Swim, Mallett, & Stangor, 2004), and subtle sexism is unequal treatment of women that is hidden because it is regarded as normalized behavior (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Research suggests that over time, sexist beliefs about women have become more covert and subtle, with less expressed agreement with overtly sexist attitudes and beliefs (Swim & Cohen, 1997; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998; Chapleau & Oswald, 2014; Franklin et al., 2017). As the newer forms of "modern" sexism have been recognized, Gerger et al. (2007) created their own updated scale, the Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression Scale, but is used far less often than the IRMA scale due to its original German language (Thelan & Meadows, 2021). It also contains explicit gendered assumptions in its scale design; so, finding a contemporary scale with validated sex and gender

inclusive language remains (Thelan & Meadows, 2021). Only recently have researchers begun to examine the relationship between sexual orientation and rape myth adherence and adapt the scale using non-gender-binary language (Schulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017; Johnson et al., 2021). The measurement of rape myths presents a major threat to the validity of the measure and evaluation of rape prevention/intervention programs if we fail to recognize and account for these changes (Johnson et al., 2021; McMahon & Farmer, 2011).

Even with the promise of ever-evolving sexual violence education programs among the high school and college populations, little is known about the sexual violence experiences and rape myth acceptance trends of minoritized students such as students of color, and SGM students, and the intersections (Harris 2017; Linder 2018). When elements such as race, gender, and sexuality delineate within social hierarchies where they interact and interweave, the result is unique identities within, and outcomes for, individuals (Calder, 2019). Because rape myth acceptance scale data used to develop violence prevention bystander training approaches do not account for these complexities, collective engagement may not resonate with all students when the early feminist discourse of gender inequality as the root of interpersonal violence is rejected. Today, the violence prevention landscape is gender-inclusive, sex-positive, trans-inclusive, body-positive, and digitally driven (Pew Research Center, 2016). Advocates are calling for our culture's most powerful men to be held accountable for their behavior and have begun a radical critique of the systems of power that allow predators to target victims with impunity (Rentschler, 2017; Linder, 2018). Researchers purport that the accountability of anti-violence work on college campuses can be most effective if built on critical reflexivity, especially regarding its relationship with feminism (Messner et al., 2015).

Many of the measures currently used to assess rape myth attitudes neglect to capture the more subtle and covert rape myths that have evolved; however, many high schools and colleges have implemented some form of education on issues of sexual violence over the past decade, so students have a greater awareness that certain traditional rape myths are not socially acceptable (Frazier et al., 1994). For example, college students with previous rape education may have less adherence to rape myth beliefs because of the "obvious" gendered phrasing of many rape myth measurement items (Fejervary, 2017; Hinck & Thomas, 1999; Schlegel & Courtois, 2019). Still, these myths may exist in various, more subtle, and covert forms that are not being accurately assessed because of question phrasing, the gender-binary language used, and resulting social desirability bias (Day et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2021). The complexity of rape myths is especially evident among a new generation of college students, who likely received exposure to rape prevention education and non-gender-binary peers by the time they graduated from high school (White et al., 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Sexual assault prevention and rape myth acceptance research have long suffered from gender-blind approaches to research questions, design, methods, measures, analyses, reporting, and implementation (Burbaker et al., 2017; Greaves & Ritz, 2022; Snyder et al., 2019). Gaps in knowledge have historically led to uneven treatment of those with non-normative gender identities, resulting in significant gaps in knowledge that continue to reinforce disparities in health (Greaves & Ritz, 2022). While some of these gaps are slowly being addressed, the phenomenon of 'we don't know what we don't know' regarding sex, gender and sexual assault prevails (Huhtanen, 2020). As societal attitudes and beliefs about sex and gender begin to shift and expand, the importance of continuing to reassess the language of measurement tools is clear.

In their recent study, Johnson et al. (2021) sought to expand the current measurement of rape myth acceptance beyond heteronormativity and the gender binary allowing for a representative measure of rape myth acceptance for SGM, heterosexual, and cisgender communities alike. To achieve this goal, the modified Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS) was altered to remove gendered language (e.g., he or she) and replaced with gender-inclusive language (e.g., they). The results provided initial evidence for a gender-inclusive rape myth acceptance scale, which increases inclusivity and representation for individuals who are particularly vulnerable to victimization (Johnson et al., 2021). Although Johnson et al.'s (2021) study took an important first step in establishing the initial reliability and structural validity of the GIIRMAS for SGM and non-SGM participants, their study had several limitations. The researchers utilized convenience sampling resulting in a sample of majority White, young adults (between 25 and 34 years old), and cisgender participants. Research is needed with a sample representative of people of diverse racial, ethnic, and gender identities, and of various age groups. Specifically, an investigation into the potential impact of intersecting identities including race, gender identity, and sexual identity (Crenshaw, 1991; Horvath & Brown, 2009), and the culture-specific rape myths (or realities) held within various groups of student populations; such as, major chosen, involvement in various clubs, Greek life, athletics, religious identity, or whether they have had experience with sexual assault (O'Connor et al., 2018). If these rape-related beliefs conflict with the dominant cultural beliefs, the individuals within these communities might indicate lower responses to rape myth acceptance measures; individuals with marginalized identities often endorse lower rape myth acceptance than their majority counterparts (Schulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017, Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Additionally, in their 2017 study, Schulze & Koon-Magnin combined all LGBQ and Trans identities into one group,

with no differentiation between gender and sexual identity, and did not measure the respondents' implicit biases. It is possible that although “they/them” pronouns were used, participants unconsciously assigned a binary gender to the perpetrator and victim. Participants may have assumed rape only involves a male perpetrator and female victim because rape myths exist within a context that perpetuates rape culture; traditional gender roles, adversarial sexual beliefs, acceptance of violence, hostility toward women (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Further, some items might reinforce this bias by using terms that are typically associated with women as victims and men as perpetrators; e.g., the term “slutty” as a victim-blaming term associated with women (Johnson et al., 2021).

Although participants might still read the GIIRMAS with the same gendered assumptions as to the original IRMAS, the inclusive language allows for those with diverse gender identities and all victims of sexual violence to see themselves on the scale, which may increase feelings of belonging and participation. Supplementary exploration into additional nuances among and between SGM individuals, differences between and within gender (e.g., nonbinary, trans) and sexual (e.g., lesbian, asexual) identities including a wide and diverse representation of SGM identities to account for the range of experiences within the SGM community and their gender binary peers is warranted.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Research suggests that rape myth acceptance plays a significant role in whether college students intervene to protect others from sexual assault (Carmody & Carrington, 2000; Neame, 2003; McMahon et al., 2015; Powers et al., 2015; LeMaire et al., 2016). Reforming societal norms and approaches toward rape and rape myths could potentially lead to higher campus reporting rates and play a significant role in influencing how individuals react when victims

disclose their assault. This is particularly crucial as victims are acutely aware of rape myths, face doubts about the occurrence of the assault from others and are affected by prevailing societal attitudes about how individuals should behave based on their gender (Brubaker et al., 2017; Murchison et al., 2017; Synder et al., 2018). More importantly, given historic and ongoing oppression and marginalization of people based on non-normative sexual orientations, sex identities, and behaviors as well as on non-normative gender identities and expression, there is much evidence documenting adverse health outcomes in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, and gender queer communities. Research focused on sexual and gender minority populations examining health and social issues of specific relevance for members of these communities could aid in combating these adverse outcomes.

Furthermore, sexual orientation and gender identity are often conflated in research, education, and policy (Snapp et al., 2015). People with any gender identity can experience a range of sexual orientations, with myriad possibilities; therefore, sex and gender science must include developing data collection techniques and measures to advance the health of sexual and gender minorities (Greaves & Ritz, 2022). Clarifying how these orientations differ and how they are related can help to situate different contributions to sexual violence prevention efforts, make their relationships complementarity, and tensions clearer (Blondeel et al., 2019; Greaves & Ritz 2022; Shulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017). Developing newer and additional approaches and conceptualizations, to fully integrate sex and gender considerations in understanding rape myths and sexual assault is merited; therefore, GIIRMAS items will be examined and reworked to decrease response error. Therefore, the aim of this study is to determine how participants understand, mentally process, and respond to the term “they” delineating gender identity and sexual identity used in the Gender-Inclusive Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (GIIRMAS) survey

items, allow participants to reflect on how they completed the GIIRMAS to capture their understanding and interpretation of the tool, and identify patterns of error and patterns of interpretation of the GIIRMAS across groups of undergraduate college students. The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. To what extent do cognitive frames influence college student's understanding and interpretation of GIIRMAS items?
2. To what extent do cognitive frames influence undergraduate student's decision-making processes and behavioral intentions in response to GIIRMAS items?
3. To what extent do GIIRMAS items need to be adapted to support gender and sexual identity inclusion in data collection?

Theoretical Framework

When incorporating sexual orientation and gender identity considerations into sexual violence prevention research, there are distinctive and evolving modes of engagement within the broader field (Greaves & Ritz, 2022). Researchers suggest that it is useful to continue to articulate these explicitly. Without such delineation, the field can feel fragmented, but by mapping this territory we can be clearer about how various perspectives and frameworks interact and complement one another to produce a fuller understanding of sex, gender, and public health outcomes (Greaves & Ritz, 2022). To produce the best possible health research evidence, it is essential to integrate sex and gender considerations throughout the research process (Day et al., 2016).

Highlighting how sex- and gender-related factors (originating in both biology and sociology) affect human health and communicate interdisciplinary ideas about concepts, methods, measures, and analyses of related evidence can create evidence for supporting all areas

linked to understanding the impacts of sex, gender, and intersectional factors on sexual violence prevention outcomes (Stall et al., 2020). Within the overall landscape of sex and gender science, there are several subgenres that describe different conceptual orientations to addressing sex and gender considerations. Gender differences research typically contrasts social and cultural experiences of men and women, boys and girls, and gender diverse people to derive knowledge (Greaves et al., 2014). Research design typically uses sex or gender categories themselves as the primary analytical framework, and as a result, these approaches are more likely to lead to the development of sex- or gender-specific actions, treatments, or interventions—that is, to suggest that men and women or males and females or gender diverse and fluid people require different treatments based principally on their sex/gender category (Day et al., 2016; Stall et al., 2020). Research focused on sex/gender interactions attends to the experiences of being a sexed body in a gendered social context, probing real world experiences of people and experiential impacts on bodies

Broader intersectional approaches acknowledge that the operation of sex/gender-related factors is not homogeneous across populations or sex or gender categories (Greaves & Ritz, 2022; Nowatzki & Grant, 2011). Intersectionality is a critical framework that provides us with the mindset and language for examining interconnections and interdependencies between social categories and systems (Heard, 2021). These approaches consider the interactions between various characteristics (such as ability, age, sexual orientation, gender, race/ethnicity) among social and political processes (such as colonialism, sexism, racism, capitalism etc.) where gender as a social identity is usually included but not always deemed central (Greaves & Ritz, 2022). In the discourse of sex and gender science, intersectional perspectives are important for advancing the ways that the operation of sex and gender can differ by context (Day et al., 2016; Greaves &

Ritz, 2022; Nowatzki & Grant, 2011; Stall et al., 2020). A sample representative of people of diverse racial, ethnic, and gender identity, and of various age groups is warranted. Specifically, subsequent research must investigate the potential impact of intersecting identities including race and gender, given the historic oppression and underrepresentation of people of color within research (Crenshaw, 1991; Gurthrie, 2013) and the particular risk of sexual violence and murder among trans women of color (Matsick et al., 2022; Allendoerfer, 2020; Wood et al., 2019).

Method

Although rape myths are typically measured through quantitative self-report measures such as the GIIRMAS (Johnson et al. 2021; McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999), qualitative measures in the field will often yield distinctly different results from quantitative studies (Dellinger Page, 2010; Shaw et al., 2017). Because it allows for the formulation of multiple realities and interpretations, qualitative research strays from viewing humans as independent beings who are simply responding to stimuli and influences, and allows for the context in which the person exists to be viewed as well (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Morrow, 2007).

Both survey research and semi-structured interviews were utilized to determine the efficacy of gender and sexual identity inclusion in the GIIRMAS survey. The interviews were designed to elicit respondents' thought processes when answering the survey question, specifically, how they understood a question and how they arrived at their answer. Survey respondents were engaged in four types of information processing before responding to survey questions. Respondents were asked to (1) interpret each survey question (2) retrieve the information from their memory, (3) decide how to respond, and (4) select an answer from among the response categories that matches their "internally generated answer" (Schwarz & Oyerman, 2001; Willis, 2005, p. 36) The interview questions and protocol were used to help participants

think about their understanding of, mentally process, and respond to the term “they” delineating gender identity and sexual identity, to reflect on how they completed the GIIRMAS, and to capture their understanding and interpretation of each item.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

It is important to note the topic of sexual assault can be a sensitive topic for the participants directly or to the class of individuals they represent. Little guidance exists for cognitive interviewing for sensitive topic instrument development. Researchers engaged in instrument development increasingly use cognitive interviewing to enhance instrument reliability and validity. Based on cognitive theory, cognitive interviewing encompasses a family of techniques for eliciting data on how future respondents will interpret questionnaire items and formulate responses (Conrad & Blair, 2004; Collins, 2014; Miller et al., 2014). Cognitive interviews take multiple forms, including verbal probing and think aloud, which may be used in combination or alone (Collins, 2003; Jobe & Mingay, 1989) The contribution of cognitive interviews to establishing content validity and address the importance of developing standardized guidelines for analyzing and interpreting cognitive interviews to maximize their usefulness for instrument development.

Interviewer skills are critically important when conducting a cognitive interview to establish participant rapport, create a comfortable environment that encourages participants to share their thoughts and experiences, and to draw out the participant’s response explanations, and maximizing the quality of data collected (Cowles, 1988; Widom & Czaja, 2005; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Though usually not intended as an intervention, qualitative interviews, in general, may have a therapeutic effect on participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006). Qualitative interviews addressing sensitive topics can be intense, used to empower the participant, and provide an

opportunity for the participant to tell their story to someone who wants to listen. When they no longer remain silent about their trauma, they may feel relieved to bring their experience to light after feeling like they had to keep their thoughts and experiences hidden. In addition, some participants report a sense of purpose from sharing their experiences as a contribution to increasing awareness and eventually improving care for others who may have similar experiences (Krumpal, 2013). Topics addressing attitudes or behaviors that violate social norms may cause participants' responses to be influenced by social desirability bias. In this case, it is often not the interview question but the answer that is sensitive. Respondents may alter their responses to appear more socially favorable (Bernardi & Nash, 2022; Krumpal, 2013).

To ensure the validity of this work, I will address my own experience with measuring rape myth acceptance and cognitive interviewing (Fairclough, 2010). I am a cis-gender female with 24-years of experience as a clinical social worker. For four and a half years, I served in a variety of roles at the local rape crisis center including the Child Abuse and Neglect Community Action Network Coordinator, Human Trafficking Survivor Case Manager, Community Outreach Services Coordinator, and the most recent role as the Prevention Education Director of the agency. The agency where I worked has close working partnerships with law enforcement, county social service agencies, schools, and other non-profit organizations. My background in violence prevention work is what led to my curiosity about the language in the IRMAS and currently, the GIRMA. As an Independent Clinical Social Worker, who has extensive training and experience with clinical competence, empathic listening, and probing for interview data that answer questions, I employed general cognitive interview tenets, clinical interview best practices, and professional experiences when discussing gender identity and rape myth acceptance to provide recommendations (Adler & Proctor, 2017; Evans et al., 2017; Kirst-

Ashman & Hull, 2018; Ryan et al., 2012). I'll also note that I teach undergraduate and graduate level social work program courses in communication skills, interviewing individuals and groups, human behavior, and mental health.

Findings

In this section, key findings are presented which emerged from the data analysis process. The main purpose of this study was to utilize the Cognitive Interview process and analysis as evidence to guide decisions about keeping, deleting, or modifying items of the GIIRMAS. The four most salient elements in relation to the cognitive framing categories that emerged from the interviews were: *Language*: Participants activated their comprehension and interpretation of each rape myth scenario through their own attention, memory, and understanding of both the informed consent and survey items; *Images*: Participants interpreted and/or envisioned a particular identity of each scenario characters in each survey item through their own personal identity; and *Implicit Attitudes and Beliefs*: Participants' implicit attitudes, beliefs, and cognitive biases contributed to item interpretation and response. The following analysis demonstrates how the themes emerged and are organized based on the cognitive framing theory codes used during analysis: *priming*, *framing effects*, and *value expressiveness*.

Priming

In the context of cognitive framing theory, priming refers to the process of influencing or biasing a person's perception, judgment, or interpretation of information by exposing them to certain cues or stimuli beforehand. Priming operates based on cognitive associations and the activation of related concepts in the mind. For example, the cues used during survey development included wording questions using gender neutral pronouns such as 'they' and 'someone' in place of the gender dichotomous terms 'he,' 'she,' 'her' or 'him.' Although it is

tempting to conclude that simply having gender as a linguistic structure is sexist, many argue that the true issue is whether men and women are treated equally using the language (Stahlberg et al., 2007). In natural gender languages, unequal use of the language is highlighted by the presence of asymmetry in the linguistic treatment of men and women. By substituting a gender-specific pronoun with a gender-neutral alternative, individuals are primed to think in a more inclusive manner and perceive the term as applicable to individuals of any gender (Mucchi-Faina, 2005). The effects of priming can be subtle, operating on a subconscious level, and individuals may not be fully aware of how their judgments and opinions have been influenced (Newell & Shanks, 2014).

Survey Language

All 13 respondents demonstrated how they understood the nouns and pronouns in each item represented in each survey item throughout their individual interviews. For example, when asked to state who an “individual” represents in the item, *If an individual is raped while they are drunk, they are least somewhat responsible to letting things get out of control*, Kora said,

To me? I believe they're individuals or any person. It could be a woman, it could be a man, it could be non-binary, too.

Abraham suggested that an individual may be anyone in this scenario, but he also understood the term as inclusive of two genders and religious affiliation when he stated,

An individual here is anybody. A male, female, Christian. Muslim.

Overall, four of the 13 study participants interviewed determined the term “individual” represented a wider range of sexual and gender identity inclusion using the words *someone* and *anyone* in their answers. Three participants described an individual as *any person of any gender or sex* whereas nine of the 13 participants viewed the term “individual” to represent the binary

distinctions of cisgender men and cisgender women across all 19 survey items. Although cultural norms and societal expectations have traditionally assigned specific attributes, roles, and behaviors to people perceived on their gender, contemporary understandings of gender have expanded beyond the binary in the last two decades (Lips, 2020); however, the results indicate that most respondents adhere to the cultural and social norms which often define masculine and feminine identities within a binary framework.

Identity was also demonstrated when participants were asked who “someone” represented in the item, *If someone “hooks up” with a lot of people, eventually they are going to get into trouble*, Danica answered,

Just a person who I just pictured myself in a situation, like a person hooking up with a lot of people. What would happen to me if I did that? Eventually, eventually something might happen. So that's kind of what I pictured- me when I was reading that question.

Riley demonstrated understanding of her own identity in relation to the victim when asked who an “individual” represented in the item, *If and individual doesn't physically resist sex-even if protesting verbally-it can't be considered rape* when she stated,

Yeah I think with just the fact, I think I would see that as a woman just because I am a woman or someone who, I guess I would see it as someone who, it's not necessarily smaller, but easier to, for someone to physically overpower which for me would be a woman, to me personally.

In the scenarios above, the two female-identifying respondents attributed the potential sexual assault victim's actions to their own personal qualities. Danica and Riley immersed themselves into the scenario and made situational judgments based on what they would do. They then used

their situated preferences in their mental simulations of the potential sexual assault scenarios as formative indicators of their overall level of agreement with each item. The perception that women are seen as the weaker sex is rooted in historical, cultural, and societal factors that do not reflect the diverse strengths, capacities, and potential of individuals regardless of their gender (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Danica and Riley show that societal narratives and cultural norms around rape myth acceptance reinforce the perception that they and women, in general, are vulnerable and at risk of sexual violence.

Like previous research on gender identity and rape myth acceptance, participants in this survey clearly demonstrated that their personal attitudes and behaviors impacted how they perceive offender and victim attributes in each GIIRMAS item. The above responses indicate these perceptions ultimately influenced their responses. Although there has been a recent shift in cultural norms understanding gender is a complex and multifaceted construct that extends beyond the binary, many cultures and societies have historically embraced and reinforced the notion of a binary gender system where individuals are assigned a specific gender at birth based on biological sex. These norms are deeply ingrained and can influence how people perceive and understand gender (Schulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017). It's also important to note that the respondents who responded using gender norming language identified as cisgender themselves. Despite most participants' interpretation of gender inclusive nouns and pronouns in the survey as representative of gender dichotomous identities, respondents communicated the importance of using inclusive nouns and pronouns. Participants acknowledge the growing awareness of the discrimination, violence and health disparities experienced by SGM people, and why it was important to generate precise gender identity data, which has significant implications for the social inclusion and well-being of the SGM community.

