

Perceived Victim Blame and Risk in College Students' Perceptions of Rape Myths in  
Varying Sexual Assault Scenarios

by

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## ABSTRACT

Do the circumstances of sexual assault situations shape how individuals view a victims' blameworthiness and risk? To examine this, data were collected on college students' perceptions of a victims' blameworthiness and a victims' perceived amount of risk specifically looking at how these views differ across scenarios portraying varying rape myths. College students (n=395) from Arizona State University were recruited via professors to participate in the survey. In the analysis, chi-square tests were run and zero-inflated ordered probit logistic regressions (ZIOP) with clustered standard errors predicting risk and blame perceptions across scenarios were conducted. The results show that the college students' perceptions of risk and victim blameworthiness did vary across the rape myths that were shown within the scenarios. The chi-square tests demonstrated that for all three of the risk and blame questions, respondents' answers on the outcome were dependent on the scenario. The ZIOP demonstrated that overall, the respondents were unwilling to assign risk and blame to the victims in the scenarios, however, when they assigned risk and blame answers varied across the different scenarios. This indicates that the rape myths portrayed in each scenario changed how individuals rated a victim's perceived blameworthiness and risk. This has implications for the continuation of exposure to sexual assault awareness training and courses.

**KEYWORDS:** sexual assault; rape myths; victim blaming; blameworthiness; victim risk; college students

## DEDICATION

I dedicate my master's thesis to my family and friends. I could not have done this without all your love and support. To Dr. Danielle Wallace, your consistent and never-ending encouragement has and will continue to inspire me. To Ty, your support and love throughout my graduate career has pushed me to be a better learner and researcher. I am truly thankful for all that you all have done for me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	3
Rape Myths .....	3
Clothing and Attire Blame.....	5
Clothing and Attire Risk.....	6
Drinking Behavior Blame.....	7
Drinking Behavior Risk.....	8
Situational Characteristics Blame.....	8
Situational Characteristics Risk.....	9
Rape Myths and Their Role in Risk and Blameworthiness Perceptions .	9
Victim and Outsider Risk Perceptions .....	10
Victim Own Perceptions of Risk.....	10
Outsider Perceptions of Victim Risk.....	11
Victim and Outsider Blameworthiness Perceptions.....	14
Victim Own Perceptions of Blameworthiness .....	14
Outsider Perceptions of Victim Blameworthiness .....	15
3 CURRENT STUDY .....	17
Research Question 1 .....	17
Research Question 2 .....	17

CHAPTER	Page
4 METHODS .....	18
Participants.....	18
Survey .....	18
Scenarios .....	19
Procedure .....	21
Data .....	22
Collection Methods.....	22
Variables .....	23
Analysis Plan .....	24
5 RESULTS .....	26
Chi-Square Tests Across Scenarios.....	26
Zero-inflated Ordered Probits.....	26
Predicted Probabilities for Risk.....	27
Predicted Probabilities for Clothing Blame.....	29
Predicted Probabilities for Drinking Blame .....	30
6 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS .....	33
REFERENCES .....	41
APPENDIX	

APPENDIX	Page
I	PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST VICTIM BLAMEWORTHINESS AND RISK QUESTIONS ..... 46
II	VICTIM RISK AND BLAMEWORTHINESS SCENARIOS ..... 48
III	QUESTIONS FOLLOWING SCENARIOS ..... 50
IV	SUMMARY STATISTICS – CONTROL VARIABLES ..... 52
V	SUMMARY STATISTICS – DEPENDENT VARIABLES ..... 54
VI	CHI SQUARE TESTS FOR SCENARIOS ..... 56
VII	ZERO-INFLATED ORDERED PROBIT MODEL SHOWN AS ODDS RATIOS ..... 58
VIII	ZIOP – PREDICTIVE PROBABILITY FOR RISK PERCEPTIONS ..... 60
IX	ZIOP – PREDICTIVE PROBABILITY FOR CLOTHING BLAME PERCEPTIONS ..... 62
X	ZIOP – PREDICTIVE PROBABILITY FOR DRINKING BLAME PERCEPTIONS ..... 64