Framing Effects

Framing effects refers to the phenomenon where the way information is presented or “framed” influences individual’s perception, judgment, and decision-making. The framing of information can shape how people interpret and respond to that information, leading to different outcomes depending on how it is framed. Two types of framing effects include the positive/negative frame where information is framed in terms of gains or losses. When information is presented in a positive frame, emphasizing gains or benefits, individuals tend to be more risk-averse seeking to maintain the gains (Rothman et al., 2006). Framing can also be used to highlight specific attributes or characteristics.

Images

Respondents were asked to imagine each rape myth scenario and report who and why they thought the scenario occurred. These items were meant to capture a traditional or cultural story or narrative that often explains the origins of rape myths, provides moral or spiritual lessons, or serves to understand the world and human experience. These rape myths can shape beliefs, practices, and identities within a culture or society (Conaghan & Russell, 2014). To accurately depict respondents’ acceptance of commonly held rape myths, survey questions were written to assert a specific myth and elicit the respondent’s understanding of and level of agreement with each myth. For instance, under the subscale, *They Lied*, question *A lot of time, individuals who claim they were raped just have emotional problems*, participants, construed the phrase “just have emotional problems” in two ways. Emotional problems were either considered a character trait the victim used to falsely claim rape whereas some participants understood it as the victim suffering emotional ramifications of surviving a sexual assault. For example, Kora said,

I mean, people usually assume females are emotional, I guess. Okay. Emotional problems would just be like they don't know how to control their emotions.

Devon, Jerry, and Callie suggested that the individual in this scenario has *psychological problems*, is *mentally unstable*, or has *mental health issues* and is *unreliable*. The responses to the rape myth indicate that these participants understood that labeling a rape victim has mental health issues can be a way to shift blame away from the perpetrator and downplay the seriousness of the assault. By suggesting that the victim already had mental health issues, doubt about the veracity of the victim's claims and undermining their credibility is a result. Conversely, a few of the respondents suggested that *emotional problems* refer to the victim suffering emotional consequences because of the assault. These responses indicate this phrase has a mixed impact on how respondents understood and interpreted the question. It is crucial to use clear, unambiguous language that avoids potential bias, so this survey question could be modified to reflect the intended meaning of the rape myth that people claim rape because they have difficulty managing their emotions.

Framing impacts on participant responses also occurred when prompted to interpret "asking for trouble" in the following *They Asked For It* subscale item, *When an individual goes to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble*, Devon said,

Getting in trouble means that they're going to have problems, I might say they're going to trouble means it might also mean that they're going to cause distraction. So, they're going to get into trouble. Yeah. Maybe harassment or harassment that girls get for wearing shorts.

Abe had a similar interpretation when he reported,

It means when someone goes to a place and their clothes maybe seems to be, let me use the word tempting, to bring temptations to maybe guys who have bad manners or who don't behave. In case of anything happening, they [the person wearing revealing clothing] will be responsible whatever happens.

Emily suggested that “getting in trouble” has two different meanings when she stated,

Getting in trouble means that they're going to have problems. They're going to trouble means it might also mean that they're going to cause distraction. So, they're going to get into trouble.

As demonstrated in the responses, participants equated the phrase “asking for trouble” in the scenario causing a distraction or tempting others. This item was categorized under the subscale, *They Asked For It*. It is clear the respondents understood the intended meaning of this phrase and the rape myth which connotes a greater responsibility of the potential victim being sexually assaulted because of the misplaced focus on personal responsibility. People may engage in cognitive biases and rationalization to distance themselves from the uncomfortable reality of sexual violence. Victim blaming can be a way for some individuals to maintain their sense of safety and control, allowing them to believe that they would not be vulnerable to such acts (Gravelin et al., 2019).

Respondent Identity

Across cognitive interviews, participants’ demonstrated their own personal identity influenced their perceptions of the potential victim’s identity in each rape myth scenario. For example, when asked “Who does an ‘individual’ represent?” in the following item, *When an*

individual goes to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble, Steph commented,

Usually, it's like females wearing revealing clothing. So that's what I just pictured. I just pictured myself in that situation. If I wear revealing clothes, am I asking for trouble? Just because I'm wearing revealing clothes.

Similarly, Janae responded,

I think I'm doing a lot of self-insertion, so it'll probably be someone like me, like a girl. But I feel like it could also really be anybody, because I know a lot of people who might not identify as a girl, and they could also wear something that was revealing, so it could be really anybody.

Several participants commented on how they perceived the gender-identity of both the potential offender and victim in each item in relation to their experience and personal identity. Devon reported difficulty conceptualizing men wearing revealing clothing in response to the question “Who does “individual” represent?” in the item, *When an individual goes to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble*. He stated,

As a man, I don't really understand what it might look like for a man to wear revealing clothes. And when it comes to women wearing revealing clothes or anybody generally wearing revealing clothes outside of me for a moment outside of dressing comfortably for the weather or for specific occasions I don't have a good understanding of why people necessarily dress [revealing clothes]. So, I think I answered, not sure to this question. So initially when I saw this, I was thinking, well a lot of women do just dress suggestively, I suppose. And I would

say that I didn't think there was a good reason for that outside of maybe dressing comfortably.

Briggs also reported difficulty envisioning any gender other than a woman wearing revealing clothes when he responded,

I mean, the victim could be members of either sex but undeniably typically it's referring to women. I think something that has to be considered is that, I suppose provocative clothing. I can't say that I understand what that might look like for a man but the image is clear when it comes to a woman. Still, I think there has to be some cases where a man could be the individual in this question or in this statement.

Framing rape myths can impact individual's mental models by reinforcing and perpetuating false beliefs, stereotypes, and misconceptions about sexual assault. Most respondents demonstrated some perceptual distortions of the realities of sexual assault imagining traditional roles that reinforce the idea that women are vulnerable and passive, while men are dominant and sexually aggressive. Although the current sexual assault data supports the idea that primarily woman identifying individuals are more likely to be raped (1 in 4) than any other gender these stereotypes led to a skewed perception that predominantly focuses on female victims due to their higher likelihood of reporting incidents as compared to men (CDC, 2023). The invisibility of male and SGM survivors can perpetuate this myth that only women experience sexual assault.

Value Expressiveness

Value expressiveness in framing is a concept that focuses on how frames can convey and express individuals' deeply held values, beliefs, and identities. It recognizes that framing can go beyond providing information and shape people's perceptions and attitudes based on the

alignment of the frame within their core values. When the frame aligns with an individual's values, it taps into the emotional identity-related aspects of decision-making, making the frame more relatable and meaningful to the individual. Frames can activate cognitive processes that lead to stronger engagement and support for a particular perspective or issue (Goffman, 1974; Silver & Hovick, 2018; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Not only can survey respondents reflect their own identity in answering each item, but implicit attitudes and beliefs play a role in item responses (Dasgupta, 2013). For example, the degree to which a rape victim and rapist are perceived as responsible for a sexual assault can be influenced by factors that are tangential to the actual offense (Mitchell et al., 2009). Participants in this study demonstrated how their attitudes and beliefs were not necessarily consciously acquired; rather, they were accrued passively in individuals' minds without their conscious awareness. This was especially apparent when discussing the sexual assault scenarios and what characteristics they attributed to either the victim or the offender in the items.

Implicit Attitudes and Beliefs

Prior research (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005) indicated that female aggression toward a male was less likely to be considered wrong, compared with male aggression toward a female. Furthermore, because abuse perpetrated by males is often viewed as more severe than abuse perpetrated by females (Dardis et al., 2015; Hamby & Jackson, 2010), it is possible that the greater perceived responsibility attributed to male perpetrators (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Sylaska & Walters, 2014) may in part be due to perceptions that male perpetrators cause more harm than females. Participants in this study reflected similar attitudes in their responses. When asked to respond to how he understands the survey item, *Individuals don't usually intend to force sex on others, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away*, Jared stated,

I've heard this sometimes too, how some people are like, oh, it's just because, well, if you hear about a lot of men raping, you hear people trying to back them up by saying it's just because men want to have sex more than women do, where I don't believe that's the case. So, it's kind of saying that it's just because men have more sexual desire basically.

Conversely, Briggs responded,

So, I answered agree to this one. I think I find it hard to imagine a situation or to imagine a rape where the rapist didn't do it because of a drive through sex. I think it's a primal thing and I can't imagine why anyone would be drawn to that without that drive?

Dylan said,

People, someone, I guess. When people rape other people like it's because of their, I don't know, their strong desire for sex. I don't know. I don't agree with it. I don't know I feel like there's something wrong with people who rape other people. I don't think it's like because they don't get enough action. I think that there's something messed up about them. I don't know. I feel like guys are stigmatized to have a really over powerful desire for sex and stuff like that

When asked to provide concluding thoughts on the survey items, Jared stated:

I think it's because I've only been exposed to stories that have been the female as a victim. I've rarely come across stories where male men have been raped, but I know obviously that happens. And when I have heard of men being raped, it's usually just with in a same sex relationship. So, it's usually two men that I hear

stories of when men were raped. But I don't usually hear; I don't really hear them that often. So that's why I just assume the female in each situation.

Jared, Briggs, and Dylan, who identified as cisgender males, indicated that sexually driven offenders who are motivated by an overactive sex drive were perceived as not having control over whether the offender forced sex upon another person. Interestingly, these interviews responses support the previous studies which suggested that respondents who identified as male in this study were more likely to accept that rape occurs when sexually driven offenders are motivated by deviant sexual arousal and adheres to the harmful belief that suggest men are entitled to sex or that sexual aggression is an inherent part of masculinity (Brownmiller, 1975; Herman, 1990; Walters & Tumath, 2014).

Under the subscale, *It Wasn't Really Rape*, respondents were asked to articulate their understanding of the item, *If an individual didn't physically resist sex- even if they protest- it can't really be considered rape*. Devon mentioned,

If two individuals that is a man and a girl are together in a room and then the man touches the lady, and the lady is not against, again, the lady's not against it, it can't be considered to be a rape because the lady didn't, did not complain.

Finally, Janae said,

For example, if the person is being raped and maybe they can't fight back or physically push the person away from you, even if you are shouting at them to "stop" or telling them, "get away from me," it can't be considered a rape.

The above participants indicated they understood the item to mean that not fighting or resisting an attack is equivalent to the victim's consent to have sex. Their interpretation reflects the

intended meaning of this GIIRMAS item. Similarly, participants understood the rape myth within the *Didn't Mean To* subscale, when asked to translate the item, *It shouldn't be considered rape if an individual is drunk and didn't know what they were doing*. Jerry said,

Yeah, it means when folks maybe they're together, and they're carried away by the emotion, they tend maybe to find themselves maybe having sex or doing other sex acts without consent, without their mind working correctly, without them acknowledging what they're doing here.

Briggs suggested,

When someone is wasted [drunk], they might start having wild thoughts or being about having sex with the people around you. You might even consider having sex with a friend.

Emily mentioned,

It means someone should not be accused of rape if they were drunk and they we're not sure of what they were doing here-they shouldn't be accused or face the law. If someone says, "I was not willing to do this" after the act, too bad. It's not rape because the rapist was drunk.

As demonstrated above, respondents understood the item suggesting the rape myth that alcohol negates offender responsibility for the sexual assault in this scenario. They each equated alcohol consumption with the inability to make meaningful decisions and to choose whether they engage in sex with another person. Overall, participants voiced their understanding similarly with some unique variations. The differences between study participants reported gender identity in relation to the potential victim's responsibility for their own assault were clearly demonstrated throughout the cognitive interviews. Compared to participants who identified as women, those

who identified as men indicated that they would provide more negative and less positive social reactions to the victim, were less likely to identify the scenario as rape, and endorsed less perpetrator responsibility.

Demographic Impacts on GIIRMAS Items

Respondent demographics can have a significant impact on how they answer survey questions. This is because an individual's experiences, beliefs, values, and social contexts are shaped by a range of factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and geographic location. These factors can influence the way respondents interpret and respond to survey questions and can result in variations in responses based on demographic characteristics (Brenner & DeLamater, 2016; Grim, 2010; Krumpa, 2013). Participants indicated the impact the following demographic items had on whether they considered the survey inclusive of the general undergraduate student population in the United States.

Participants were then asked to report if they represented the demographic items which included *sexual identity*, *gender identity*, *racial identity*, *current religious viewpoint*, *current academic class year*, and *participation in university affiliated activities*. Two standalone fill-in-the blank items included the questions, *How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic identity?* and *Do you identify as transgender?* Participants were then asked if they would add or delete any of the choices provided. The comments below helped to capture how participants perceived gender identity, sexual identity, and standalone items.

Participants who identified as men in this study were more cautious about determining whether the victim or offender was more responsible for the assault than those who identified as women or transgender. There were also instances where participants responses included notions

that the survivor provoked or fabricated the sexual assault. In response to the survey item, *A lot of time individuals who say they were raped agreed to have sex and regret it*, Abe stated,

I think ultimately we have to be responsible for our own decisions in the present. I think if someone agreed, it relies more on agreement in the present and the intellectual capacity required for that. I think regret is something people feel for many decisions, but that doesn't mean that they didn't decide, they didn't make that decision in the moment. So, I don't feel like it's fair to classify something as rape when in the moment everything indicated otherwise.

Correspondingly, Dylan said,

I answered somewhat agree. If you are caught by your partner, if you are married and you are caught with your partner having sex with someone else and then they start claiming it was forced. It was not against their will and they are trying to redeem themselves in the eyes of their partner.

When Devon was asked to share why he chose “Not Sure” to the survey item, *Rape accusations are often used as a way to get back at someone*, he said,

In regard to culture in America, there is a lot of contention about this and how in some capacity there is the idea of it [rape accusations] being used as a weapon or almost a tool for maybe defamation. I think that kind of reveals how I look at the individuals in this question because of the vivid conversations I've had about this. I'm trying to find the word here, it might depend on the severity of the claim, but it can't be ignored in any circumstance. And so there really isn't, isn't a defense against a rape accusation itself. So, I do believe that power is there whether or not it is used frivolously, I can't say.

Abe, Dylan, and Devon were uncertain about whether a victim is responsible for their assault. Their comments make clear that their perception of the victim in each of the above scenarios was somewhat justified because the victim either falsified claims of sexual assault due to regret or revenge or were caught cheating on their partner. As they demonstrated, rape myths that hold the victim responsible for their own assault continue to permeate cultural norms and socialization processes. This could be a result of the “just world” bias where individuals believe the world is fair and that terrible things happen to those people who deserve it or misguided notions of societal expectations around masculinity, which often involve ideas of power, dominance, and control.

Participants who identified as women or transgender attributed the assault solely to the offender regardless of the scenario circumstances posed. When asked to respond to the following survey item, *If someone is raped when they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control*, Callie said,

I strongly disagreed. Some people might say that they are okay, might consent and then after they realize that they were not in the right headspace or they really should have said no. And I don't know, some people just changed their minds after the fact then that's okay.

Riley voiced how they believed drinking alcohol was a risk factor; however, it does not indicate personal responsibility of the potential victim when they said,

Well, obviously cognitive impairment is a side effect of getting drunk. I think there are people who I can conceive of people who would never be raped while sober, but while drunk might let themselves go and not really consider the consequences and consider their actions. I think when people are drunk there's a propensity

between not really caring as much. Still, it does not make them responsible for being raped. They just lower their threshold for understanding what's happening.

Danica mentioned her answer was determined by her own personal views on what *individual responsibility* means in this item when she said,

So, I answered strongly disagree to this one. So, I don't see why it's exactly relevant again without, it seems pretty clear cut to me. Unless there's a situation of consent, it's never really-I mean it's never really a victim's fault. I don't know, that's just a typical strongly disagree statement. Okay. I would say I don't really see a situation where it would ever be their own fault.

Interestingly, Callie, Riley, and Danica challenged victim-blaming attitudes while still considering the incapacitation level of the victim. Rape myths suggest that there is a double standard and gender biases. Women are disproportionately subject to victim-blaming attitudes when they consume alcohol or engage in behaviors that society deems “risky.” The bias stems from ingrained gender roles and the wrongful perception that women should bear the responsibility for preventing sexual assault (Kearns et al. 2020). Participants who identified as women also wrestled with whether a victim is responsible for their own sexual assault. Under the consent item, *If an individual doesn't physically resist sex, even if protesting verbally, it can't really be considered rape*, Steph shared how she perceived consent and victim resistance when she said,

I answered strongly disagree. Let me think about that for a moment. Yep. So yeah, I mean some individuals don't feel comfortable resisting physically in any situation. It's a violent thing and sometimes to get to resist physically in a situation like that and during a rape to resist physically, that requires a lot of

force. And I think sometimes people are too caught up in me in their emotions to even be able to understand they do need to resist. So, I, I'd have to say it is rape still and I don't know. Okay. Saying no, but saying no. But not having your actions reflect that does not equate to it not being rape. Okay. These questions are kind of infuriating. It's, they're not supposed to blame anyone for what is going to happen to them if they're going to be raped.

Although Steph states that she strongly disagrees with someone being responsible for their own sexual assault because they did not physically resist the assault, she still had to contemplate the idea of power and control in the situation, the ability of someone to physically resist, and the ability of the victim to overcome their emotional responses mid-assault. Again, these respondents demonstrated that although students are aware that these rape myths are untrue, they continue to wrestle with the idea that victims are at fault due to their behavior or previous actions. These myths still can distort the reality of rape and contribute to the misguided justifications some people may offer regardless of gender identity.

In a quest for inclusive survey design and utilizing best practice, it was important to ensure the survey did not disadvantage groups and negatively impact already underserved populations. In effort to mitigate negative impacts, the gender identity demographic item listed *genderqueer, genderfluid, gender non-conforming, man, non-binary, women*, and a text box was provided for participants to answer, “I identify as...” if the options provided did not apply. All 13 survey participants reported the list was inclusive and expansive. Only one respondent had a comment other than a “yes” to the question, “Do you see yourself or those around you represented in this list?” Steph said, *I think it's [survey item] trying to ensure that everyone is included. Yeah. And there's not any form of discrimination.*

The demographic item listed *asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, heterosexual, pansexual, queer*, and once again, a text box was provided for participants to answer, “I identify as...” if the options provided did not apply. Several respondents shared their overall impressions of the sexual identity options suggesting they were inclusive and straightforward. Survey participants were asked whether the standalone item, “Do you identify as transgender” aided in inclusivity. Ten of the 13 reported items would support future respondent representation. Janae, who identified as a lesbian woman mentioned,

I thought it was fine, especially because maybe for the topic that it was on, I guess transgender people could have different experiences, too. So, it might be important to know if you're transgender or not taking a survey.

Jared, a cisgender man, agreed when he stated,

It might give people a chance who don't see themselves on there to be able to state whatever they are. They can just identify as they see themselves.

And Devon, a cisgender man said,

I thought it was fine, especially because maybe for the topic that it was on, I guess transgender people could have different experiences too. So, it might be important to know if you're transgender or not taking a survey.

Contrary to the above comments, Briggs, a cisgender man did not perceive the item as relevant.

He stated,

I think it's not relevant because people can just pick from the above [gender identity] section.

Jared, also a cisgender man, had a similar response when he said,

This isn't needed. I feel it's all covered. Like because a heterosexual or straight, it should be included with those [sexual identity items].

Not all transgender people may identify, for example, as a “Transgender Man” they may just identify as a “Man.” This is why Gender Identity questions are often paired with “Do you identify as transgender.” It is evident these participants viewed gender identity, sexual identity, and identifying as transgender as analogous identities. The ways these identities are talked about in popular culture, academia, and science are constantly changing. Perhaps as participant awareness, knowledge, and openness to the nuances and complexities of these various identities and their experiences with the concepts of sexuality, gender, and transgender people grow, their understanding of the distinctions of each will also expand.

Study participants were also asked to share their impressions of the item, *How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic identity?* Abraham, reported the standalone item asking participants to describe their ethnicity or ethnic identity should be included with the racial identity demographics when he said,

It's [ethnic identity item] is not important. People can just speak from the above [racial identity item].

Conversely, Janae stated the importance of including the item when she mentioned,

I think it's trying to ensure that each and every ethnicity is included and that none is left out. Yeah. And there's not any form of discrimination. That's important.

Dylan also noted,

I think ethnicity is more of who you are, the first one. And then race is more of your group identity. They should be separate.