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Sexual assaults on college campuses are considered a huge problem for college students. In fact, 13% of all students, both graduate and undergraduate, experience sexual violence (RAINN, 2021, n.d.). Additionally, among graduate and professional students 9.7% of females and 2.5% of males experience rape or sexual assault and when looking at undergraduate students 26.4% of females and 6.8% of males experience sexual violence (RAINN, 2021, n.d.). Due to the high number of assaults occurring on college campuses, many have implemented awareness and courses for sexual assaults. It is important to consider the positive effects these victimology courses and awareness for sexual assaults can have on individuals' perceptions (Fox & Cook, 2011). Understanding college student perceptions of sexual assault issues like victim blameworthiness and perceived victim risk can help us better understand why victims are blamed for their victimizations and how to ensure that college students continue being exposed to this information for better victim-blaming prevention.

Both perceived victim blame, and perceived victim risk are commonly overlooked when examining sexual assault situations as it has become normalized overtime. More specifically, victim blaming has been found to cause both mental health issues as well as poor coping methods in victims (Conaway & Lohr, 1994; Waller, 1990; Xie et al., 2006). Understanding how rape myths and risk factors play a role in sexual assaults and working to find solutions may help individuals avoid victim-blaming perceptions in the first place. Recognizing that a victim should not be blamed for their assault is important in ensuring that they have a good experience within the criminal

justice system and allows the criminal justice system to avoid revictimization behaviors and reduce trauma experienced by the victim. By examining college students' perceptions on both perceived victim risk and perceived victim blameworthiness, the criminal justice system can gain a better understanding of how to combat these harmful perceptions of victims specifically through increased education on college campuses.

Within this study, perceived victim risk is defined as the amount, or degree to which, an individual perceives that the victim is putting themselves at a higher risk for sexual assault. Blameworthiness is defined as the amount, or degree to which, an individual considers the victim at fault or to blame for their victimization (Jones, 2021). The terms victim and survivor may be used interchangeably within this study to recognize that individuals may prefer to identify as one or the other.

The goal of this study is to better understand respondents' perceptions of victim risk and victim blame across different scenarios to reduce blame in sexual assault cases and understand how respondents' attribute risk to victims. Understanding these perceptions may also have implications for more exposure to sexual assault courses on college campuses. This study can create better understanding of victim-blaming by looking how believing in rape myths may change these perceptions for college students and how individual rape myths may alter how individuals feel about blame and risk.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

To review the literature, it is important to start with an understanding of different rape myths, including clothing and attire, drinking, and situational characteristics. Then I will focus on the literature associated with a victim's perceived risk in sexual assaults and how it varies amongst victims and outsider perceptions. Outsiders in this study include anyone perceiving the sexual victimization from outside standpoint other the victim and the perpetrator of the sexual violence. I will then end with a discussion of perceived victim blameworthiness and how it also varies amongst victims and outsider perspectives.

#### **Rape Myths**

Rape myths are described as an explanation of the norms in society that allow individuals to excuse sexual violence and are most often defined as “the attitudes or false beliefs about rape that minimize the victim's injury and/or blame the victim for their own victimization” (Bohner et al., 2006; Burt, M., 1980; Edwards et al., 2011; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010; Jones, 2021). In the criminal justice system and sexual assault cases, rape myths are misused to reduce the punishment for the perpetrator and instead place the blame of the sexual assault onto the victim (Untied et al., 2012; Zelin et al., 2019). Specifically, rape myths surrounding a victims' drinking behavior have been misused to justify why a perpetrator may have sexually assaulted someone, with most individuals saying the perpetrator was too drunk to know why it was wrong, yet a victim may be perceived to lose credibility in their story if they were drinking at the time of the sexual violence (Zelin et al., 2019). Another common rape myth pertains to the misperception that victims are sexually victimized due to their clothing and attire, with provocative