Like the transgender standalone item, Abraham, Janae, and Dylan were not able to distinguish the difference between race and ethnicity. Whereas race refers to dividing people into groups, often based on physical characteristics, ethnicity refers to the cultural expression and identification of people of different geographic regions, including their customs, history, language, and religion. Again, it may be that once exposed to more information about the differences, participants would be able to determine the differences between the two categorical survey items.

Because of the research about prior experiences with sexual assault and rape myth acceptance (Archer, 2019; Carmody & Washington, 2001; Rich et al., 2021), one item on the survey was added to capture the numerous ways in which respondents have been exposed to sexual assault situations. Aligning with previous research indicating that many sexual assault victims have experienced more than one type of sexual assault (Planty et al., 2013; Reich et al., 2022), it is important to note that all 13 participants indicated they had experienced at least one or more of the 14 types of sexual assault listed on the survey (see Table 1).

Item Options	Percent	N
<i>Been stalked, followed, or received unwanted messages, text, emails, etc. from someone that made me uncomfortable</i>	76.9%	1
<i>Been in a relationship that was controlling or abusive (physically, sexually, psychologically, emotionally, or financially)</i>	61.5%	8
<i>Been sent sexual messages or pictures that I did not want (including porn)</i>	61.5%	8
<i>Been asked or pressured for a date, hook up, or sexual favors even though I had already said no</i>	53.8%	7
<i>Been touched sexually (breasts, buttocks, or genitals) when I did not want them to</i>	46.1%	6
<i>Had someone expose themselves to me (breast, buttocks, or genitals) when I did not want them to</i>	53.8%	7
<i>Had someone say sexual things to me that I did not want to hear (catcalling, verbal harassment)</i>	69.2%	9
<i>Had someone say sexual gestures or imitated sexual motions when I did not want them to</i>	61.5%	8
<i>Been physically forced to have sex (intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, or penetration with an object) against my will</i>	15.3%	2
<i>Someone had sex with me against my will when I was physically unable to consent to sex (e.g., passed out, unconscious, or not physically able to respond) because someone had slipped me drugs or alcohol</i>	*	*
<i>I was unable to consent to sex because I took drugs or alcohol voluntarily</i>	23.0%	4
<i>Somehow escaped a situation where I was in the process of being physically forced to have sex</i>	30.7%	4
<i>I have not experienced any of these</i>	7.0%	1

Table 1: Survey Item: Have you experienced any of the following?

Overall, participant comments included whether items should be either added or deleted. Some participants reported the emotional impact these items may have on future survey respondents. For example, Danica, a transgender woman disclosed,

This was kind of triggering. Others might be really triggered by that information because it's kind of like they could be reliving in experience.

Although Danica was concerned about the item's propensity to cause emotional distress, she and the other 12 participants reported they viewed list inclusive and expansive. After reading the list to check for understanding, Lily, a cisgender woman, suggested a viable option when she commented,

Maybe something I'd add, I guess, is being forced to have sex, not because someone threatened to harm you, but threatened to harm somebody else that you know or don't know.

Priming the demographic response items using inclusive pronouns, gender identities, sexual identities, and leaving space for free responses aided in respondents to think about their intersecting identities in a more nuanced way. Overall, respondents overwhelmingly reported that specifically employing the variations of gender identity and sexual identity in the survey were inclusive and expansive. Priming each item using inclusive language made gender and sexual identities salient to respondents, influencing their attention and focus. By activating specific thoughts and focus on all-encompassing gender identity and sexual identity in rape myth acceptance, respondents were able to consider multiple viewpoints which can aid in capturing a broader range of responses and improve the survey's validity.

Discussion and Implications

One aim of this study was to use the results of the analysis as evidence to guide decisions about keeping, deleting, or modifying items of the Gender-Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (GIIRMAS). The newly revised instrument will be developed because of these interviews utilizing this thorough review and analysis of the cognitive interview data. The review summarized respondents' comprehension of items and developed categories of item problems. The analysis provided evidence of the extent to which respondents had shared interpretations of items that also were consistent with the conceptual framework underlying the GIIRMAS and revealed potentially problematic aspects of items that merited further consideration. Both the review and analysis furthered instrument development. The strategies used were built upon previously developed research which addressed the criticism that analysis of cognitive interview data is the least developed aspect of this otherwise promising approach to instrument development (Drennan, 2003). The efforts parallel those of Grant and Davis (1997), Knafl et al. (2007), and Garcia (2011) to systematize the use of content experts in instrument development. They not only developed guidelines for the systematic analysis of input from theoretical and clinical experts, but also noted that "instrument review by a sample of participants drawn from the target population is another vital component of content validation" (p. 273).

The analytic techniques described here contribute to informed decision-making during the early phases of instrument development. The analysis also adds to a fuller understanding of the meaning of diverse input and ways that various sources of input informed instrument development. Broad categories of problems with questionnaire items are addressed in the literature on cognitive interviewing (Collins, 2003; Drennan, 2003; Willis et al., 1991). Typically, problems related to respondents' comprehension of an item are distinguished from

problems related to respondents' ability to retrieve information from memory and willingness to provide information. The use of cognitive interviewing and subsequent analysis focused on problems of comprehension. The primary intent was to assess whether participants understood the items and offered similar interpretations. Limited threats to comprehension, lack of clarity regarding reference and perspective were identified.

All items were reported as comprehensible and consistently interpreted across participants; however, it is important to note that although the 13 respondents represented a stratified sample among race, religion, and ethnicity, 92.2% identified as cisgender men and women. Items were retained with only a few adaptations to aid in question clarity and flow. The changes made were also based on input from clinical and theoretical experts in the field. In total, it is recommended that 11 items be revised based on the analysis of the cognitive interview data. Although these changes might seem slight, they reflect the larger, critical issue of making items relevant to students. Although the methods described to complete a thorough review of the cognitive interview data were used, not every piece of participant input and advice resulted in a modification to the GIIRMAS. In some cases, participants gave conflicting input, and the analytic strategies used facilitated considering the weight of evidence for varying points of view. Hence, all demographic items were retained as written despite two participants' observations that the items did not list all feasible options for college affiliated groups/organizations. Fill-in text boxes were provided in the initial items and will remain in the updated measure so future participants can add their unique information.

Updating the GIIRMAS

All 19 items on the GIIRMAS were reviewed to determine their match with the findings from the participants, previous research, and practice experience with students. With a specific

focus on sex and gender inclusion in articulating sexual assault and victim blaming attitudes, all four subscales were analyzed: *They Asked for It*, *It Wasn't Really Rape*, *Didn't Mean To*, and *They Lied*. These four subscales comprised a total of 19 items, and these items all related to the covert, subtle rape myths that blame the victim for her assault or excuse the perpetrator. The subscale *They Asked for It* reflects the belief that the victim's behaviors invited sexual assault. Examples of questions from the GIIRMAS for this category are the following: "If an individual is raped while they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control" and "When an individual goes to parties wearing revealing clothing, they are asking for trouble." The subscale *It Wasn't Really Rape* consists of items that deny that an assault occurred due to either blaming the victim or excusing the perpetrator. For example, two of the statements from this subscale are "If the rapist doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it a rape" and "If an individual doesn't say 'no,' they can't claim rape." The third subscale, *They Didn't Mean To*, reflects the belief that the perpetrator did not intend to rape, with items such as "When an individual rapes, it is because of their strong desire for sex" and "Individuals don't usually intend to force sex onto others, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away." The fourth rape myth subscale, *They Lied*, consists of items that indicate the belief that the victim fabricated the rape. Examples of items from this subscale are "A lot of times, individuals who say they were raped often led the other person on and then had regrets." and "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at someone."

Throughout the study, participants demonstrated general comprehension of and the ability to interpret most of the survey items. However, one item stood out as needing simplification or clarification: *A lot of times, individuals who claim they were raped just have emotional problems*. For this question, an improvement can be made by rewording the item using

more intentional language. To use inclusive language throughout the items, the researcher noted that respondents interchanged the term “Individual” with “someone” in their responses. Because pronouns are typically used as shorthand words to refer to someone without explicitly using their name, the term “individual” will be replaced with “someone” in each item to stay in line with the survey’s intent of using gender-inclusive pronouns throughout. Overall, a few revisions are needed moving forward. The following 11 of the 19 GIIRMAS items within each subscale were edited. The noun “individual” was substituted with the pronoun “someone” which was used interchangeably by all research participants:

- 1) If someone is raped while they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control,*
- 2) When someone goes to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble,*
- 3) If someone goes to a room alone with another person at a party, it is their own fault if they are raped,*
- 4) If someone "hooks up" with a lot of people, eventually they are going to get into trouble,*
- 5) When someone rapes, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex,*
- 6) Rape happens when someone's sex drive gets out of control,*
- 7) It shouldn't be considered rape if and someone is drunk and didn't realize what they were doing,*
- 8) If someone doesn't physically resist sex-even if they protest verbally- it can't really be considered rape,*
- 9) If someone doesn't say "no", they can't claim rape, and*

10) A lot of times, someone who says they were raped agreed to have sex and then regrets it afterward.

Finally, the item, 11) *A lot of times, individuals who claim they were raped just have emotional problems* was edited to *A lot of times, people who claim they were raped just do so because they have emotional problems* to assuage item confusion of whether the scenario victim claimed rape due to emotional problems or is having emotional problems because of the rape. Because all 13 participants indicated that they saw themselves and others represented in each of the eight demographic items, it is recommended that no demographic items be changed because of this study.

Sandelowski (1998) discussed the role of experts in qualitative research, noting that it is the responsibility of the researcher to interpret diverse sources of expert input and decide how each will contribute to the project. It was advantageous to have multiple source interpretations by inviting distinct kinds of experts in the development of the adapted GIIRMAS. Feedback from clinicians and researchers familiar with the theoretical underpinnings of the adapted GIIRMAS helped assure the conceptual integrity of the newly created measure, whereas participants' comments provided a check on the clarity and appropriateness of items. The goal of this research was to weigh the input from these different expert sources when decisions regarding the retention, deletion, or revision of items were made.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

To capture the beliefs and attitudes about rape myths, it is necessary to educate ourselves about, respect and acknowledge the identities of our students and people in our communities. To counter rape culture and decrease sexual assault, many colleges sexual assault prevention programs focus on reducing rape myth acceptance (RMA). To best assess outcomes of such

prevention efforts, we must ensure we are accurately measuring this construct. Current RMA scales are decades old and focus exclusively on cisgender, white women. The primary intent of this study was to evaluate the GIIRMAS' use of inclusive pronouns to capture college student's intersecting identities. Although the cognitive interviews suggest the GIIRMAS was considered inclusive by respondents, it's important to note that this study oversampled cis-gender (76%) men (38%) and women (62%) and only one participant identified as transgender, one identified as gay, and one identified as lesbian which may represent response bias. Because convenience sampling was used, the survey sample included only undergraduate college students in the United States who had access to social media and Zoom. They were required to complete a screening form, survey, and 30-minute to one hour interview with participants. Potential SGM participants may not have been reached in recruitment efforts or could have been deterred from participating due to the three-step process. Naturally, SGM college students are more invested in topics affecting their own community and are therefore more likely to participate. This response bias may have affected perceived inclusion among survey and demographic items as well as qualitative responses provided. Also noted was the oversample for participants who have experienced at least one form of sexual assault. This may be due to the sample's personal stake in the topic due to survivorship. It can be extremely difficult for survivors to come forward and share their story. They may feel ashamed, concerned that they won't be believed, or worried they'll be blamed. Survivors may also blame themselves, especially if they know the perpetrator personally. Participants in this study may have considered this an opportunity to safely share their experiences and discuss the myths surrounding their own sexual assault. It is important to note that cognitive framing theory has its critics, and the effects of framing can be complex and context dependent. Factors such as individual differences, cultural norms, and prior beliefs can

interact with framing effects. Nonetheless, cognitive framing theory provided valuable insights into the role of rape myth in shaping participants' cognition, and decision-making processes.

Strengths of the study included stratified samples of racial identity, ethnicity, and religious viewpoints. Also, the study uncovered respondents' implicit bias. When presented with scenarios using “they/them” pronouns, 9 of the 13 respondents reported assigning a binary gender to the perpetrator and victim as was hypothesized by Schulz et al. (2017). In cases where the gender of the perpetrator or victim is unknown, respondents demonstrating using “they/them” pronouns allowed for more inclusive and accurate language. Respecting an individual’s self-identified pronouns is crucial and should be prioritized when discussing specific cases or engaging with individuals directly. Additionally, using “they/them” pronouns is just one aspect of fostering a broader culture of consent, respect, and support for survivors of sexual assault. Although these respondents may assume rape involves a male perpetrator and a female victim, the reported the inclusive language allowed for those with diverse gender identities, sexual identities, and all victims of sexual violence to see themselves in the scale, which may increase feelings of inclusion and participation. With increasing acceptance and visibility of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, efforts to dismantle systemic barriers to the advancement of this community have become increasingly important. Future studies could include sampling undergraduate students who identify as a SGM exclusively to account for more diverse perspectives. Although the creators of the GIIRMAS (Johnson et al., 2021) sampled for primarily SGM-identifying respondents, it would be beneficial to utilize the cognitive interviewing process with a larger, more sexually and gender diverse sample to determine understanding and interpretation of the survey items.

Future research using larger, more diverse samples is needed to replicate and assure the generalizability of these findings. Moreover, given regional, racial, ethnic, and gender differences in behavior, a design stratifying on these demographics characteristics, in addition to age and employment status, could be used to ensure adequate participant recruitment and reach. Information from this study will be used to further adapt Johnson et al 's (2021) GIIRMAS to better reflect the current language used by the population of undergraduate college students. Providing multi-positionality options on survey items may help to determine what may be impeding current campus sexual violence prevention efforts (Yule et al., 2020). Further, this information could not only afford institutions the opportunity to better understand student attitudes about sexual violence and the ways power is possessed by individuals of particular social identities but assist them in making informed decisions when it comes to providing a safe educational environment for all students. Higher education institutions could use the findings from such comprehensive analyses to identify and address specific factors that are found to strongly influence rates of sexual assault. They could use the data to enact more effective policies, training, and best practices prompting administrators to tailor outreach, prevention efforts, reporting mechanisms, and security based on what characteristics or contextual factors lead to increased incidence. These findings could encourage future studies to question not only what drives sexual assault on college campuses, but what collection of characteristics influence sexual assault rates and why they do. Finally, the results from this study could assist in education, awareness, and bystander programs that target sex and rape, including sensitive issues that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, and gender queer students face such as concerns about their sexuality, sexual orientation, stigma, any physical response following an act

of sexual violence (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Linder, 2018; Melanson, 1998; Ovenden, 2019; Rosenstein & Carroll, 2015; Scarce, 1997).

It is important to understand that sexual assault can happen to anyone, regardless of gender; men, transgender individuals, and non-binary people can also experience sexual assault. Shifting societal narratives, promoting inclusive conversations, and raising awareness about the experiences of all survivors can help debunk the myth that sexual assault is solely a women's issue. Creating a supportive environment for all survivors and fostering a culture of consent and respect is essential in addressing and preventing sexual violence in its entirety.

ARTICLE 3 - PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF A SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY-INCLUSIVE RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE SCALE

Introduction

Rape myths exist for several historical and cultural reasons, including gender role expectations, acceptance of violence and misinformation about sexual assault, and a reason many rape victims are shamed into remaining silent (Ahrens, 2016; Cook, 1995; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Discussions of sexual assault repeatedly include the concept of rape myths. Rape myths, which often reflect the gendered realities of sexual assault, gained attention in the 1970s by researchers, sociologists, feminists, and in the public (Burt, 1980; Brownmiller, 1975; Edwards et al., 2011; Feild, 1978; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1974). For decades, researchers have attempted to identify and define beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, and assumptions that influence how society conceptualizes rape. Burt (1980) defined rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217). To clarify Burt’s (1980) nongendered definition, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) redefined rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Well-established literature has determined how rape myths function (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) and factors that may predict rape myth adherence or sexual violence (Barnett et al., 2018; Loh et al., 2005; Malamuth, 1981). Former studies have also determined how rape myths can perpetuate occurrences of sexual victimization (Brownmiller, 1975; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), and how rape myths are maintained by society at the institutional level (Edwards et al., 2011; Hayes et al., 2013). Although researchers and activists have made advances in understanding rape myth acceptance and increasing awareness, the focus has only recently begun

to explore how rape myth acceptance across different subpopulations extend beyond the heteronormative gender binary (Johnson et al., 2021; Canan et al., 2022).

Rape myths function to maintain victimization and pathology (Donat & d’Emilio, 1992; Woods et al., 2022). The purpose of rape myths typically focuses on excusing the perpetrator while punishing the victim. Routinely, a victim’s credibility is the focal point of court cases because an outside party (e.g., juror) must decide if sexual intercourse was consensual or non-consensual. A victim’s trustworthiness is appraised by scrutinizing their past and present behavior; consequently, rape myths affect a juror’s perception (Ellison & Monroe, 2009; Golding et al., 2016; Temkin & Krahe, 2008). Additionally, if a victim is not physically injured by a stranger who uses a weapon with lots of resistance to the victim, then their allegation is typically viewed as less credible (Burt, 1998; Estrich, 2018; Lonsway et al., 2009). Rape myths also serve to minimize perpetrator blame and promote victim blame. Historically, researchers have found that stronger belief in rape myths leads to a greater likelihood of victim blaming (Ayala et al., 2018; Ryan, 2019; Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). The endorsement of rape myths creates negative consequences for both the victim and the larger society (Bohner et al., 2013; Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). The acceptance of rape myths distorts society’s view of the “typical” rape victim creating a dichotomy between how people think victims should act versus how an individual does respond. This prepossessed view of the “perfect” victim, which is influenced by Western society’s beliefs about traditional gender roles (Randall, 2010), can affect a judge’s ruling on sexual assault cases (Bumby, 1999; Beichner & Spohn, 2005; Green & Ellis, 2007; Salter, 2013).

Current research shows that one in five women, one in sixteen men, and one in four undergraduate students, identifying as transgender, gender non-conforming, or questioning, experience sexual and partner violence while in college (ACHA, 2019; CDC, 2022). A multitude

of research exists documenting the persistent rates of sexual assault victimization among college students. Whereas much of this research compares victimization rates between male and female college students, contemporary research has just now begun to compare victimization rates between sexual-gender-minority and heterosexual college students. The studies that do exist indicate that Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM⁴) individuals are at an increased risk of sexual violence compared to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts (CDC, 2022; RAIIN, 2022; Messinger & Koon-Magnin, 2017). A current study found that among cisgender people, gays/lesbians had higher odds of sexual assault than heterosexual men, but not for heterosexual women. People unsure of their sexual identity had higher odds of sexual assault than heterosexual men and women and bisexuals had higher odds of sexual assault than heterosexuals (Coulter, et al., 2017).

Compared to other age groups, college aged individuals (between 18 to 24 years of age) are more vulnerable to victimization (Baum & Klaus, 2005; Hart, 2003). Research shows 20% to 25% of college women will experience coerced sexual contact or unwanted intercourse while in college (Fedina et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2000; Franklin, 2010). Moreover, 33% of college women have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and between 30% and 60% of women have reported sexual harassment (Pina et al., 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). These experiences have produced an array of negative mental health consequences and adverse physical outcomes, including elevated startle responses, internalizing disorders, sleep

⁴ Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM)- is a comprehensive term that refers to individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or who are attracted to or have sexual contact with people of the same gender and/or whose gender identity (man, women, other) or expression (masculine, feminine, other) is different from their sex (male, female) assigned at birth (USDHHS, nd.).

disruptions, appetite abnormalities, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Brener et al., 1999; Goodkind et al., 2003). Survivors' career trajectories have also been negatively affected from difficulty concentrating, reduced academic performance, and university attrition (Huerta et al., 2006).

Recent highly publicized sexual assault events on college campuses raise questions about what constitutes rape, victim blaming, the issue of perpetrator accountability, and best practices used to reduce the occurrence of sexual assault. Therefore, the American College Health Association (2011) issued a call for colleges and universities to identify and implement sexual violence prevention strategies to reduce campus violence and foster campus environments of respect and safety. Developing and understanding of sexual violence on campus has evolved over the last three decades and has been conceptualized as a criminal justice issue, a public health problem, and a form of violence that is the direct result of patriarchal subjugation of women and people of other marginalized genders (Fisher, Daigle & Cullen, 2009). Because a social-ecological understanding of sexual violence occurrence and prevention that locates the causes of sexual violence is now at the forefront of sexual violence prevention efforts, the CDC (2014) recommends approaching violence in a systemic way.