clothing being perceived by some as sexually inviting (Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Whatley, 2005). More recently, rape myths have been used to identify what circumstances are perceived to place a victim at more risk for sexual assault. These circumstances may include things like the victims clothing, drinking behavior, and situational characteristics surrounding the victims' assault. The ideas of both victim-blaming and victim risk revolves around the victim's clothing, drinking behavior, and situational characteristics at the time of the sexual victimization. Sexual assault cases where the rape myths cannot be easily applied are seen in the criminal justice system as being a "real rape" or a "believable victimization" (Fisher et al., 2003; Parratt & Pina, 2016). This demonstrates that in sexual assault cases where criminal justice officials are likely to have an acceptance of rape myths, the assaults are more likely to be considered less serious than other sexual assault cases where rape myths were not present.

Because rape myths are wrongly accepted within the criminal justice system as valid reasons for perpetrators' to be involved in sexual violence, it is easy to understand the impact that rape myths, which facilitate blaming the victim, can have on the way these cases are handled (Jones, 2021). In fact, rape myths can affect the entire process a victim goes through in the criminal justice system including police interactions including reporting rates, court experiences, and how the perpetrators case is handled. The literature has shown that victims are hesitant to report sexual victimizations to the police and when they do, they are met with unfavorable behaviors such as doubts from police officers (Spohn & Tellis, 2019).

Rape myths are also often used to justify sexual violence and may also change how judges perceive the victim's case (Beichner & Spohn, 2012). This can result in

changes in how the perpetrator is handled within the criminal justice system including the amount of punishment they receive as well as how they are perceived by criminal justice officials. This impacts the likelihood that the perpetrator feels that they can get away with the crime, potentially increasing the probability of these kinds of events occurring (Bohner et al., 2006). Many studies have also found that individuals with a higher acceptance of rape myths tend to have a high tendency to victim blame (Basow & Minieri, 2011; Frese et al., 2004). It is plausible that in sexual assault cases, rape myth acceptance also influences an individual's perceptions of risk for the victim in varying situations. In fact, individuals who have a higher rape myth acceptance may have perceptions that result in a belief that the victim is putting themselves at a high risk by partaking in these behaviors.

In the next section, I will discuss different types of rape myths and how they contribute to perceived victim blameworthiness and perceived victim risk.

### ***Clothing and Attire Blame***

Individuals may wrongly perceive victims as more responsible for their sexual victimization when the victim who was sexually assaulted dressed more provocatively at the time of their sexual victimization (Whatley, 1996). The rape myth surrounding a victims' clothing is commonly brought up through questions like "what were you wearing?". In many ways this rape myth gives outsiders the opportunity to miscategorize victims as individuals who were "asking for it" or "had it coming" due to their choice of clothing when they were sexually assaulted. Women are often mischaracterized as signaling to those around them that they are open to sexual advances when they are wearing provocative clothing. Multiple studies have shown that in sexual assault cases

where a victim was wearing provocative clothing, the clothing is misinterpreted by others to demonstrate the victim's sexual intent in which the victim is 'asking for' the sexual violence (Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Whatley, 2005). A victim's clothing is often wrongly used by individuals to demonstrate why the sexual violence may have been warranted or 'wanted' by the victim influencing criminal justice processes (Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Whatley, 2005). Using the victim's clothing in the criminal justice system creates a problematic perception because it places blame onto the victim and takes blame away from the perpetrator.

### ***Clothing and Attire Risk***

The rape myth pertaining to the clothing and attire of a victim in which others wrongly assume that wearing revealing clothing warrants sexual violence also adds to an individual's perceptions of a victim's risk. Many individuals' wrongly associate provocative clothing with sexual interest meaning that the perpetrator may see the victim as welcoming the sexual violence (Farris et al., 2006). It's plausible that this problematic association creates the interpretation that provocative clothing puts victims at a higher risk for sexual assault as they are "indicating sexual interest". Farris and colleagues demonstrated that individuals who are dressed in a more conservative manner were perceived as "friendly" rather than "sexually interested" (Farris et al., 2006). This misunderstanding and association with women's clothing creates an issue in which women who are dressed conservatively may be perceived to be at lower risk than their counterparts. This is problematic because it indicates women should be blamed for their sexual victimization based on their clothing choice. While a victim's clothing plays an

important role in individuals' perceptions of blameworthiness and risk, drinking behavior has been shown to also play a large role in these perceptions.

### ***Drinking Behavior Blame***

A victim's drinking behavior during or around the time of their sexual violence is commonly perceived in sexual assault cases to make the victim less credible (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Horvath & Brown, 2007; Lynch et al., 2013; Sims et al., 2007). Often throughout the case process, a victims' drinking behavior is misinterpreted as a way to understand how credible the victim is in recalling the event of the sexual assault. This rape myth often has an opposite effect where it is commonly used to excuse the behavior of the perpetrator (Zelin et al., 2019). In fact, oftentimes bystanders will believe the perpetrator to be excused from the sexual violence if they were drinking because they "had no control over their actions" (Zelin et al., 2019). This is important in understanding how victim and perpetrator experiences within the criminal justice system may differ in where blame is placed and why it is placed. A study looking at college students' perceptions of drinking behavior in sexual assault scenarios found that individuals were more likely to place blame on the victim in the scenario and not the perpetrator (Untied et al., 2012). Most of the research surrounding the rape myth about drinking behavior have found that victims who are seen as intoxicated are more likely to be considered to blame for their sexual victimization (Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Sims et al., 2007). This indicates that the misassumption that victim's drinking behavior is the reason for their sexual victimization is a significant rape myth that may play a role in individuals' perceptions.

### ***Drinking Behavior Risk***

A victim's drinking behavior contributes to individual's perceptions of a victim's amount of risk as well. More specifically, victims that engage in behaviors that are perceived as risky like drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs may be perceived to be more at risk than a victim that does not engage in these types of behaviors (Beichner & Spohn, 2012). Victims are perceived to be at more risk when they are intoxicated in public or when they are shown excessively drinking. This is mainly because individuals who are intoxicated are perceived as being more vulnerable and unable to protect themselves properly making drinking and doing drugs risky behaviors. The previous research has demonstrated that victim's drinking behavior during their sexual assault is often misused as a justification to show that the victim put themselves at risk (Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Sims et al., 2007).

### ***Situational Characteristics Blame***

Rape myths surrounding situational characteristics are also common in cases where sexual violence has occurred. In situational victim blaming, individuals tend to place blame on the situation the victim was in and disregard the perpetrator who committed the sexual violence (Jones, 2021; Taylor, 2021). Individuals often focus on the setting the victim put themselves in such as being at a bar, club, or alleyway and focus on the time of day that the sexual assault occurred at. In many cases of situational blame, the individuals who are placing blame onto the victim wrongly assume that the victim should have avoided the situation all together instead of placing the blame on the perpetrator that committed the act of sexual violence (Grubb & Turner, 2012).

### ***Situational Characteristics Risk***

Situational characteristics play a significant role in risk perceptions as well. Those that have high rape myth acceptance often perceive the victim to be at fault for the sexual violence and perceived that they put themselves at more risk if they did not take the proper precautions to prevent the sexual violence (Grubb & Turner, 2012). For example, it is plausible that individuals may have the misassumption that the victim should have avoided being out alone at night because it increases their risk for being sexual assaulted. The characteristics surrounding a victim's situation at the time of the sexual violence can often be used to create the misperception the victim put themselves at a higher risk for being sexual assaulted compared to those avoiding these risky situations.

### **Rape Myths and Their Role in Risk and Blameworthiness Perceptions**

The rape myths discussed above play a significant role in how victims are perceived in terms of their blameworthiness and their amount of risk. However, very little research has been done to understand how rape myth acceptance may change perceptions across risk and blameworthiness. Since rape myths are particularly associated with placing blame onto the victim for their sexual assault, they may play a larger role in blameworthiness perceptions compared to risk perceptions. Specifically, in my study, changes in individual perceptions of rape myth acceptance may determine how respondents feel about the different scenarios presented.