Gender and Victim Blaming

Historically, researchers have examined variables contributing to increased victim blaming including demographic information related to the victim and the perpetrator concluding that gender is a crucial factor (Gravalin & Biernot, 2019; Pedersen & Strömwall, 2013; Russell & Hand, 2017). Gender roles vary across time and location. Western society's gender roles reflect the theme of patriarchy. Patriarchy relates to the power of men over women leading to the subjection and victimization of women. A concept of social script theory assumes individuals

follow internalized scripts influencing how an individual thinks, feels, and responds to certain environments (Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2019; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Wiederman, 2005). For example, Wienclaw (2011) suggests that in Western culture, these traditional gender roles translate into sexuality such as, gender roles are biologically based. Masculine gender roles promote dominance, independence, and freedom while feminine gender roles focus on control, restraint, and meekness. Physiologically, it is females who must gestate and bear the young of the species. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is the female who must take care of the child after it is born, as is demonstrated by stay-at-home fathers who nurture the child while the mother returns to work in a reversal of traditional typical Western gender roles (Wiederman, 2005; Wienclaw, 2011).

Although gender has a biological foundation in the physiological differences between females and males, the way that gender is interpreted differs from culture to culture. For instance, expectations about a person's sex and sexuality vary according to their gender. Because cisgender women may become pregnant, they typically received more parental communication regarding sex during their formative years than cisgender men. These messages inadvertently insinuate girls and women are the "sexual gatekeepers" in the relationship (Wiederman, 2005, p. 497). While men are typically viewed as the conqueror when having sex with a new partner, women are viewed as having loose morals; therefore, social scripts, specifically gendered scripts, influence an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors around their own sexual experiences and the sexual experiences of others (Crane & Crane-Seeber, 2003; Coltrane & Adams, 2008; Masters et al., 2013; Rutter & Schwartz, 2011). Unsympathetic social reactions to sexual violence inherently related to rape myths (such as victim blaming) are crucial to consider. Previous studies demonstrated that negative social reactions to disclosure of sexual violence

were related to worse functioning of rape victims, such as them experiencing more depressive and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Orchowski et al. 2013; Relyea and Ullman, 2015; Ullman et al., 2006).

Gender roles have traditionally been represented dichotomously as male and female (Carter, 2014; Levounis, 2012). Although identifying as a Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM) can happen at any point during a person's development, a SGM identity may not be fully accepted until long after a same-sex sexual attraction or gender incongruence is first recognized (Drescher, 2012). Because much of the world is not a friendly place for SGM people, it may be traumatic to discover that one might be SGM and therefore seen as deviant or sinful—or even engaging in unlawful activity. Early in development, SGM people have often been taught throughout life that what they do sexually is “unnatural,” and this can have a lasting effect on their self-esteem (Drescher et al., 2016). When SGM people look for models of how to behave sexually with a partner, they have no guidance from families and the wider world. They may take what they know about the cisgender, heterosexual world and apply it to themselves, leading to self-judgment and sexual dysfunction. From the perspective of understanding masculine and feminine, male, and female, dominant and submissive, as social constructs, these terms may become less meaningful to the general population as time progresses (Levounis, 2012).

Most sexual assaults and rapes are perpetrated by cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) men against women (Coulter et al., 2017; Planty et al., 2013). As a result, most published research on sexual assault and victim blaming involves this pairing. Previous literature investigated the influence of respondent characteristics on victim blaming. One variable extensively studied is the influence of a respondent's gender on their perception of rape victims. Walfield (2018) found the respondent's gender contributes to their degree of acceptance of rape myths. Several researchers

found men are more accepting of rape myths than women (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Chapleau & Oswald, 2008; Davies et al., 2012; Reitz-Krueger et al., 2017). Additionally, prior studies found a higher rape myth acceptance correlates with more responsibility on the victim while minimizing the perpetrator's role (Edwards et al., 2011; Grub & Turner, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Researchers also found differences in how respondents view sexually aggressive behavior (e.g., rape). Several factors, including characteristics of the victim, the perpetrator, the sexual assault, and person assigning the blame (e.g., the study participant) have been linked to victim blaming. For instance, research with samples of heterosexual individuals has found that male participants consistently blame sexual assault victims more and perpetrators less than female participants (Dyer et al., 2021; Hocket et al., 2016).

Situational factors also influence victim blaming, including the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the type of sexual assault. Victims who are assaulted by a stranger are blamed less than those who are assaulted by an acquaintance (Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014), and victims who had been drinking prior to the sexual assault are blamed more than those who had not been drinking (Grubb & Turner, 2012). In addition, victims are blamed less for sexual assaults involving physical force than those involving alcohol intoxication, with victim blaming being highest for verbally coerced sexual assault (Russell et al., 2011). Women are less likely than men to condone sexually aggressive behavior and were more likely to label an aggressive sexual act as rape in comparison to men (Langley et al., 1991). Subsequently, researchers examined the perception of "seriousness" of rape amongst men and women where women were found to view rape as a more serious crime than men (Barnett et al., 1992). Lastly, prior studies found correlations between gender and blame attributed toward rape victims (Sleath & Bull, 2010; Morrison & Pederson, 2020; Wakelin & Long, 2003). Findings suggest significant

differences between men and women's perception of the role of the victim. Women tend to identify more with victim which promotes more sympathy and empathy toward the rape victim (Bongiorno, 2020; Davies et al., 2006). Additionally, women are more likely to consider the psychological impact on the victim after experiencing sexual assault. Conversely, men endorse more negative attitudes toward rape victims while attributing less blame toward the perpetrator (Davies et al., 2006).

Views of gender and sex are changing, both among experts and the general public (Hyde et al., 2019; Schudson, Beischel, & van Anders, 2019). Gender and sex have become more fluid, as reflected in societal changes such as the growing visibility of, and support for, transgender and nonbinary individuals (Gahagan & Colpitts, 2017; Ruben et al., 2020), discussion and implementation of gender-inclusive language (e.g., gender-neutral pronouns such as “ze” and “they;” Boylan, 2018; Morgenroth et al., 2021), and related changes to policy and practice (Jordan et al., 2021). However, due to the bifurcated, heteronormative focus on sexual assault and victim blaming, scholarship and societal efforts to address sexual violence are severely lacking in their consideration of SGM-identified individuals (Girshick, 2002; Menning & Holtzman, 2014; Messenger & Koon-Magnin, 2017). This is even though research repeatedly concludes that GSM people are at an elevated risk of sexual violence victimization (Coulter et al., 2017; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Chen et al., 2020). The invisibility of SGM persons within the public discourse on sexual violence exacerbates this issue. SGM sexual assault survivors too often face a minefield of risks when seeking help: from service providers turning them away, to having their experiences and identities devalued, to being outed, victim blaming, and psychological distress (Girshick, 2002; Messinger, 2017; Weiss, 2017). It makes sense that rape myth acceptance and victim blaming among the SGM population is warranted.

History of Rape Myth Measurement

Rape myths, first recognized in the 1970s, were originally defined as cultural beliefs that supported sexual violence against women (Brownmiller, 1976; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1975). In 1980, Burt further defined rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217) and noted that these myths are common not only among the public but also among those who work with victims daily. These beliefs may affect how individuals interact with victims, in terms of whether they see the victim as believable or even blameworthy in their own victimization. Influenced by an increase of feminist literature and victimization focus during the 1970s, Martha R. Burt introduced the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA, or RMAS) in 1980. The scale was the first and most widely used and most validated method for measuring individual's level of belief in rape myths (Payne et al., 1999).

Using Burt's (1980) method, rape myth acceptance is measured by asking subjects 19 questions. The first 10 questions each consist of a statement which suggests that rape victims are responsible for their own rape, and ask the subject to assess its truthfulness, rating each statement on a seven-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The 11th statement tests for the inverse of this idea, asking whether it is true that any woman can be raped. The remaining questions ask test subjects to guess the proportion of reported rapes that are false and assess whether they are more or less likely to believe a rape victim based on the victim's personal characteristics (for example, their gender, their race or ethnicity, their age, or their relationship to the test subject). Burt's (1980) original study concluded that many survey respondents believed in rape myths. More than half of the individuals sampled in Burt's (1980) original survey had agreed that "a woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man" on the first date "implies she is willing to have sex," and that in most rapes "the victim was promiscuous or had a bad

reputation." More than half of the respondents had suggested 50% or more of reported rapes were reported "only because the woman was trying to get back at a man" or "trying to cover up an illegitimate pregnancy" (Burt 1980, p. 222).

Based on concerns about the limited significant relationships produced using Burt's (1980) RMA scale, Payne et al. (1999) re-conceptualized the measurement of RMA, creating the 45-item Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA) Scale. Payne et al. (1999) suggested that rape myth acceptance is most adequately conceptualized as consisting of both a general component and seven distinct myth components: *She asked for it*; *It wasn't really rape*; *He didn't mean to*; *She really wanted it*; *She lied*; *Rape is a trivial event*; and *Rape is a deviant event*. Focusing on the addition of structural questions and seven subscales, an original goal of the IRMA was to add items capturing the idea that rape myths "serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression towards women" (Payne et al., 1999, p. 30) and that women falsely claim rape under certain circumstances. Subscales were included under the hypothesis that individual experiences, such as sexual assault victimization, may decrease acceptance of some rape myths, while raising acceptance of others, therefore creating a null effect when all items are combined into one scale, as in the case of Burt's (1980) RMA. The development of the IRMA helped to improve item wording, content validity, and criterion-related validity in measuring rape myth acceptance, which previous scales had not yet successfully and consistently achieved (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Payne et al., 1999). The IRMA-SF, the 20-item short-form complement to the IRMA, was introduced to assess only general rape myth acceptance, not any of the seven IRMA sub-scales specifically (Payne et al, 1999).

Rape Myth Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Minority Populations

To date, there is little research on the conceptual factors underlying the acceptance of prejudicial and false beliefs about the rape of SGM persons or the specific attitudes that might predict them. In their 2005 study, Kassing et al. examined the relationship of homophobia and gender role conflict to male rape myth acceptance. They found a strong relationship between male rape myth acceptance and negative attitudes toward gay men. This is consistent with previous literature in which negative attributions toward male rape victims, such as victim blame, relate to both homophobic attitudes (Bur & DeMello, 2002; Davies, 2002) and the particularly negative evaluation of gay victims of male rape (Davies et al., 2001). In a later study, Davies et al. (2012) examined the relationship between male rape myth acceptance, female rape myth acceptance, attitudes toward gay men, a series of gender role and sexism measures, victim blame and assault severity. It was predicted that men would display more negative, stereotypical attitudes than women and that male rape myth endorsement would be related to, and predicted by, the other attitude and attribution scales. Results broadly conformed to predictions, with men more negative than women, and male rape myth acceptance significantly related to female rape myth acceptance, negative attitudes about gay men, gender role attitudes, and victim blame (Davies et al., 2012). Furthermore, male rape myth acceptance was predicted by female rape myth acceptance, gender attitudes, and victim blame (Davies et al., 2012).

Shulze and Koon-Magnin (2017) were among the first to examine the relationship between sexual orientation and rape myth adherence using a nationwide survey of primarily lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer respondents ($n = 184$). They utilized the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and a modified Male Rape Survey as their primary instruments to test both rape myth adherence and instrument-appropriateness. Results suggest that respondents were

most likely to support myths that discredit sexual assault allegations or excuse rape as a biological imperative and least likely to support myths related to physical resistance. Consistent with previous studies, men exhibited higher levels of rape myth adherence than women. Regarding sexual orientation, respondents who identified as queer consistently exhibited lower levels of rape myth adherence than respondents who identified as gay (Shulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017).

Sex and Gender Identifiers and Intersecting Identities

Historically, a concern of surveys has been the accuracy of information obtained by simply asking a sample (survey respondents) to serve as a fundamental part of measurement and then using the information provided to produce estimates that extend to the population at large (Baldwin, 2000; Stone et al., 1999). Researchers have determined that even slight wording changes can have major effects on aggregate data distributions (Bradburn & Sudman, 1991; Schuman & Presser, 1981; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). The crucial information gathered through rape myth acceptance measures illustrates the importance of regularly updating and expanding measurement. However, even the most updated measures continue to examine rape related assumptions that exist within a heteronormative, gender-binary context. This limitation is particularly critical given recent findings that SGM individuals are at increased risk for sexual violence (Chen et al., 2020; James et al., 2016; Walters et al., 2013). As a result, researchers have begun considering whether and how to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people in research about rape myth acceptance. Preliminary studies suggest that even though individuals who identify as gender-sexual minorities are more likely to experience the most severe forms of adolescent/adult sexual victimization (Anderson et al., 2017), are more likely to be acknowledged survivors (i.e., conceptualized their experience as rape) than those

who identified as heterosexual, and ostensibly reject rape myths (Wilson & Newins, 2019), little research has been dedicated to demonstrating these findings.

The Illinois-Rape Myth Acceptance-Short Form (IRMA-SF) is a widely used scale measuring people's endorsement of rape myths, however, it uses heavily gendered wording and makes gender-based assumptions that may affect its generalizability to various subgroups of people, including sexual and gender minorities who may view gender constructs outside of the heteronormative gender binary (Walfield, 2021). In a current study, Schulze, Koon-Magnin, and Bryan (2019) addressed the importance of identity inclusion in rape myth acceptance measurement with the Identity Inclusive Sexual Assault Myth Scale (IISAMS). The IISAMS was developed as a revised version of the IRMAS (Payne et al., 1999) including gender inclusive language (e.g., "people" instead of "girls" or "guys") and gender reversed language (e.g., updating "If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble" to "If a guy acts like a man whore, eventually he is going to get into trouble," p. 114), the original IRMAS, the original MRMS, and a revised MRMS (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Once the IISAMS was created, Schulze et al. (2019) conducted a study utilizing the IISAMS with undergraduate university students. When comparing the results with gender inclusive and gender reversed language, the researchers found similar rates of endorsement for the gender-inclusive/reversed and the original IRMAS questions.

Schulze et al. (2019) postulated that participants' responses were similar because they interpreted the gender-inclusive questions from a gendered lens, assuming a male perpetrator and female victim even when the gender was not specified. It is important to note that this finding may have been influenced by the participants receiving both the original IRMAS (that included gendered items) and the gender modified version. Additionally, most (at least 72.6%) study

participants were not members of the SGM community which may have influenced the results given the higher rates of rape myth endorsement among heterosexual individuals (Davies & McCartney, 2003). Additionally, the authors edited items of the original IRMAS (Payne et al., 1999) as opposed to the modified IRMAS (McMahon & Farmer, 2011), which has updated language which might have impacted the results. Whereas it is important to identify whether participants interpret gender-inclusive items from a gendered lens, the findings do not nullify the need for a gender inclusive scale, which can allow for more flexibility and representation when attempting to understand rape myths.

Johnson, Lipp, and Stone (2021) followed up Schulze and colleagues work to expand the current measurement allowing for a representative measure of rape myth acceptance for SGM, heterosexual, and cisgender communities alike. To achieve this goal, the researchers altered the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS) to remove gendered language (e.g., he or she) and replaced with gender-inclusive language (e.g., they). Confirmatory factor analysis showed stability of factor structure with five separate factors: *Victim asked for it*, *Didn't mean to*, *Didn't mean to*—specific to intoxication, *It was not really rape*, and *Victim lied*, underlying the overall latent factor. Further analysis supported measurement invariance of the gender inclusive IRMAS across SGM membership. Their gender inclusive version of the modified IRMAS (GIIRMAS) demonstrated strong internal consistency, good model fit with 18-items loading on all five separate factors underlying the overall latent factor, rape myth acceptance, and measurement invariance across SGM membership (i.e., SGM, non-SGM) (Johnson et al., 2021).

Although Johnson and colleagues' (2021) study provides initial evidence for a gender-inclusive rape myth acceptance scale, the study utilized convenience sampling resulting in a sample of majority White, young adult (between 25 and 34 years old), and cisgender

participants. Also, given the historic oppression and underrepresentation of people of color within research (Crenshaw, 1991; Gurthrie, 2004) and the particular risk of sexual violence and murder among trans women of color (Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation, 2019; Human Rights Campaign, 2020; Wood et al., 2019), future research with a sample representative of people of diverse racial, ethnic, and gender identity, and of various age groups is warranted.

Most recently, Canan et al. (2022) conducted a study to assess the structure and psychometric properties of a gender inclusive modified form of the IRMA-SF. In their administration of the IRMA-SF, the researchers used gender inclusive terms in place of all gendered wording (e.g., “Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men” became “Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at someone”). They also used the singular *they* in lieu of *she* or *he* pronouns as are suggested by the current American Psychological Association Manual and other researchers that study rape myth acceptance among SGM communities (American Psychological Association, 2019; Johnson et al., 2021). The study included adult participants with a range of sexual orientations and gender identities and was part of a larger, two-phase study which assessed sexual assault and sexual orientation. The preliminary modified IRMA-SF (mIRMA-SF) was first reviewed by an expert panel ($n = 6$) of sexual health researchers and researchers with expertise in gender and sexual orientation. Panelists were both women and men who worked both in and outside of academia. After several rounds of revisions, the survey was then cognitively pre-tested for wording feedback and comprehensive answer options using a small focus group ($n = 5$) of SGM college students who identified as women, transgender, or genderqueer. After additional revisions, the survey was pilot tested ($n = 20$) with members of the general population. The pilot participants took the surveys privately and provided written feedback via email. Participants represented a range of

ages (23–68 years old), differing racial identities, several sexual orientation identities, politically liberal and conservative ideologies, and a range of educational and income levels. The survey was reviewed once again by the same panel of six sexual health researchers and revised accordingly after incorporating this additional feedback (Canan et al., 2022). Results indicated an acceptable absolute model fit according to the confirmatory factor analysis (RMSEA = .07, $p < .001$; SRMR = .06) but unsatisfactory incremental fit (CFI = .82). Canan et al. (2022) suggest that these model issues were due to a floor-effect of low item variability which may call into question the utility of this scale in determining differences in rape myth acceptance, overall.

Overwhelmingly, participants in this study rejected rape myths.

Researchers should explore the use of gender inclusive wording with an updated rape myth scale for use with sexual gender minorities and, the general population, as some of these statements may be lacking in cultural relevance (Canan et al., 2022). Previous research indicated that sexual minority individuals have lower levels of rape myth acceptance, although differences exist between sexual minority men and sexual minority women (Schulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017). Canan et al.'s (2022) findings were like Schulze and Koon-Magnin (2017) with heterosexuals and cisgender men having the highest rape myth acceptance compared with SGM and cisgender women. However, even these groups had low levels of rape myth acceptance—27.78 average (heterosexuals) and 25.36 average (cisgender men) on a 17–85-point scale. Due to the result, the authors considered alternative explanations: 1) The IRMA-SF items are now over two decades old, so societal attitudes may have shifted in recent years, resulting in less endorsement of certain rape myths and 2) respondents may have been driven by social desirability, suggesting how they should answer, even if they do endorse some form of rape myths.

In conclusion, providing gender inclusive terms may shift measurement items to be more single barreled, potentially removing unintended respondent confusion. For example, if a participant reads the scale item “If someone is raped while drunk, that person is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand” as opposed to “If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand,” research may find that people endorse rape myths including alcohol use and intoxication without having to consider gender as a confounding variable. This may be helpful in informing rape prevention programs regarding how alcohol use relates to perceived accountability (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). In addition, if a participant reads the scale item “If a person doesn’t say ‘no’ the person can’t claim rape” instead of “If a girl doesn’t say ‘no’ she can’t claim rape,” this may create an opportunity to acutely examine thoughts surrounding consent (Canan et al., 2022). Despite various limitations, all three studies reviewed amplify the need for inclusivity and representation for individuals who are especially vulnerable to victimization

Study Purpose and Significance

Historically, sexual assault has been regarded primarily as something men do to women; however, recent research has demonstrated that it is much more complex and multidimensional, requiring more than simplistic explanations (Caldwell et al., 2012). Multiple studies indicate that sexual and gender minority individuals are at an increased risk of sexual violence compared to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts (Messinger & Koon-Magnin, 2019). These disparities, which are evident across a variety of definitions of rape and sexual assault, have prompted researchers to further explore the dynamics, outcomes, and societal responses regarding sexual violence within the SGM communities. Furthermore, the existing literature is limited (particularly regarding transgender victims) but growing rapidly. Because of this, there is often

little to no acknowledgment or understanding of how ingrained and systemic sexist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, paired with intersection minority identities contribute to the overwhelming rates of sexual violence in their communities (Chapleau et al., 2007; Hong & Marine, 2018). Accounting for the complexities of gender and sexual identities and intersectionality is lacking. Supplementary exploration into the potential gender differences, or lack thereof, of rape myth acceptance is warranted and serves as a compelling reason to create a specialized and inclusive rape myth survey instrument to understand views of sexual assault within the SGM population.

Understanding the prevalence with which students, including sexual-minority college students, experience various forms of interpersonal victimization on campus could be useful in tailoring intervention and prevention efforts as well as guiding future research agendas specific to college students. Payne and colleagues (1999) suggested that the reliability and validity of measures "...depend on wording that is clear and uniformly understood by all respondents, yet this is often not the case with rape myth scales" (p. 7). Additionally, Schulze and Koon-Magnin (2017) suggest, "Given that sexual orientation is a strongly implied (and sometimes explicitly stated) component of many rape myths, failure to assess the role of sexual orientation in understanding rape myths is an important oversight" (p. 160). Despite this, the potential distinction for how subgroups such as the SGM community understand rape myths has not yet been addressed in Payne and colleagues' (1999) IRMA-SF measure, although it has been addressed in more subtle measures of rape myth acceptance (Johnson et al., 2021; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how the updated Sex and Gender Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance scale language affects the psychometric properties of the revised scale in diverse college student populations. The research questions are:

1. To what extent does the Sex and Gender Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance scale (SGI-RMA) accurately measure rape myth acceptance (the latent construct)?
2. To what extent does the SGI-RMA consistently measure rape myth acceptance?
3. To what extent does the SGI-RMA predict other outcomes related to rape myth acceptance?

These findings could encourage future studies to question not only what drives sexual assault on college campuses, but what collection of characteristics influence sexual assault rates and why they do

Method

In April 2023, participants were initially asked to complete the Sex and Gender Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance scale (SGI-RMA) as part of a larger project to develop a validated measure of rape myths among all gender and sexual identities. The newly revised gender-inclusive rape myth acceptance scale instrument developed because of these interviews assured a thorough review and analysis of the cognitive interview data. The review summarized respondents' comprehension of items and developed categories of item problems. The analysis provided evidence of the extent to which respondents had shared interpretations of items that also were consistent with the conceptual framework underlying the original Gender-Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance (GIRMA) scale (Johnson et al., 2021) and revealed potentially problematic aspects of items that merited further consideration. Both the review and analysis furthered instrument development. The strategies used were built upon previously developed research which addressed the criticism that analysis of cognitive interview data is the least developed aspect of this otherwise promising approach to instrument development (Drennan, 2003). The efforts parallel those of Grant and Davis (1997), Knafl et al. (2007), and Garcia

(2011) to systematize the use of content experts in instrument development. They not only developed guidelines for the systematic analysis of input from theoretical and clinical experts, but also noted that “instrument review by a sample of participants drawn from the target population is another key component of content validation” (p. 273).

Item Pool

The SGI-RMA is a 19-item survey. All 19 items on the SGI-RMA were reviewed to determine their match with the findings from previous research and practice experience with students. With a specific focus on accountability for rape and victim blaming, four of the seven subscales were found to be theoretically relevant: *They Asked for It*, *It Wasn't Really Rape*, *They Didn't Mean To*, and *They Lied*. Four subscales comprised a total of 19 items, and these items all related to the covert, subtle rape myths that blame the victim for her assault or excuse the perpetrator. The subscale *They Asked for It* reflects the belief that the victim's behaviors invited sexual assault. Examples of questions from the SGI-RMA for this category are the following: “If someone is raped while they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control” and “When someone wears revealing clothing, they're just asking for trouble.” The subscale *It Wasn't Really Rape* consists of items that deny that an assault occurred due to either blaming the victim or excusing the perpetrator. For example, two of the statements from this subscale are “If the rapist doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it a rape” and “If someone doesn't say ‘no,’ they can't claim rape.” The third subscale, *They Didn't Mean To*, reflects the belief that the perpetrator did not intend to rape, with items such as “When someone rapes, it is because of their strong desire for sex” and “People don't usually intend to force sex on someone, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.” The fourth rape myth subscale, *They Lied*, consists of items that indicate the belief that the victim fabricated the rape. Examples

of items from this subscale are "A lot of times, people who say they were raped agreed to have sex and regret it afterward" and "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at someone."

The 19-item survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Due to the co-occurrence and intersection of rape myth acceptance to other oppressive belief systems, such as sexism, racism, ageism, classism, and religious intolerance (Aosved & Long, 2006; Oney, 2014; Powers et al., 2015; Stoll et al., 2021), eight additional demographic items including gender identity, sexual identity, racial/ethnic group identity, religious affiliation, involvement in various student organizations were included to yield valuable insights. One additional item, a list of sexual assault scenarios to determine experience with experiencing various forms of sexual assault, was also included (see Appendix B). In the administration of the SGI-RMA, the gender inclusive terms in place of all gendered wording (e.g., "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men" became "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at someone") was used. Where appropriate, the singular "they" in lieu of she or her pronouns and "someone" in place of "individual" as is suggested by the current American Psychological Association Manual and other researchers that study rape myth acceptance among SGM communities (American Psychological Association, 2019; Johnson et al., 2021).

The SGI-RMA survey was administered on the internet survey platform, Qualtrics. Participants were invited to complete the survey via the social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram between April 7-April 31, 2023. To aid in recruitment, consistent with Qualtrics' (2023) and other opt-in panels' practices, participants could be entered into a drawing to win one of ten \$20 electronic gift cards. Participants were required to read and agree to an informed

consent form prior to deciding whether to participate. This 28-item survey takes 10 minutes to complete, and participants may leave it at any time and resume from their last completed response. Responses were closely monitored at each institution and follow-up emails were also tailored to individual institution response rate. A clear explanation of the survey's purpose was provided prior to consent, however some of the survey questions were highly personal. To moderate item nonresponse, underreporting, and/or misreporting, a “trigger warning” was provided in the consent form and referral for assistance as part of the end of survey “thank you” (McNeeley, 2012) (see Appendix D). The number of matrix rows included in the survey could negatively impact the quality of data collected, specifically if respondents used a smartphone to complete the survey (Qualtrics, 2021). Respondents were urged in the initial invitation to use the desktop to complete the survey for more streamlined visual survey access.

Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample

The survey population was college students enrolled in a United States college or university. The population was chosen based on varied demographics, varied geographic location, and ease of access to the population frame by the principal investigator. Participants consisted of individuals of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, gender identities, and race (see Table 2).

Variable	Percent	N
Gender		
Cisgender woman	53.8%	46
Cisgender men	36.7%	32
Genderqueer, transgender, or another gender identity	11.3%	9
Sexual Orientation		
Gay	4.6%	4
Heterosexual/Straight	75.9%	66
Lesbian	5.7%	5
Bisexual	11.5%	10
Pansexual	2.3%	2
Race/Ethnicity (could select multiple options)		
Asian/Asian America	5.7%	5
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	4.6%	4
Black/African American	18.4%	16
Latino/a/x or Hispanic	14.9%	13
Multiracial or Multiethnic	4.6%	4
White	51.7%	45
Religion		
Atheist	9.2%	8
Agnostic	12.6%	11
Christianity	41.4%	36
Judaism	21.8%	19
Buddhism	6.9%	6
Islam	4.6%	4
Hinduism	3.4%	3
Academic Class		
First year	6.9%	6
Second year	26.4%	23
Third year	35.6%	31
Fourth year	21.8%	19
Fifth year or more	91.9%	8
Campus Clubs/Organizations		
Fraternity	5.7%	5
Sorority	3.4%	3
Current/Former Military	1.2%	1
Student Athlete	1.3%	9
Campus Multicultural	4.6%	4

Table 2: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Participants were enrolled as undergraduate students at their institution and indicated they were at least the age of 18. Participants were also required to have a valid email address and access to a computer and/or smart phone and the internet to complete the survey. To reduce sampling error, a sample was selected from the population to assure participants were as representative of the entire population as possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Recognizing that all samples selected were only estimates of population values. The sample required for Rasch analysis depends on several factors, including the complexity of the measurement instruments, the desired level of precision, and the properties of the data. While there is no fixed rule, most researchers recommend a sample size of at least 5 to 10 participants per item. Because the survey contains 19 items, the sample size targeted for this study was at least 50 person measures (Azizan, Mahmud, & Rambli, 2020). Individuals were recruited by email inviting them to complete the survey in a three-week time between April 7- April 31, 2023 (Fowler, 2014). Participant emails were gathered from each institution's Registrar's Office. Under coverage was accounted for by obtaining updated student email lists that are most accurate, and emails were scanned for duplicates prior to sending out the survey to account for erroneous inclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and participants could refuse to take part without penalty, withdraw at any time and skip questions as their comfort level dictated. The survey was designed to protect participant privacy and confidentiality. A password-protected, encrypted technology to receive, transmit, and store data was used. Answers were stored in a separate file from participant contact information and were reported in aggregate. Any reports or articles written were limited to aggregate data that does not identify individual respondents. Records were kept confidential to the extent provided by federal, state, and local law. Participants'

contact information was stored—in a separate, secure file from data—to send follow up emails if necessary. Upon completion of the study, all names and email addresses were destroyed. The required paperwork was completed and submitted to the North Dakota State University Institutional Review Board in the Office of Research and Creative Activity. The study did not take place until the IRB and the collaborative research form allowing survey administration at the participating campus was approved.

Data Analysis: The Rasch Model

For the current study, Wolfe's, and Smith's (2007) Rasch validity framework was used to examine the psychometric functions of the SGI-RMA. This approach aligns specific Rasch analytic tools with each of the six components of Messick's (1995) unified concept of construct validity. Rasch modeling is a statistical method used to analyze categorical data, particularly in the field of psychometrics. The Rasch model is specifically designed to measure latent traits or abilities based on observed responses to a set of items or questions. It assumes that the probability of a person endorsing or succeeding at an item depends on the person's ability and the difficulty of the item (Linacre, 1999; Andrich, 2011). The Rasch model can be used to estimate the item difficulty and the person's ability on the same latent trait scale, allowing for comparisons and ranking of individuals or items. It provides a way to transform raw categorical data into interval-level measurements, enabling more precise analysis and interpretation (Boone et al., 2016). In the Rasch model, the assignment of numerals to response categories merely enables the researcher to properly count the number of correct items, or passed thresholds, but it is not equivalent to measurement. Measurement is achieved by successfully demonstrating that the latent variable complies with the structure of quantity (Bond et al., 2020).

Rasch modeling also provides information about the fit of the model to the data. Fit statistics, such as the time and person fit residuals are used to assess how well the observed responses conform to the expected patterns predicted by the Rasch model. Poor fit may suggest violations of model assumptions, such as local dependence or multidimensionality. Additionally, Rasch modeling is less sensitive to missing data, making it an ideal analytic tool for evaluating instruments with some incomplete responses (Boone et al., 2014). For this study, 97% of students responded to all 19 items and 1.7% had only one missing item leaving 1.3% of participants with more than one missing item. Overall, Rasch modeling provides a rigorous framework for analyzing item response data and estimating latent traits or abilities (Boone & Townsend, 2011). This model assumes the probability of a person endorsing an item is a function of their ability and the difficulty of the item (Boone et al., 2014); therefore, concluding that persons with high rape myth acceptance (RMA) will agree to more difficult items, whereas persons with low RMA will only agree with easier items. Moreover, respondents with certain levels of RMA should only be able to agree with items of a lower difficulty than their ability, and difficult items are less likely to be endorsed than easier items.

All methods of analysis using the Rasch model were conducted using the Andrich-Wright Rating Scale Model (RSM) in the Winsteps (version 3.92.1) software. The RSM assumes that the distance between response option categories is the same across all the items. Rasch modeling does allow for the intervals between categories to differ across items with the Partial Credit Model (PCM). Although the RSM is preferred when the same ordinal scale is used across items, as with the items in the SGI-RMA; prior to doing the main analyses, assumptions of the Rasch model were checked. Rasch Model Assumptions Check Application of item response theory (IRT) models in general and Rasch model in particular, requires observation of two assumptions:

local independence and unidimensionality. Unidimensionality requires that a single dominant construct should underlie responses to the items of a test. Each item on a test may measure more than one dimension. The set of items included in a test are expected to share the same dimension the test is intended to measure. A particular dimension is expected to overwhelm the other dimensions measured by the items. Unidimensionality requires that these “other dimensions” not be shared by many items on the test and act like random noise (Linacre, 2009). Local independence expresses unidimensionality another way. It includes but goes beyond unidimensionality. It implies that the correlation between the items of a test should be due to the single dominant dimension affecting performance on the test. After removing the effect of the dimension, the correlation should reduce to zero (Linacre, 2009). To check unidimensionality of the test, a chi-squared test of difference was used to determine which model was best suited for this instrument. Results indicate the EFA did not significantly improve the model fit, so RSM ($\chi^2(160939-1594062)=\chi^2(15332)=161141.2763-159585.5397=1555.7366$, $p=0.337$) was utilized (see Table 3).

Model	Log-likelihood chi-squared	d.f.
RSM	982.5489	1048
PCM	1241.56	84

Table 3: Global Fit Statistics for Rating Scale Model (RSM) versus Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

First, 24 extremes (i.e., highest, and lowest) respondent scores were excluded from the analysis. Boone recommended this approach et al. (2014) since the measurement error of the person measure can skew the analysis when those who obtain the maximum or minimum score on an instrument are included. The model is unable to measure ability level using the current

instrument when respondents get a perfect score or the worst possible score. This yields a measurement error of infinity. Boone (2014) suggested, “If someone has topped out on an instrument...or if someone has bottomed out...these types of individuals do not provide useful data that help us understand how accurately the instrument is functioning” (p. 221). Once extreme responses and missing responses were excluded, the sample included 91 students. Next, to optimize fit and report results, misfitting persons and items were selected for deletion with. Five misfitting persons with infit MNSQ > 1.3 and $Z > 3.0$ were deleted. Two more misfitting persons were detected; however, both items had an infit MNSQ within 0.10 of the thresholds. These persons were also maintained to maximize the statistical power of the analysis with an already small sample size. Lastly, Rasch analysis assumes that the items in the instrument conform to the expectations of the model. If certain items consistently exhibit poor fit to the model they may introduce measurement error or violate model assumptions. Each item that had an outfit MNSQ $< .70$ or $irMNSQ > 1.30$ were analyzed within the model one-by-one to determine retention (see Table 2). A total of 10 items within the four subscales were determined to have poor fit to the Rasch model: *They Didn't Mean To (4)*, *It Wasn't Really Rape (2)*, *They Lied (2)* and *They Asked for It (1)* (see Table 4).

Item Label	Score	Count	Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MNSQ	Infit ZSTD	Outfit MNSQ	Outfit ZSTD	Observed Point-Biserial Correlation	Expected Point-Biserial Correlation	Estimated Discrimination
Q_5	112	66	-0.490	0.15	1.92	4.30	2.47	5.40	0.67	0.77	0.41
Q_6	122	7	-0.640	0.14	1.44	2.40	1.64	2.90	0.74	0.78	0.42
Q_7	122	73	-0.680	0.15	1.43	2.40	1.24	1.30	0.73	0.77	0.44
Q_1	95	72	-0.110	0.14	1.18	1.10	1.32	1.40	0.73	0.76	0.53
Q_8	110	72	-0.480	0.14	1.31	1.80	1.25	1.30	0.74	0.76	0.50
Q_3	108	73	-0.390	0.14	1.14	0.90	1.21	1.00	0.75	0.76	0.37
Q_4	123	72	-0.710	0.15	1.18	1.10	1.03	0.20	0.50	0.77	0.44
Q_9	81	72	0.140	0.15	1.07	0.94	-0.20	5.13	0.74	0.74	0.51
Q_11	91	68	-0.170	0.16	0.95	0.86	-0.60	3.83	0.76	0.75	0.46
Q_10	67	74	0.480	0.15	0.90	0.94	-0.10	3.87	0.74	0.72	0.65
Q_12	87	72	0.100	0.15	0.83	9.00	-0.40	4.41	0.78	0.75	0.56
Q_13	79	72	-0.160	0.15	0.69	0.89	-0.40	3.73	0.78	0.75	0.56
Q_14	71	73	0.410	0.16	0.81	0.68	-1.40	3.14	0.78	0.73	0.62
Q_15	63	76	0.010	0.17	0.72	0.65	-1.40	4.18	0.75	0.72	0.65
Q_16	57	71	0.660	0.15	0.70	0.49	-2.00	9.00	0.76	0.73	0.71
Q_2	85	74	-0.150	0.15	0.68	0.59	-2.00	6.87	0.78	0.75	0.58
Q_18	86	76	-0.150	0.15	0.66	0.59	-2.00	3.14	0.79	0.75	0.51
Q_19	79	79	0.340	0.15	0.61	0.58	-2.00	3.69	0.79	0.74	0.67
Q_17	64	73	0.010	0.16	0.59	0.90	-2.00	4.30	0.78	0.73	0.65

Table 4: 19 Item-Statistics - Misfit Order (by Outfit MNSQ)⁵

⁵ Refer to APPENDIX F. to view survey items.

Results

Messick's (1995) six distinguishable aspects of construct validity were used throughout the analysis to highlight a means of addressing the notion of validity as a unified concept. These six aspects of construct validity are content, substantive, structural, generalizability, external, and consequential. According to Messick (1995), the importance of considering multiple dimensions of validity to ensure that the measurement instrument effectively captures and represents the intended construct. It enables the creation of linear measures with interval-level properties, allowing for more accurate comparisons and rankings of individuals along the measured construct. Rasch also allows for the calibration of item difficulty or item severity. Estimating the item parameters helps to create a hierarchy of items that accurately reflect their difficulty level or measurement properties (Borsboom et al., 2004). Results are demonstrated within each aspect below.

Content Aspect of Validity

The content aspect of validity assesses the degree to which the items or tasks in a measurement instrument adequately represent the domain or construct being measured. When evaluating content validity, the focus is on the relevance, representativeness, and comprehensiveness of the items. The goal is to ensure that the measurement instrument covers the important aspects of the construct and provides a representative sample of the content domain. Evidence regarding content aspects of construct validity can be gleaned from the following sources (Wolfe & Smith, 2007): (a) item strata index, (b) infit and outfit statistics, and (c) point-measure correlations. The person-item map contains a wealth of arguments applicable to not only the representative aspect of Messick's content validity but to the other aspects, as well (Beglar, 2010).

Conventional recommendations (Linacre, 2002) suggest items fit the Rasch model well when they exhibit outfit mean-squares fit statistics (MNSQ) between 0.5 and 1.5 logits, a point-biserial correlation greater than 0.30, and close observed and expected point-biserial correlations (i.e., < 0.15). Inspection of the outfit MNSQ and point-biserial correlation statistics determined a total of 10 of the 10 SGI-RMA items fit the Rasch model; outfit MNSQ values ranged between 0.57 and 1.16 the smallest point-biserial correlation was 0.87 and the largest difference between the expected and observed point-biserial correlations was 0.02 (see Table 5). To demonstrate the linear relationships between the Rasch calibrations for the 91 respondents, 20 variables, and 19 survey items, the person item map was examined (see Figure 4.1). The vertical lines represent the dimensions or the constructs which the items are supposed to define operationally.

Conventionally, the mean item difficulty measures are centered at zero. On the vertical line, M represents the mean, S represents 1 standard deviation away from the mean, and T represents 2 standard deviations away from the mean. The upper part of the line locates more able persons and more difficult items, whereas the lower part represents the less able persons and less difficult items. Figure 4.1 shows that survey items on the right are either well or not well matched to the bulk of the persons on the left, indicating the test is or is not appropriately targeted for this group of participants. For a well-targeted survey, mean ability measures of the respondents should be located around the mean difficulty of the items (around 0 logit).

Item Label	Score	Count	Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MNSQ	Outfit MNSQ	Outfit ZSTD	Observed Point-Biserial Correlation	Expected Point-Biserial Correlation	Estimated Discrimination
Q_10	81	56	-0.230	0.21	1.21	1.16	0.80	0.87	0.89	0.59
Q_1	84	53	-0.520	0.21	1.20	1.19	1.00	0.89	0.90	0.53
Q_17	84	56	-0.360	0.21	1.19	1.20	1.00	0.88	0.89	0.48
Q_14	77	52	-0.390	0.21	1.12	1.17	0.90	0.89	0.89	0.52
Q_2	81	51	-0.390	0.21	1.11	1.13	0.70	0.89	0.89	0.51
Q_3	71	53	-0.010	0.21	1.05	0.94	-0.20	0.87	0.88	0.60
Q_11	62	54	0.450	0.22	0.74	0.90	-0.30	0.88	0.87	0.63
Q_18	79	56	-0.110	0.21	0.82	0.79	-1.00	0.90	0.88	0.68
Q_12	59	55	0.680	0.22	0.76	0.64	-1.50	0.88	0.86	0.73
Q_13	57	56	0.880	0.22	0.75	0.57	-1.80	0.87	0.85	0.67

Table 5: 10 Item-Statistics - Misfit Order (by Outfit MNSQ)

As you can see in Figure 4, four of the items mean ability of the subjects are located within range or 1 standard deviation above the respective mean item measures. Six of the items fell either within range or 1 standard deviation below the respective mean item measures. The items are clustered within the middle of the mass, while there is no spread of persons at the bottom or top. Hence, there are insufficient items to estimate RMA of students at the lower end of the scales. This evidence shows that the items in the survey represent the respective content well; however, considerable gaps exist between items of different difficulty levels in the maps and a floor effect meaning some items are not sensitive enough to capture the full range of variability among respondents who had low rape myth acceptance. To have a more precise estimate of the persons who fall in these regions of RMA, more items in these areas are needed.