Some studies have shown that individuals with a higher rape myth acceptance are more likely to believe the victim was at risk or to blame for partaking in behaviors included in rape myths (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Sims et al., 2007). For example, when individuals partake in wearing provocative clothing, drinking alcohol, and unsafe

situations both the victim and the outsider may perceive themselves or the individual to have a higher blameworthiness or to be at a higher risk for sexual violence. When individuals are willing to accept rape myths and the logic behind them, they may be more likely to misperceive the victim to be blameworthy or say that the victim put themselves at a higher risk for sexual victimization. Due to the relationship between rape myth acceptance and individuals' perceptions of blame it is important to consider how this acceptance may also play a role in risk perceptions.

### **Victim and Outsider Risk Perceptions**

Rape myths have been shown to play a role in how individuals may perceive a victim to be at more risk for sexual assaults. A victim's choice of clothing/attire, drinking behavior, and situational characteristics all are perceived to affect the amount of risk an individual may be at for sexual victimization. These perceptions can be broken down by how the victim perceives their own risk as well as how outsiders, such as college students, may perceive a victim's risk for sexual violence.

### ***Victims Own Perceptions of Risk***

In general, one study found that victims tend to perceive their risk to be lower than an outsider would (Saling & Dulaney, 2015). This is because of the "optimistic bias" theory in which women believe that their risk of being sexually assaulted is less than their peer's risk of being sexually assaulted (Saling & Dulaney, 2015). It is important to understand how victims may perceive themselves to be at risk for sexual assault because depending on how much risk they perceive themselves to be at may play a role in how frequently they are okay with participating in risk-taking behaviors. Victims may perceive their risk based on a multitude of factors including the individuals' ability to



detect risk and their prior victimizations. One study looks at how an individual's emotions may play a role in that individuals' ability to detect risks in social situations (Melkonian et al., 2017). This study suggests that social information processing in situations may affect a victim's ability to detect risks in social situations. In fact, those with lower social information processing skills were more likely to report less risk in the scenarios (Melkonian et al., 2017; Hetzel-Riggin et al., 2021). This demonstrates that an individual's ability to understand cues in these types of situations is important in risk detection.

Other studies have shown mixed results in understanding whether a victim may perceive their risk based on their prior victimization experiences. Some studies have demonstrated that victims who have been sexual assaulted may determine their risk to be higher or lower than individuals who have not been previously victimized while others have shown that there is no link between prior victimization and risk perceptions (Brown et al., 2005; Melkonian et al., 2017; Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006). However, previous victimization experience may contribute to victims having better judgement for risk in situations compared with no victimization experience (Yeater et al., 2010). Due to the mixed results, it is difficult to determine whether an individual's prior victimization plays a large role in risk perceptions, however the limited information pointing to its role in risk perception is important to consider in risk-reduction strategies.

### ***Outsider Perceptions of Victim Risk***

Personal characteristics of the individuals perceiving both the victim's blameworthiness and perceived risk have been shown to influence how individuals perceive a victim at risk or to blame for their sexual assault. Outsider perceptions can

show up differently in their perceptions of risk in sexual assault cases. It's possible that it is easier for outsiders to perceive a victim to be at higher risk for sexual violence when perceiving the situation from an outside viewpoint. Outsiders may perceive a victim's risk to be higher based on a variety of factors including the 'optimistic bias', the outsiders' characteristics, and the victim's personal characteristics.

In general outsiders tend to judge other individual's behaviors thus perceiving other individuals as putting themselves at a higher risk for sexual violence. Part of this is the "optimistic bias" discussed earlier where individuals perceive themselves to be at less risk than their peers (Saling & Dulaney, 2015). This carries over into outsider perceptions because as they perceive themselves at a lower risk for sexual assault, they are viewing their peers as engaging in risk-taking behaviors that increase their risk for victimization. It is also important to consider that different characteristics may influence how individuals perceive risk. For example, men and women use different ways to recognize and act upon sexual assault risk (Diamond-Welch et al., 2016 as cited in Hetzel-Riggin et al., 2021). In fact, a woman may associate their perceptions of risk and blame with sexual communication risks or belief in random events while men may associate their perceptions of risk and blame with an acceptance of rape myths or the world being a cruel place (Hetzel-Riggin et al., 2021). This demonstrates that an outsider's perceptions may be affected by their personal characteristics.