Representativeness can also be checked by translating the item separation index provided by the Rasch model into the item strata statistics through the following formula: $H = (4G + 1)/3$. G is the separation index which is the ratio of the true standard deviation of items / average measurement error of items. Item strata refers to the number of distinct item difficulty levels or strata that the test takers' performance can define. The inspection of item strata helps ensure that a range of item difficulties have been included in the test (Smith, 2001). According to Linacre (2007a), high item strata (>2) depend chiefly on two factors: 1) item difficulty variance which is evidence of the representativeness of the items, 2) large person sample size. The item separation statistics for SGI-RMA are 2.70 respectively (See Figure 1).

TABLE 12.7 SGI-RMA Data 7.10.23_old.dta ZOU352WS.TXT Jul 10 2023 12:43
 INPUT: 115 PERSON 19 ITEM REPORTED: 86 PERSON 10 ITEM 5 CATS WINSTEPS 3.92.1

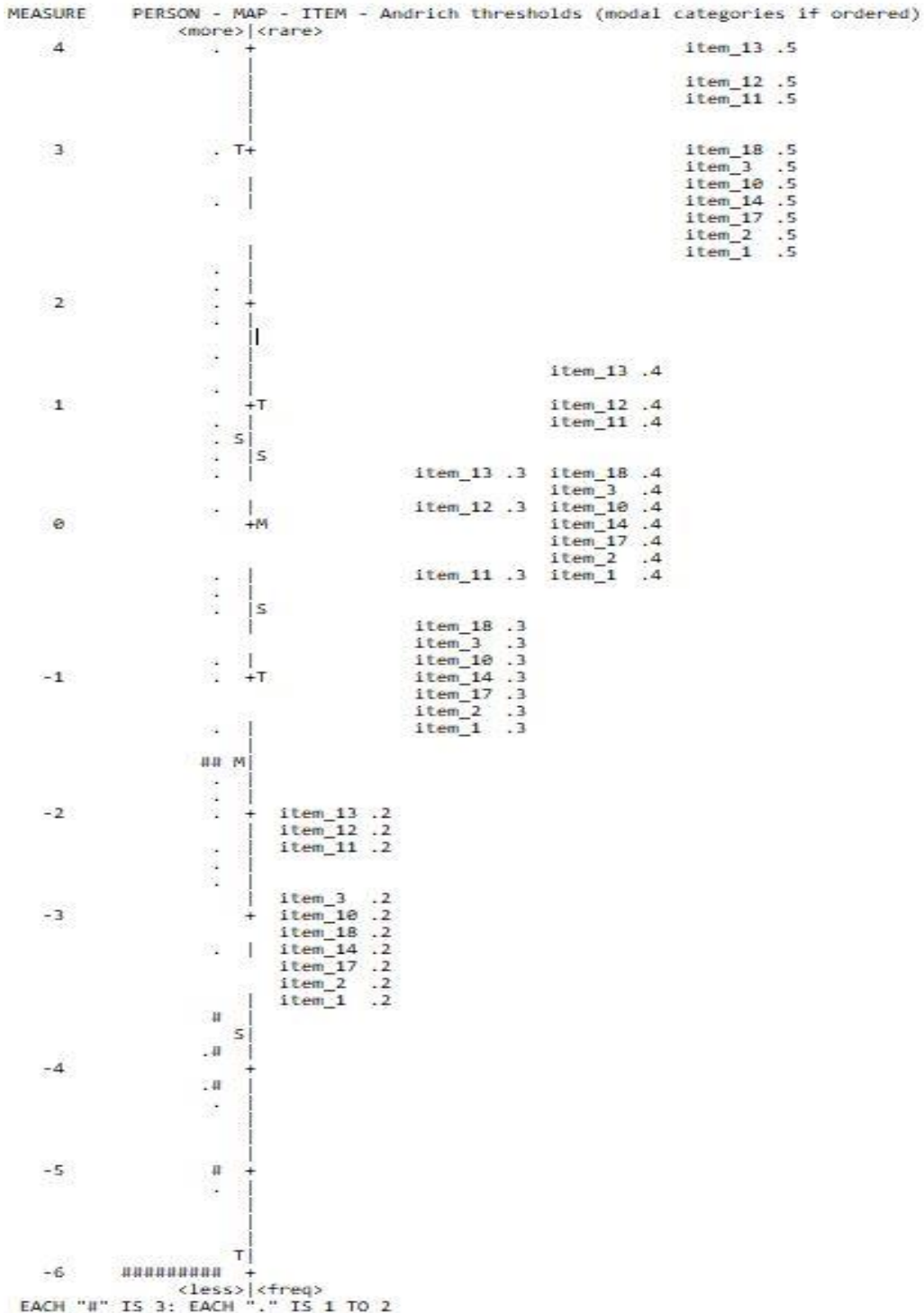


TABLE 12.8 SGI-RMA Data 7.10.23_old.dta ZOU352WS.TXT Jul 10 2023 12:43
 INPUT: 115 PERSON 19 ITEM REPORTED: 86 PERSON 10 ITEM 5 CATS WINSTEPS 3.92.1

Figure 1: Wright Map

Substantive Aspect of Validity

Measuring the substantive aspects of validity involves evaluation to which the Rasch model adequately represents the underlying construct is being measured. Assessment included considerations for unidimensionality assuming that the latent trait being measured is unidimensional, meaning it's a single underlying construct and emphasizes the influential role of theory when designing a new scale (Messick, 1995). In other words, when the responses on an instrument align with the developer's intentions, it demonstrates substantive construct validity. According to Wolfe and Smith (2007) indicators of substantive validity are as follows: 1) Response categories used with the items should demonstrate monotonic functioning (i.e., average RMA increases with the values of the 5-point rating scale) and discernment (i.e., respondents can differentiate between the five response options), and 2) the observed difficulty of the castles' items align with the difficulty predicted by the theoretical approach.

To determine monotonic functions of the response rating cycle, two methods were utilized. To start, item polarity was assessed to ensure response categories were in the appropriate order (i.e., the respondents with the higher disposition select the greater response category). Item polarity occurs when the average ability of the person observed in one response category is lower than the overall ability of the person in the next lower category (Linacre, 2018). Any items that were determined to have polarity were deleted from the analysis during the data cleaning phase. As shown in Tables 6 on pages 122-123, none of the remaining 10 survey items demonstrated misordered response categories.

Item Label	Data Code	Data Count	Data Percent	Mean Ability	Mean S.D.	Mean S.E.
Q 13	*	25	23%	-2.43	0.00	0.00
	1	52	61%	-4.91	1.77	0.25
	2	16	19%	1.18	0.91	0.23
	3	4	5%	0.35	0.89	0.52
	4	11	13%	1.67	0.85	0.27
	5	2	2%	6.63	0.00	0.00
Q 3	*	29	26%	-2.48	3.15	1.58
	1	44	54%	-5.24	1.56	02.4
	2	16	20%	-1.66	1.11	0.29
	3	8	10%	-0.42	0.73	0.29
	4	5	6%	1.02	1.49	0.74
	5	8	10%	3.00	2.18	0.82
Q 10	*	27	25%	-4.77	175	1.24
	1	42	51%	-5.33	1.48	0.23
	2	15	18%	-1.78	1.16	0.51
	3	10	12%	-0.75	1.53	0.51
	4	10	12%	0.74	1.34	0.45
	5	6	7%	3.55	2.28	1.02
Q 12	*	26	24%	-0.76	1.14	1.14
	1	50	60%	-5.04	1.65	0.24
	2	16	19%	-1.36	0.96	0.25
	3	6	7%	0.36	1.18	0.53
	4	9	11%	1.52	0.93	0.33
	5	3	4%	5.30	1.89	1.34
Q_17	*	26	24%	-4.08	2.18	2.18
	1	38	45%	-5.53	1.42	0.23
	2	20	24%	-2.45	1.40	0.32
	3	10	12%	-0.19	1.54	0.51
	4	12	14%	0.63	1.29	0.39
	5	4	5%	4.50	2.17	1.25
Q_11	*	27	25%	-0.6	1.51	1.07
	1	47	57%	-5.41	1.62	0.24
	2	17	20%	-1.81	1.34	0.34
	3	7	8%	-0.62	0.90	0.32
	4	9	11%	0.93	1.59	0.48
	5	3	4%	3.44	2.74	4.37

Table 6: Polarity Statistics for Items with Disordered Response Categories

Item Label	Data Code	Data Count	Data Percent	Mean Ability	Mean S.D.	Mean S.E.
Q 1	*	29	26%	-2.75	1.59	0.93
	1	37	46%	-5.65	2.74	0.21
	2	18	22%	-2.43	1.87	0.37
	3	9	11%	-0.62	1.26	0.32
	4	12	15%	0.93	1.51	0.48
Q 2	5	5	6%	3.44	0.90	1.37
	*	31	28%	-3.43	1.59	0.72
	1	38	48%	-5.53	2.74	0.23
	2	14	18%	-2.28	1.77	0.39
	3	11	14%	-0.50	1.40	0.40
Q 14	4	11	14%	0.80	1.39	0.46
	5	5	6%	3.78	1.28	1.17
	*	29	29%	-0.89	1.45	0.71
	1	41	51%	-5.54	2.33	0.20
	2	13	16%	-2.09	1.42	0.39
Q 18	3	15	19%	-0.78	1.29	0.40
	4	6	7%	0.70	1.35	0.59
	5	6	7%	3.78	1.50	0.92
	*	25	23%	-5.02	1.20	0.00
	1	40	47%	-5.55	2.05	0.10
	2	20	24%	-2.14	0.00	0.25
	3	12	14%	-0.34	1.33	0.37
	4	9	11%	1.62	1.09	0.26
	5	4	5%	3.94	1.23	2.20

Table 6: Polarity Statistics for Items with Disordered Response Categories (continued)

Category probability curves were then used to test the discrimination of the response scale and to demonstrate the domain where the person measure for which a response category is most probable. Response category discrimination occurs when each probability curve has a region that is the most probable. If any curves are hidden under the other curves, a disproportionate number of response options. Therefore, decreasing scale categories should be considered. Category considered. Category probability curves for the SGI-RMA demonstrate that respondents were able to discriminate between the five response options (See Figure 2).

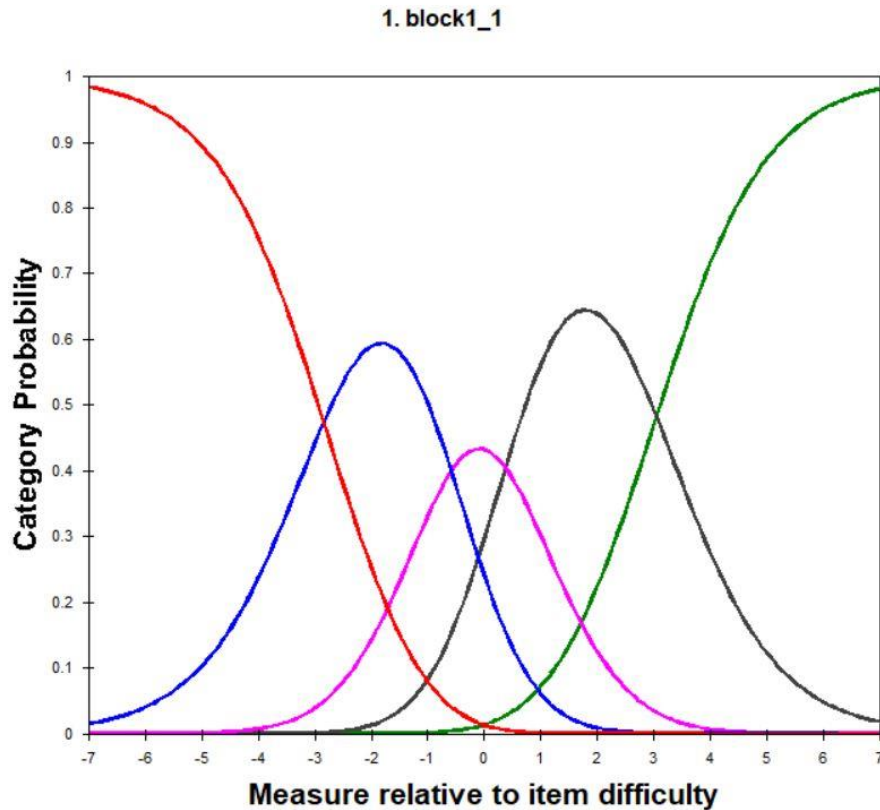


Figure 2: Category Probability Curves for Response Categories (RSM)

The level to which the Rasch-determined item difficulty aligns with theoretical hypotheses also supports the substantive construct validity. Particularly, those items which are hypothesized to be harder based on previous literature should have higher item difficulty values as measured by the Rasch model. I hypothesized the difficulty of the items with the theory and literature in mind. In particular, expanding on Johnson et al.’s (2020) research on building an initial sex and gender inclusive rape myth acceptance survey tool, the *It Wasn’t Really Rape* subscale items were hypothesized to be more difficult than the *They Lied* subscale items. The item – “If someone is raped while they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.”– was hypothesized to be the most difficult, out of all nineteen items, for respondents to endorse. The results reveal that it was the most difficult item.

Interestingly, much of the initial hypothesis appears correct; but two items were disordered. Item 18 was hypothesized as the 4th most difficult item but was the 5th most difficult; and item 3 was hypothesized as the 5th most difficult item but was the 4th most difficult of the 10 items. The remaining eight SGI-RMA items were ordered correctly. Table 7 depicts the hypothesized versus the observed item difficulty and the statistical analysis of all ten items, respectively. The discussion section explores other hypotheses surrounding the difficulty of items.

Item	Hypothesized Difficulty Rank	Mean	SD	Min	Max
13	13	0.570	-1.800	0.850	0.870
12	12	0.640	-1.500	0.860	0.880
11	11	0.900	-0.300	0.870	0.880
3	18	0.940	-0.200	0.870	0.880
18	3	0.790	-1.000	0.900	0.880
10	10	1.160	0.800	0.870	0.890
17	17	1.200	1.000	0.880	0.890
14	14	1.170	0.900	0.890	0.890
2	2	1.130	0.700	0.890	0.890
1	1	1.190	1.000	0.890	0.900

Table 7: Hypothesized Item Difficulty Rank

Structural Aspect of Validity

The structural aspect of validity refers to how well the underlying assumptions and structure of the Rasch model align with the data and the intended measurement purpose. The Rasch Model item response theory (IRT) model assumes a hierarchical structure where the probability of a response to an item is determined by the latent trait (e.g., ability) of the respondent and the difficulty of the item (Messick, 1995). Assessing the structural aspect of validity in the Rasch model involves evaluating the fit of the data to the model's assumptions and examining the model's ability to provide valid and interpretable measurement outcomes.

Determining the structural aspect of validity includes assessing the fit of the data to the model, assumes that item responses are conditionally independent, given the latent trait, assessing DIF (when different groups of individuals with the same level of the latent trait have different probabilities of responding to an item and evaluating targeting or the match between the distribution of person abilities and the distribution of item difficulties (does the instrument effectively cover the range of the latent trait being measured).

I examined whether the items reflecting rape myth acceptance included a unidimensional latent construct using parallel analysis by utilizing principal component analysis (PCA) to further evaluate the structure of the scale. Parallel analysis was selected to determine the number of factors to extract in the PCA since it is considered more accurate than the Kaiser rule and scree plots methods (Hayton et al., 2004). Results from the parallel analysis indicated that a single factor should be retained (see Figure 3). The evidence discussed in the Rasch Model Assumption Check Section pointed to the multidimensionality of this version of the SGI-RMA.

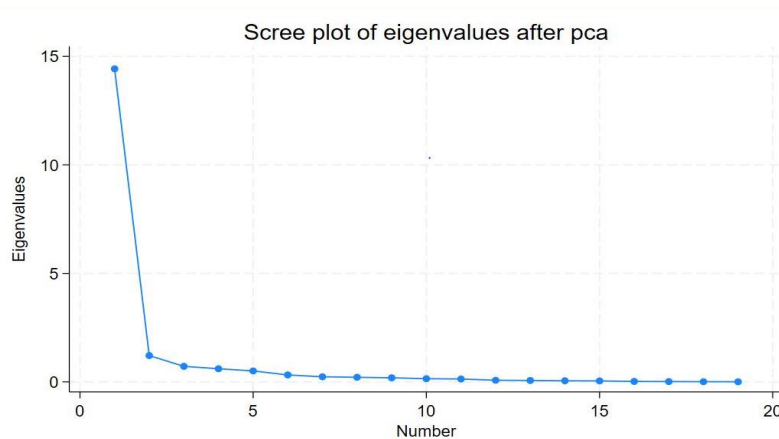


Figure 3: Scree Plot of Eigenvalues after PCA

Next, utilizing a polychoric correlation matrix, CFA was also performed to assess the model fit of the items on a single, unidimensional factor. Polychoric correlation is appropriate for ordinal data since the Pearson correlation assumes the variables are continuous and jointly

normally distributed; violation of these assumptions result in underestimation of the true correlation (Rupp, Koh, & Zumbo, 2003). Multiple fit indices were used to assess global model fit including a non-significant χ^2 test, confirmatory fit index Tucker Lewis index (TLI) > 0.90, root mean squared error or approximation (RMSEA) between 0.05 and 0.06 and standardized root mean residual (SRMR) at 0.022 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015). Standardized factor loadings > 0.5 and average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.05 also indicate good model structure (Brown, 2015).

Generalizability Aspect of Validity

The generalizability aspect of validity refers to assessing the extent to which the findings and results obtained from applying the model to the sample or context can be generalized to other populations, settings, or conditions. Considerations for generalizability include sample representativeness, a sample that is diverse, representative of the target population, and includes an adequate range of abilities or characteristics will enhance the generalizability of the model's finding. It also included assessing whether the model holds invariant across different populations or subgroups by examining the measurement properties of the items to ensure they are comparable across groups and that it performs similarly for different populations (Boateng et al., 2013). To determine generalizability, examining the relationships between Rasch-derived measures and other validated instruments or outcome can provide evidence of external validity and the extent to which the Rasch model produces meaningful and consistent results. Cross-validation is also important. This involves applying the model to independent samples or datasets to evaluate its generalizability. By replicating the findings in different samples or contexts, the stability and robustness of the model's results can be assessed. Finally, the generalizability of the

Rasch model findings may be influenced by specific contextual factors such as cultural differences, language variations, or specific measurement conditions.

The Rasch modeling property of invariance is verified empirically by examining item and person calibration invariance. Item calibration invariance deals with the degree to which items measure the same dimension across different subgroups; therefore, items have the same meaning for the subgroups. This is addressed by differential item functioning (DIF) analysis (Smith & Suh, 2003). Person calibration invariance deals with the degree to which the respondents perform differently on two tests of the same latent trait, which is the concern of differential person functioning (DPF) analysis. DIF in the present study was studied across gender identity and sexual identity. In DIF analysis, both size and significance of the DIF contrast should be investigated. In terms of significance, no SGI-RAMA items' DIF values are significant at $P < 0.05$. Size refers to the degree to which item difficulty measures for the subgroups have influence in the decisions made based on the test. As shown in Table 4.7, the DIF effect is not big enough to be considered as a threat to the fairness and generalizability of the test (see Table 9).

Item Label	Person Class	DIF Measure	DIF SE	Rasch-Welch
Gender	Cisgender men	-0.52	0.31	0.3598
	Cisgender women	-0.85	0.36	0.4954
	Non-binary	-0.52	0.31	0.4954
Sexuality	LGBQ	-0.62	0.25	0.0000

Table 8: DIF Statistics by Gender and Sexuality

Additionally, Draba's (1977) suggestion was employed as an additional criterion to assess the size of Differential Item Functioning. According to Draba (1977), if the difference in item difficulty estimates between two groups exceeds 0.5 logits, it should be identified as

exhibiting DIF. However, none of the items displayed a DIF contrast value exceeding 0.5 logits. Therefore, although the difficulty measures of several items differed significantly between groups, the DIF size as evaluated using either Linacre's or Draba's (1977) criteria was not substantial across different sections of the test.

External Aspect of Validity

The external aspect of validity refers to the extent to which the Rasch model's results align with external criteria or measures that are conceptually related to the construct being assessed. Some considerations include determining convergent validity or the degree to which the Rasch-derived measures correlate positively and significantly with other measures or criteria that are theoretically expected to be related to the construct being measured. Discriminant validity also must be examined. This refers to the degree to which the Rasch-model derived measures correlate less strongly with variables or measures that are theoretically expected to be unrelated to the construct being measured. Further, predictive validity assesses the ability of the measure to predict future performance or behavior related to the construct being measured. This can involve predicted measures such as academic achievement, job performance, or treatment outcomes. Concurrent validity is also a consideration. This evaluates the degree to which the Rasch-derived measures correspond with other measures or criteria obtained at the same time. Finally, criterion-related validity must also be considered. Criterion-related validity involves comparing the measures with established external criteria standards. This can include comparing the measure with expert judgments, diagnostic classifications, or established gold-standard measures to assess the degree of agreement or concordance.

Studies on the external aspect of construct validity examine item distribution relative to the dispersion of person measures by inspecting item-person map and person strata index. The

item-person map for a test should have the following two characteristics to be sensitive to treatment, (Wolfe & Smith, 2007): (a) A floor effect should occur for the distribution of the person measures and (b) the items should be widely dispersed along the line and many of the items should be located beyond the highest ability person. Messick (1989) posited that the social consequences and value implication of the test score use, and interpretation is also important and the validity of it should be taken into consideration. As Figure 4.1 shows in the person-item map of the SGI-RMA, most of the items are located beyond the highest person measure but the items do not necessarily cover a wide span of the respective constructs. The bulk of the items are slightly above the bulk of the persons, yet there is a floor effect for the distribution of person measures and items are not widely dispersed along the ability continuum. This indicates that if the items differentiate between the survey respondents were supposed to retain the subscale constructs and those who do not retain them. In addition to visual inspection of the person-item map, the person strata index represents the number of statistically different ability strata that the survey can identify in a sample. This provides more evidence towards external aspects of construct validity. Low person separation values (< 2) for the survey show that more items covering wider spans of the corresponding latent traits are needed to classify persons with various levels of rape myth acceptance. Combining the evidence obtained by the spread of items and the person separation indices, one can conclude that the survey does detect the difference between those with high and low levels of the intended constructs in rape myth acceptance.

Consequential Aspect of Validity

The consequential aspect of validity refers to the examination of the potential impact and consequences of using the Rasch model and its results in practical or real-world application; for example, it may have implications for decision-making, policy development, or educational and

clinical practices. Some considerations include the utility or practical usefulness of the model and its results. This considers the specific needs and goals of the stakeholder who will use the results and determine if the model meets those needs effectively. Educational and clinical impacts must also be considered. The results can impact teaching, learning, or clinical decision-making. Another consideration is the fairness and equity of the assessment and measurement. Evaluation for potential bias or DIF that may disadvantage certain groups is paramount. The results of the model can also impact policies, guidelines, or resource allocation decisions. Finally, ethical considerations must be made. This includes addressing issues related to privacy, informed consent, data security, and potential unintended consequences of using the results in real world applications.

The consequential validity of a test is confirmed when it provides equivalent results across different subgroups of test takers and is a pure reflection of the ability of the test takers about the intended construct. For the consequential aspect of validity, Rasch does not provide any unique index other than those supporting some other aspects of construct validity. Since this instrument is not yet intended for these uses, the consequential aspect of validity was not examined.

Strengths and Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when viewing the results of this study. When applying Rasch modeling to the SGI-RMA, there are several limitations that should be considered. First, Rasch modeling assumes that the sample used for the analysis is representative of the population of interest. If the sample is not representative the findings may not generalize to the broader population. It is crucial to ensure diversity in terms of demographic sociocultural backgrounds and experiences related to rape myth acceptance; therefore, it would be important to

include more diverse demographics in future studies. More specifically, including more sexual and gender minority students within the undergraduate college population is warranted. Also, Rasch modeling assumes a unidimensional structure meaning that the scale measures a single underlying construct. However, rape myth acceptance may be a complex construct with multiple dimensions or subdomains. If the scale is not strictly unidimensional, the Rasch model may not fully capture the nuances and multidimensionality of rape myth acceptance.

Further, Rasch modeling assumes that the items are locally independent meaning that responses to one item should not be influenced by responses to other items once the latent trait is accounted for. In the context of rape myth acceptance, certain items may be conceptually related, and responses may be influenced by the context or wording of other items. Violation of local independence may affect the accuracy of the content. It's important to consider the cultural relevance and sensitivity of the scale items when applying Rasch modeling. Concise wording of the items of the SGI-RMA are crucial for valid measurement. If the items are ambiguous, culturally biased, or not relevant to the population being studied, it may in fact be the interpretation and generalizability of the rationale. The measurement of rape myth acceptance may be influenced by cultural social and contextual factors the applicability and interpretation of the Rasch model may vary across distinct cultural or sociopolitical contexts This analysis clearly demonstrates that some of the current items wording needs to be updated to represent a diverse undergraduate college population..

If the scale has limited variability in responses, either due to a floor effect where most respondents scored at the lowest end or a ceiling effect where most respondents scored at the highest end, it may impact the precision and discriminatory power of the Rasch model. The results demonstrated a floor effect suggesting that a considerable proportion of respondents or

SIGI-RMA scored at the lowest possible level and exhibited minimal variability in their responses. This indicates that the SIGI-RMA is unable to capture or differentiate lower levels of rape myth acceptance. Finally, while Rasch modeling provides valuable insights into the measurement properties of the SIGI-RMA, it's important to complement the analysis with other forms of validity evidence to ensure the external validity of the scale. This can include examining the relationships between the scale and relevant external variables or conducting qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of the construct. The results suggest more qualitative research is needed to understand the cultural context and current nomenclature of current college students. Also, determine whether they have had any form of violence prevention education prior to taking the survey to determine rape myth exposure would be beneficial. By acknowledging these limitations and addressing them through appropriate study design sample selection item development interpretation of results the validity and meaningfulness of the analysis for the Rasch model or of the Rasch modeling analysis for rape myth acceptance.

Discussion and Implications

When determining the psychometric properties of the SIGI-RMA, there were several implications to consider based on the use of Rasch modeling. The benefits and implications of utilizing Rasch modeling in this study included measurement precision, construct validity, identification of biased items, and the creation of a common measurement scale. Rasch modeling was used because it provides a framework for constructing linear measurement scales that are precise and reliable. By estimating item difficulties and person abilities on a common logit scale, it offered a robust and accurate measurement of the latent trait and item difficulty. Rasch modeling assumes specific measurement properties, such as unidimensionality and local independence. This means that all the items in the SIGI-RMA are intended to tap into rape myth

acceptance. It is crucial to consider this assumption because if the scale measures multiple dimensions or constructs, the results may not accurately reflect the targeted construct violating the assumption of unit dimensionality.

Previous research shows that factors such as age, education and awareness, culture and ethnicity, social norms and peer influences, and victim-blaming attitudes can be predictors of rape myth acceptance (Navarro & Ratajczac, 2022). These predictors may lead to misinterpretation of item difficulty estimates and person ability estimates. To account for this effect, Rasch analysis enabled the identification and investigations of Differential Item Functioning (DIF), which refers to the differential performance of individuals from distinct groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity) on specific items. However, DIF analysis showed that items were not biased or function differently for distinct groups. Although this is the case, findings demonstrate that the updated scale doesn't quite capture these various predictors, even for majoritized individuals. It also contributed to the assessment of construct validity by providing evidence for the unidimensionality of the SGI-RMA. The survey items were, indeed, measuring rape myth acceptance in each of the four categories: *They Asked for It, It Wasn't Really Rape, They Didn't Mean To, and They Lied*. As a result, the analysis, new SGI-RMA items will be created to address the floor effect adjusting the item difficulty to align with the abilities of the target population. By ensuring the items are appropriately calibrated to the respondent's ability level, the floor effect can be mitigated, allowing for a more accurate measurement of rape myth acceptance. Once updated and validated, the scale items can then be used for various assessments. This will allow for flexible test assembly, adaptive testing, and efficient time selection for tailored assessment of rape myth acceptance.

SUMMARY

Sexual violence is a blatant violation of human rights. Prevention advocates strive to uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals, ensuring that everyone has the right to live free from violence, coercion, or abuse. Sexual violence prevention seeks to challenge harmful social norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence. By promoting consent, respect, gender equality, and healthy relationships, prevention efforts contribute to creating a culture of respect and non-violence. Three studies were undertaken to investigate the language usage in the Green Dot violence prevention programming and the development of a sex and gender-inclusive scale for measuring acceptance of rape myths. In Study 1, Critical discourse Analysis was employed to examine the language employed in the Green Dot curriculum and its impact of social structures and meanings. Study 2 involved survey research and cognitive interview to explore how undergraduate college students understood and interpreted the Gender-Inclusive Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (GIIRMAS). Study 3 utilized the Rasch validity framework to evaluate the psychometric properties of the Sex and Gender-Inclusive Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (SGI-RMA).

Study 1 revealed noteworthy findings indicating that despite the intended goals of promoting inclusion, empowerment, unity, and change in the Green Dot Curriculum, the use of terms such as “we” and “us” (representing cisgender women) while implying a distinction with “they” and “them” (representing cisgender men) did not align with the desired objectives. Study 2 indicated that participants aligned their interpretation of the GIIRMAS items with the underlying conceptual framework, although 11 of the 19 items raised potential concerns that warranted careful consideration. Study 3 demonstrated that 10 of the 19 SGI-RMA items effectively measured the underlying construct of rape myth acceptance. These findings hold

significant implication for enhancing violence prevention programs and promoting the use of inclusive language to challenge and debunk misconceptions surrounding sexual violence.

Prevention programs that aim to change individual and collective behaviors that contribute to violence, such as bystander intervention, healthy communication, and consent education, can promote positive and respectful behaviors (Elias-Lambert & Black, 2016; Koss, 2018; Linder, 2018). Sexual violence prevention efforts are crucial for several reasons. Sexual violence prevention aims to create safe environments and prompt the well-being of individuals. By addressing the root causes and risk factors associated with sexual violence, prevention efforts work toward reducing incidents of violence and protecting individuals from harm. Prevention efforts also play a significant role in empowering survivors of sexual violence. By raising awareness, challenging rape myth acceptance and victim-blaming attitudes, and providing support services, prevention programs, like Green Dot, to promote healing resilience and survivor empowerment are crucial (Coker et al., 2015; Edwards, 2015).

It is critical to understand that sexual violence is not solely an individual issue, but is deeply rooted in social, cultural, and system factors. Rape myths are deeply embedded in cultural attitudes and beliefs often perpetuating victim-blaming attitudes, which place the responsibility and blame on survivors rather than on the perpetrators (Johnson & Johnson, 2020; Messenger & Koon-Magnin, 2018). By understanding and debunking these myths, victim-blaming narratives can be challenged to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Rape myths can also create barriers for survivors seeking support and justice (Arnowitz et al., 2010; Canan et al., 2016; Estrich, 2018). Misconceptions about rape, such as the belief that it only happens to certain types of people or that survivors are responsible for the assault, can deter survivors from reporting the

crime or seeking helps. Understanding these myths enables us to create a supportive environment that encourages survivors to come forward and access the assistance they need.

A comprehensive understanding of rape myths is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies. Throughout these three distinct studies, it became clear that despite ongoing efforts to combat these myths, the misconceptions still exist, albeit in different forms. One element that emerged is a continued misunderstanding surrounding consent and alcohol consumption. Study participants wrestled with the belief that if the individual is intoxicated, they are at least responsible for their assault. Another interesting finding is that participants who identified as men determined that false reporting happens at a much higher rate than is reported. This can undermine the experiences of survivors and contribute to skepticism when they come forward. Finally, those who identified as cisgender men had difficulty considering that an “individual” could be identified as a man in the GIIRMAS survey item, *When someone goes to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble*. Society often objectifies individuals based on their appearance, particularly women. This objectification reduces people to their physical attributes and assumes that their worth is solely determined by their sexual attractiveness (Ponterotto, 2016; Ramsey et al., 2017). Additionally, underlying misconceptions shown among all participants suggested that revealing clothing or a person’s appearance indicates their consent or sexual availability. This flawed reasoning fails to recognize that consent is a clear, voluntary, ongoing agreement between individuals and is not determined by clothing choices. Delving further into how societal norms and cultural conditioning shape perceptions and judgments around rape myths is warranted.

Further, it is conceivable that several social determinants including cultural customs and norms, the widespread use of social media platforms (Jatmiko et al., 2020; Salter, 2013) and/or

unknowingly possessing benevolent sexist attitudes. Benevolent sexism is a “set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist” (Glick & Fiske (1996, p. 491) in terms of viewing women as stereotypically in restricted roles but subjectively positive in feeling. When interviewing students in Study 2, most either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the GIIRMAS, but those identifying as cisgender men still grappled with the idea that men could be raped or that women could sexually offend. Previous research suggests that benevolent sexism is an ideology that perpetuates gender inequality. But despite its negative consequences, benevolent sexism is a prevalent ideology that some even find agreeable (Becker & Wright, 2011; Radke et al., 2016). When scanning decades of violence prevention research, the social, cultural, and individual factors that contribute to sexual violence have been studied extensively; however, the use of both feminist and protective frameworks in campus sexual violence prevention, how various forms of sexism lead to these frameworks, and how each impact collective engagement has yet to be determined (Becker & Swim, 2012; Yule et al, 2020). Because of this, there is often little to no acknowledgment or understanding of how ingrained and systemic sexist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, paired with silence and inaction, contribute to the overwhelming rates of sexual violence in their campus communities (Chapleau et al., 2007; Hong & Marine, 2018). It will be important to explore various forms of sexism, including hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, and how each relates to intersecting identities (racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious, and prior victimization) and prosocial influences on bystanders’ behavior may assist in determining how violence prevention educational strategies can be geared toward college students (Yule et al. 2020).

By addressing the misconceptions and beliefs that contribute to sexual violence, prevention efforts can be tailored to challenge and counteract these myths, reducing the

incidence of sexual violence. It is not only important to utilize valid tools to measure rape myths, beliefs, and attitudes surrounding sexual assault to gain a greater understanding of the current myths that permeate culture, but developing and implementing tools that can measure and address gender inequality, patriarchal norms, harmful masculinities, and power imbalances to create lasting change is crucial. Because sexual violence has significant public health implications, prevention efforts can help reduce the physical, psychological, and social consequences it has on individuals, families, and communities (Ford et al., 2017; Shields & Feder, 2016; Relyea & Ullman, 2015). Understanding rape myth acceptance also has important practice implications for addressing and combating sexual violence supporting survivors and promoting a culture of consent and gender equality. These practice implications include developing and implementing educational programs that aim to raise awareness about rape myths and their harmful impacts these programs can be targeted at various settings such as schools, colleges, workplaces, and communities by increasing knowledge and understanding individuals can challenge and reject misconceptions about sexual violence. Organizations can also design prevention programs that address the underlying attitudes and beliefs associated with rape myth acceptance. These programs should focus on promoting healthy relationships, consent, respect, and empathy providing accurate information about sexual violence and its consequences. As a result of these three studies, challenging rape myth acceptance requires targeted education and awareness specifically about consent. The more ambiguous items on both the GIIRMAS and (SGI-RMA were easier for the respondents to agree. Lacking a comprehensive understanding of consent and the importance of what clear and enthusiastic affirmative consent resembles could help reshape societal attitudes and prevent victim blaming.

Providing training for professionals working in fields such as law enforcement, judiciary, health care social work, and education should address the influence of rape myths on their practices and decision making. By understanding and challenging their own biases, professionals can provide more supportive and trauma informed responses to survivors. It is also critical to ensure that support services for survivors of sexual violence are grounded in an understanding of rape myth acceptance service providers should be trained to recognize and address the impact of rape myths on survivors avoid victim blaming and provide empathic and nonjudgmental support. Next, promoting media literacy skills among individuals to critically analyze and challenge rape myths perpetuated by media sources media platforms journalists and content creators should be encouraged to adopt reasonable reporting practices that avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes or minimizing the seriousness of sexual violence (Pella, 2021; Skull et al., 2019).

Further research and evaluation can be conducted to assess the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing rape myth acceptance; this could help refine and improve prevention and intervention strategies and identify best practices. For example, understanding the nature of rape myths can bolster advocacy for policy and legal reforms that promote a survivor centered approach. This understanding could also challenge rape myths within the justice system this can include reforms related to sexual assault laws reporting mechanisms and the training of legal professionals. Recognizing and addressing current rape myths and their own acceptance of rape myths at multiple levels, including education prevention and support services, media and policy, society can work towards dismantling harmful beliefs supporting survivors and creating an environment that fosters respect, consent, and equality. By raising awareness about sexual violence and dispelling misconceptions, we can foster a greater understanding of the realities of sexual violence, promote empathy and support for survivors, and encourage collective action to

address and prevent it. In conclusion, sexual violence affects the safety and well-being of entire communities. Prevention efforts contribute to creating safer communities where individuals can live without fear of sexual violence, fostering trust, community cohesion, and social progress. By challenging power imbalances, including all members of society, promoting gender equality, and advocating for policy reforms, a more just and equitable society can be built for all.

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APPENDIX A. STUDY 2 INFORMED CONSENT

Study Overview and Recruitment Form

What is the purpose of the study?

You could take part in a study of students' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to sexual assault and rape myths. Your responses will help us understand the extent of students' gender-based relationship experiences and attitudes about sexual assault situations.

What are the qualifications?

- 18 years of age or older
- Undergraduate college student currently enrolled at a post-secondary institution in the United States
- Access to the internet and Zoom VoIP software

What will I need to do?

You will be asked to take a 19-question survey. This survey will take about 10 minutes and asks questions about relationships between genders in contemporary society and students' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to sexual assault. You may leave at any time. You may also skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

Do I have to be in this study?

Your participation is completely voluntary—you may refuse to participate without penalty, withdraw at any time, and skip questions as your comfort level dictates.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

Due to the personal nature of the questions involved, the research may involve some discomfort and/or emotional distress for participants. Multiple precautions taken to protect your information. Your identity will not be associated with any information provided and will only be known to the individuals working on the project. The study will contribute to research that will improve gender and sex identity inclusion in collegiate sexual assault training efforts.

Is this survey confidential?

The survey was designed to protect your privacy and confidentiality. To ensure your confidentiality, a password-protected, encrypted technology to receive, transmit, and store data will be used. Your answers are stored in a separate file from your contact information. Any reports or articles written will also be limited to data that does not identify individual respondents. Records will be kept confidential to the extent provided by federal, state, and local law. Your contact information will be stored—in a separate, secure file from data—to send you follow-up emails if necessary. Upon completion of the study, all names and e-mail addresses will be destroyed.

Is the interview confidential?

The interview will be conducted in a closed room via Zoom communications. The interview will be audio recorded only with your permission. If permission to record the interview is granted information from the interview will be stored on a password-protected network only accessible

by the interviewer until the project is over and destroyed upon completion of the project. Your name will not be associated with any information you provide and will only be known to the individuals working on the project. The information obtained in this study will be a part of a published dissertation, but participants' identities will be kept strictly confidential.

Will I be compensated for my time?

Yes, you will be compensated. In appreciation of your efforts, you will receive a \$20 Visa gift card.

Interested in participating?

If you are interested in participating in this research, please select your answers to the questions below.

Q1 To be eligible, you must be 18 years old to complete this survey. Please select your choice below.

Yes, I am at least 18 years old.

No, I am not yet 18 years old.

Q2 Are you an undergraduate college student currently enrolled in a U.S. college or university?

Yes, I am currently an enrolled undergraduate student.

No, I am not a currently enrolled undergraduate student.

Q3 Can we contact you to participate?

Yes, please contact me to participate. I will enter my email address below.

No, I do not want to participate.

APPENDIX B. GIIRMAS SURVEY ITEMS

BLOCK 1: RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCED

Please read each of the following statements and select the response that best matches your agreement/ disagreement (*Rating Scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Not sure, Agree, Strongly Agree*):

1. If an individual is raped while they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.
2. When an individual goes to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble.
3. If an individual goes to a room alone with another person at a party, it is their own fault if they are raped.
4. If an individual "hooks up" with a lot of people, eventually they are going to get into trouble
5. When an individual rapes, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.
6. Individuals don't usually intend to force sex onto others, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
7. Rape happens when an individual's sex drive gets out of control.
8. If an individual is drunk, they might rape another person unintentionally.
9. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.
10. It shouldn't be considered rape if an individual is drunk and didn't realize what they were doing.
11. If an individual doesn't physically resist sex-even if they protest verbally- it can't really be considered rape.
12. If an individual doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.
13. If the accused rapist doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it rape.
14. If an individual doesn't say "no", they can't claim rape.
15. A lot of times, someone who says they were raped agreed to have sex and then regrets it afterward.
16. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at someone.
17. A lot of times, individuals who say they were raped often led the other person on and then had regrets.
18. A lot of times, individuals who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.
19. Individuals who are caught cheating on their partner sometimes claim it was rape

BLOCK 2: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Have you experienced the following?

- Been stalked, followed, or received repeated unwanted messages, texts, emails, etc. from someone that made me uncomfortable
- Been in a relationship that was controlling or abusive (physically, sexually, psychologically, emotionally, or financially)
- Been sent sexual messages or pictures that I did not want (including porn)
- Been asked or pressured for a date, hook up, or sexual favors even though I had already said no
- Been touched sexually (breasts, buttocks, or genitals) when I did not want them
- Had someone expose themselves to me (breasts, buttocks, or genitals) when I did not want them to
- Had someone say sexual things to me that I did not want to hear (catcalling, verbal harassment)
- Had someone make unwanted sexual gestures or imitated sexual motions when I did not want them to
- Been physically forced to have sex (intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, or penetration with an object) against my will
- Been forced to have sex because a person threatened to harm me
- Someone had sex with me against my will when I was physically unable to consent to sex (e.g., passed out, unconscious, or not physically able to respond) because someone had slipped me drugs or extra alcohol
- Was unable to consent to sex because I took alcohol or drugs voluntarily
- Somehow escaped a situation where I was in the process of being physically forced to have sex
- I have not experienced any of these

BLOCK 3: DEMOGRAPHIC ITEMS

Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your current sexuality or sexual identity,

- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Heterosexual
- Pansexual
- Queer
- I identify as _____

Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your current gender identity.
(Please mark all that apply - the options below are randomly ordered)

- Genderqueer
- Genderfluid
- Gender Non-Conforming
- Man
- Non-Binary
- Woman
- I identify as _____

Do you identify as transgender?

- Yes
- No

Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your race or racial identity.
(Mark all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native (A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America, including Central America. Tribal Affiliation: _____)
- Asian (A person having origins in any of the original peoples of East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent)
- Black or African American (A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa)
- Hispanic or Latina/o/x (A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin)
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands)
- White
- Another race or ethnicity not listed above: _____

How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic identity?

I identify as _____

Regarding your current religious viewpoint, with which of the following do you most closely identify? (Mark all that apply)

- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- I identify as _____

What is your current academic class year?

- First-Year
- Second-Year
- Third-Year
- Fourth-Year
- Fifth-year or more (undergraduate)

Do you identify as any of the following? (Mark all that apply)

- Member of a social fraternity
- Member of a social sorority
- Transfer student
- Current or former member of the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard
- Student-athlete on a team sponsored by your university's athletic department
- Another university affiliated club not mentioned.
- I do not identify with any of the following.

APPENDIX C. GIIRMAS CONGITIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Success in measuring rape myths among gender identities and sex identities will depend upon the quality of data collected during the cognitive interviews. To develop a robust and inclusive rape myth acceptance survey, a pretest will be conducted. The GIIRMAS scale items will be examined to determine whether survey respondents consider integration of sex and gender considerations inclusive and representative of their experience. The items will then be reworked to decrease response error. This guide provides an overview of cognitive interviewing techniques that will be used during the pretest.

Cognitive Interviews and Data Collection

Purpose of the pretest and the purpose of a cognitive interview is to:

- Understand whether each question gathers the intended information from the respondent
- Evaluate that respondents understand each question in a consistent manner
- Dig deep into each question to understand how the respondent reacts, interprets, and answers a question.
- The interviewer also seeks to understand how the respondent has come to their answer to a particular question

Length of a pretest interview: The interviewer will interview respondents for up to 90 minutes. As each question requires more than just asking the question and recording the answer, the interviewer will only ask respondents to answer one or two questions per survey item to limit the interview to 90 minutes.

General information on conducting effective interviews: It is important to understand the interview from the respondent's point of view. Every interviewee will be different and could potentially give different responses. The interviewer should not expect an answer or reasoning to be the same for each respondent. Furthermore, some questions may be considered sensitive to the participant. The interviewer should not assume that the respondent is comfortable with everything asked and is ready to answer every question effectively.

Please find below behavioral guidelines to follow to conduct more effective interviews:

Behavior	Guideline
Respect Confidentiality	Inform the interviewee that their confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process. (Please read the informed consent form).
Respect Participant's Time	Understand that the participant is answering their survey in their free time. Do not keep them past agreed upon time and understand if they must leave.
Tact	Do not force the participant into answering a question.
Friendly Disposition	Always maintain a friendly demeanor with participants.
Body Language	Maintain good eye contact and always appear attentive.
Pace of Interview	Do not rush the interview. Also, do not allow an answer to go on a tangent and deviate from the interview. Maintain a comfortable, appropriate pace.
Patience	It may take the participant a few moments to comprehend the question and to formulate an appropriate response. Also, you may need to repeat the question. Be patient throughout the process. Never make the participant to feel rushed or uncomfortable.
Acceptance	Never be judgmental or critical of an answer that the participant provides.
Appreciation	Always thank the participant for their time and cooperation.

Below are some guidelines to follow while asking questions to develop a comfortable atmosphere:

Topic	Guideline
Right or Wrong Answers	Ensure that there are neither right nor wrong answers and the interview is not a test.
Read All Options	You must read all answer options to the participant clearly except for "DON'T KNOW."
Reading Questions Reading Questions cont.	Read the questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As written on the survey • In a pleasant and professional voice Do not change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wording • Ordering of Questions
Making Assumptions	Never make assumptions about answers with questions, such "I know this doesn't apply to you, but..."

Probing in the cognitive interview methodology:

For each survey question asked:

- Request from the respondent how they came to this answer
- Request from the respondent what the question means to them and if it can be worded differently such that it is easy for all other respondents to answer

Below are some questions and statements to use to come to a complete understanding of the question and answer (example probes to use in a pretest interview):

- “What made you say that?”
- “Why did you respond that way?”
- “What does that mean to you?” or “What does that word mean to you?”
- “Please tell me what I was asking in your own words.”
- Restate their answer. For example: “So you agree that each customer requires a unique approach?”
- “What is going through your mind?”
- “Can you take me through the steps of how you came to that answer?”
- “What were you thinking when you first answered the question?”

This table lists responses that need probing:

If the participant replies...	Then...
“I don’t know” (DK)	Repeat the question
“I still don’t know”	Probe once more before recording “DK. For example, ask “Could you give me your best estimate?” <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This may mean the participant:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Is taking time to think and wants to gain time○ Does not want to answer because of personal reasons○ Does not know and has no opinion
“Not Applicable” (NA)	Ask them why it is not applicable. Write down NA when clear that the question is irrelevant
Making Assumptions	Never make assumptions about answers with questions, such “I know this doesn’t apply to you, but...”

The table below provides techniques to use when probing further:

Technique	Guideline
Repeat the Question	The participant may answer when they hear the question a second time
Make a Pause	This gives the participant time to collect his/her thoughts and expand on his/her answer
Repeat the Participant's Reply	This is often a highly effective way to give the participant the opportunity to reflect on the answer they have given
Use Neutral Probes	<p>Never make assumptions about answers with questions, such “I know this doesn’t apply to you, but...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use questions such as, “Is there anything else you would like to add” or “Could you tell me more about...” However, never give the impression that the answer provided is incorrect or that you disprove of it. <p>Additionally, the interviewer may need to restate the question to further clarify when the participant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is taking a long time to answer the question • Asks for a specific part of the question to be repeated • Asks for one, a few, or all the options to be repeated • Asks for the clarification of a word or a phrase <p>In addition to probing to meet the goals of the pretest, the interviewer may find that they will need to probe further to get an appropriate response when the participant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seems to understand the question but gives an inappropriate response • Does not seem to understand the question • Cannot make up their mind • Digresses from the topic or gives irrelevant information • Needs to expand on what they said to clarify the response • Gives incomplete information or the answer is unclear

Additional details to keep in mind during a pretest:

1. The informed consent form is also part of the pretest. Please note any questions respondents may have on this form. Electronic consent will be needed prior to proceeding with the rest of the survey.
2. During the introduction and informed consent form sections, the interviewer should make eye contact with the respondent. The first exchanges should focus on rapport building and making the respondent feel comfortable.
3. The interviewer will record throughout the interview. The goal of this is to understand how long the quantitative and qualitative sections of the survey take to complete. Interviewers should record the time accurately by filling in the blanks next to 'START TIME.' At the end of the survey, after thanking the respondent for their time, the interviewer should also fill in the 'END TIME.'

How to conduct cognitive interviewing:

1. The interviewer should take note of whether respondents understand the introductory text provided for each section of the survey, including the main introduction. The goal is to make sure that each section introduction is clear, includes all the appropriate information, and does not include any unnecessary information.
2. The interviewer should look out for "confusion, contradictions, ambiguity and reluctance" in the respondent. When the interviewer notices any of these reactions, they will use the probing as well as think aloud methods described earlier.
3. Throughout the entire survey, the interviewer should write notes about any issues or questions that the respondent has (Note: interviewers should organize these comments/issues by question number); the interviewer should also write down their suggestions for solutions to these issues/questions. Some specific issues interviewers should write notes about include whether respondents feel that certain questions or statements in the survey are repetitive.
4. The interviewer should ask if the contact information collected (with the purpose of contacting the respondent later) is sufficient.
5. Based on learnings from pretest interviews, the interviewer will review survey section order. They should record respondent reactions to the order and progression of questions and sections. One objective of the survey is to ensure that respondents feel comfortable sharing sensitive information with the interviewer; this requires developing a rapport with the respondent during the interview - question and section order are important.

Challenges during the interview:

Interruptions: Interruptions may occur during an interview. If they become too long or too frequent, the interviewer should suggest continuing the interview at a better time. The interviewer should always remain polite and patient even when interrupted.

Refusal to Answer: Some participants may refuse the interview. Some may not refuse outright but may later express hesitancy, reservation, or hostility. Success in obtaining cooperation will depend upon the interviewer’s manner and resourcefulness. The interviewer must not force participants to respond to the whole interview or any part of the survey if they choose not to do so.

Handling Refusals: The interviewer should be prepared to obtain cooperation from a participant who does not want to participate. The interviewer should remain pleasant, good-natured, and professional. Here are some guidelines to help with handling refusal situations:

If....	Then...
The participant becomes defensive	Show patience and understanding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide token agreement and understanding of his/her viewpoint, that is, saying something like, “I can understand that” or “You certainly have the right to feel that way.” Convey the importance of the survey to the participant. Try again later.
The interviewer thinks they may get a “no to the interview”	Suggest coming back later before getting a partial or definite “no.”
The participant misunderstood the purpose	Explain the purpose again.
There are language barriers	The interviewer should be aware that interviewees may need accommodations (interpreters, etc.) to convey and receive the correct information.

References:

- Evans, D. R., Hearn, M. T., Uhlemann, M. R., & Ivey, A. E. (2016). *Essential interviewing: A programmed approach to effective communication*. Cengage Learning.
- Fowler, F. J., & Cosenza, C. (2012). Writing effective questions. In *International Handbook of Survey Methodology* (pp. 136-160). Routledge.
- Willis, G. (2014). Pretesting of health survey questionnaires: Cognitive interviewing, usability testing, and behavior coding. *Health Survey Methods*, 217-242.
- Willis, G. B. (1999). *Cognitive interviewing: A "how to" guide*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Research Triangle Institute.

APPENDIX D. GIIRMAS CONGITIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Comprehension/Interpretation

1. What does the study introduction tell you?
2. The survey uses a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. What does 1 represent? What does 2 represent? What does 3 represent? What does 4 represent? What does 5 represent?
3. In item #1, *If an individual is raped while they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control*, who is “an individual”? Who is “they”?
4. In item #2, *When individuals go to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble*, who are “individuals”? What clothes are “revealing” clothes? What does the phrase “asking for trouble” mean?
5. In item #3, *If an individual goes to a room alone with another at a party, it is their own fault if they are raped*, who is “an individual”? Whom does “another” represent?
6. In item #4, *If an individual "hooks up" with a lot of people, eventually they are going to get in trouble*, who is “an individual”? What does the term “hooks up” mean?
7. In item #5, *When individuals rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex* who are “individuals”? Who is “their”? What is “rape”?
8. In item #6, *Individuals don't usually intend to force sex onto others, but something they get too sexually carried away*, who are “individuals”? Who are “others”? What does the phrase “get too sexually carried away” mean?
9. In item #7, *Rape happens when an individual's sex drive gets out of control*, who is “an individual”? What does “out of control” mean?
10. In item #8, *If an individual is drunk, they might rape someone unintentionally*, who is “an individual”? What does “rape someone unintentionally” mean?
11. In item #9, *If both people are drunk, it can't be rape*, who are “people”?
12. In item #10, *It shouldn't be considered rape if an individual is drunk and didn't realize what they were doing*, who is “an individual”?
13. In item #11, *If an individual doesn't physically resist sex-even if protesting verbally- it can't really be considered rape*, who is “an individual”? What does “physically resist” mean?
14. In item #12, *If someone doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape*, who is “someone”? What does “physically fight back” mean?
15. In item #13, *If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it rape*, who is the “rapist”? What does the term “weapon” mean?
16. In item #14, *If an individual doesn't say "no", they can't claim rape*, who is “an individual”? What action is the individual saying “no” to?
17. In item #15, *A lot of times, individuals who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it*, who are “individuals”?
18. In item #16, *Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at individuals*, who are “individuals”? What does the phrase “way of getting back at” mean?
19. In item #17, *A lot of times, individuals who say they were raped often led the other person on and then had regrets*, who are “individuals”? Who is the “other person”? What does the phrase “led the other person on” mean?
20. In item #18, *A lot of times, individuals who claim they were raped just have emotional problems*, who are “individuals”? What does the term “emotional problems” mean?

21. In item #19, *Individuals who are caught cheating on their partner sometimes claim that it was rape*, who are “individuals?”
22. What changes would you recommend to the survey?

Additional probes as needed:

Paraphrasing

1. Can you repeat the question I just asked you in your own words?

Confidence Judgment

1. How sure are you?

Recall

1. How did you come up with your answer?

Specific

1. Why do you say that you think....?

General

1. How did you arrive at that answer?
2. Was that easy or hard to answer?
3. I notice you paused. Tell me what you were thinking.
4. Tell me more about that.

APPENDIX E. STUDY 3 INFORMED CONSENT

Overview and Consent

Study Overview

Why are you contacting me?

You have been selected to take part in a study of relationships between genders in contemporary society and students' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to sexual assault. Your responses—along with those of your peers—will help us understand the extent of students' gender-based relationship experiences and attitudes about sexual assault situations.

What is the purpose of this form?

Since this study requires your informed consent, it is important that you read the following description. After the study has been explained to you, you will be asked to make an informed decision to participate. You may then indicate your consent and start the survey. You may print this consent form for your records.

Trigger Warning:

This survey asks about your personal experience with sexual misconduct, such as harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of violence. Some of the language used in this survey is explicit and some people may find it uncomfortable, but it is important that we ask the questions in this way so that you are clear about what we mean. Information on how to get help, if you need it, appears at the end of the survey.

What will I need to do?

You will be asked to complete a 19-question survey. This survey will take about 10 minutes and asks questions about relationships between genders in contemporary society and students' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to sexual assault. You may leave the survey at any time. You may also skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

Do I have to be in this study?

Your participation is completely voluntary—you may refuse to participate without penalty, withdraw at any time, and skip questions as your comfort level dictates.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

Due to the personal nature of the questions involved, the research may involve some discomfort and/or emotional distress for participants. Information on how to get help, if you need it, appears at the end of the survey. Your participation in this study will contribute to research that will improve gender and sex identity inclusion in collegiate sexual assault training efforts.

Is this survey confidential?

The survey was designed to protect your privacy and confidentiality. To ensure your confidentiality, a password-protected, encrypted technology to receive, transmit, and store data will be used. Your answers are stored in a separate file from your contact information. Any reports or articles written will also be limited to data that does not identify individual respondents. Records will be kept confidential to the extent provided by federal, state, and local

law. Your contact information will be stored—in a separate, secure file from data—to send you follow-up emails if necessary. Upon completion of the study, all names and e-mail addresses will be destroyed.

What if I have questions about the survey?

If you have questions about this research, the survey questions, or this consent process, please contact Melanie Fierstine a melanie.fierstine@ndsu.edu or phone at (218) 329-7531 or the Primary Investigator, Dr. Laura Dahl via email at laura.s.dahl@ndsu.edu or phone at (701) 231-8589. For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints, you may contact NDSU's Office of Research and Creativity at (701) 231-8045.

Q1 To be eligible, you must be 18 years old to complete this survey. Please select your choice below.

Yes, I am at least 18 years old.

No, I am not yet 18 years old.

APPENDIX F. SGI-RMA SURVEY ITEMS

BLOCK 1: RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE

Please read each of the following statements and select the response that best matches your agreement/ disagreement (*Rating Scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Not sure, Agree, Strongly Agree*):

1. If someone is raped while they are drunk, they are at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.
2. When someone goes to parties wearing revealing clothes, they are asking for trouble.
3. If someone goes to a room alone with another person at a party, it is their own fault if they are raped.
4. If someone "hooks up" with a lot of people, eventually they are going to get into trouble
5. When someone rapes, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.
6. Individuals don't usually intend to force sex onto others, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
7. Rape happens when someone's sex drive gets out of control.
8. If someone is drunk, they might rape another person unintentionally.
9. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.
10. It shouldn't be considered rape if someone is drunk and didn't realize what they were doing.
11. If someone doesn't physically resist sex-even if they protest verbally- it can't really be considered rape.
12. If someone doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.
13. If the accused rapist doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it rape.
14. If the accused rapist doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it rape.
15. If someone doesn't say "no", they can't claim rape.
16. A lot of times, someone who says they were raped agreed to have sex and then regrets it afterward.
17. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at another person.
18. A lot of times, individuals who say they were raped often led the other person on and then had regrets.
19. A lot of times, individuals who claim they were raped just have emotional problems. Individuals who are caught cheating on their partner sometimes claim it was rape

BLOCK 2: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Have you experienced the following?

- Been stalked, followed, or received repeated unwanted messages, texts, emails, etc. from someone that made me uncomfortable
- Been in a relationship that was controlling or abusive (physically, sexually, psychologically, emotionally, or financially)
- Been sent sexual messages or pictures that I did not want (including porn)
- Been asked or pressured for a date, hook up, or sexual favors even though I had already said no
- Been touched sexually (breasts, buttocks, or genitals) when I did not want them to
- Had someone expose themselves to me (breasts, buttocks, or genitals) when I did not want them to
- Had someone say sexual things to me that I did not want to hear (catcalling, verbal harassment)
- Had someone make unwanted sexual gestures or imitated sexual motions when I did not want them to
- Been physically forced to have sex (intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, or penetration with an object) against my will
- Been forced to have sex because a person threatened to harm me
- Someone had sex with me against my will when I was physically unable to consent to sex (e.g., passed out, unconscious, or not physically able to respond) because someone had slipped me drugs or extra alcohol
- Was unable to consent to sex because I took alcohol or drugs voluntarily
- Somehow escaped a situation where I was in the process of being physically forced to have sex
- I have not experienced any of these

BLOCK 3: DEMOGRAPHIC ITEMS

Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your current sexuality or sexual identity.

- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Heterosexual
- Pansexual
- Queer
- I identify as _____

Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your current gender identity.
(Please mark all that apply - the options below are randomly ordered)

- Genderqueer
- Genderfluid
- Gender Non-Conforming
- Man
- Non-Binary
- Woman
- I identify as _____

Do you identify as transgender?

- Yes
- No

Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your race or racial identity. (Mark all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native (A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America, including Central America.
Tribal Affiliation: _____)
- Asian (A person having origins in any of the original peoples of East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent)
- Black or African American (A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa)
- Hispanic or Latina/o/x (A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin)
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands)
- White
- Another race or ethnicity not listed above: _____

How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic identity?

I identify as _____

Regarding your current religious viewpoint, with which of the following do you most closely identify? (Mark all that apply)

- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- I identify as _____

What is your current academic class year?

- First-Year
- Second-Year
- Third-Year
- Fourth-Year
- Fifth-year or more (undergraduate)

Do you identify as any of the following? (Mark all that apply)

- Member of a social fraternity
- Member of a social sorority
- Transfer student
- Current or former member of the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard
- Student-athlete on a team sponsored by your university's athletic department
- Another university affiliated club not mentioned.
- I do not identify with any of the following.