A victim's personal characteristics including their age, gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity may also play a role in an outsider's perception of their perceived risk. While this is not addressed in this study, it is important to consider how the victims portrayed in each scenario may have been looked at differently based on their individual

characteristics. In general, women are often perceived as being more vulnerable resulting in outsiders perceiving them to be at more risk than their male counterparts (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). This is a huge contributor to perceptions of control over women in general when they partake in risky behaviors. Another characteristic that may affect outsiders' perceptions of risk is that adolescents are involved in high-risk behaviors thus they are perceived as more at risk than older individuals are (Moreland et al., 2017). This is because younger individuals are more willing to partake in risk taking behaviors including substance abuse and delinquency (Moreland et al., 2017).

Race may also play a role in how individuals are perceived in terms of victim risk. One study that used vignettes to examine race and gender in perceptions of rape found that individuals were more likely to perceive greater sympathy for the European American victim rather than the others (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). They describe that this difference may be a result of how other races are perceived as victims discussing that Latinas may be seen as more provocative or passionate due to stereotypical views of these individuals (Feagin & Feagin, 1996; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). This may result in outsiders perceiving different races as being more at risk when compared to others. Sexuality has also been shown to all influence how the victim is viewed in their sexual assault case. In fact, bisexual women have been demonstrated to be more likely to be sexually assaulted and they are more likely to receive negative reactions when discussing their assaults compared to heterosexual women and lesbian women (Dyar et al., 2019). Each of these characteristics are likely to change how outsiders perceive a victim in their risk behavior.

## **Victim and Outsider Blameworthiness Perceptions**

Rape myths have also been shown to play a role in how individuals may perceive a victim to be more blameworthy for their sexual assault. A victim's choice of clothing/attire, drinking behavior, and situational characteristics all affect the amount of blame an individual is considered to be for their sexual victimization. These perceptions can be broken down by how the victim perceives themselves to be at blame as well as how outsiders may perceive a victim's blameworthiness for the sexual violence they experienced.

### ***Victims Own Perceptions of Blameworthiness***

A victim's own perception of their blame varies across individual victims but worsens when outside blame is shown in family and friends. These self-blame views may change as they go through trauma associated with outside blame from friends and family (Ullman, 1996; Ullman et al., 2007). In fact, negative social reactions from those around the victim including family, friends, and the criminal justice system, can lead to a greater self-blame in victims of sexual violence (Ullman, 1996; Ullman et al., 2007). It is important to note that while survivors may already blame themselves in the beginning, these kinds of negative social interactions can worsen this self-blame (Ullman, 1996; Ullman et al., 2007).

While victims vary in their amount of self-blame, the experiences with those around them may lead to changes in how that individual perceives themselves (Ullman, 1996; Ullman et al., 2007). This demonstrates the importance of avoiding secondary trauma and revictimization from family, friends, and the criminal justice system following an individual's sexual victimization. It also allows us to consider putting more

focus on how important it is for support providers to monitor their behavior throughout the process following a sexual victimization (Ullman et al., 2007).

### ***Outsider Perceptions of Victim Blameworthiness***

Outsiders' perceptions of victim blameworthiness can vary based on the outsiders' individual characteristics and the victims' characteristics. Research has shown that men in general are more likely to have a high acceptance of rape myths when compared to women and are also more likely to be tolerant of sexual violence (Hayes et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2005; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Most of the influence for gender and their perceptions of rape myths stems from individuals' beliefs in sexism (Angelone et al., 2020; Hayes et al., 2016; Rollero & Tartaglia 2019). In this case, men in general may perceive women in sexual assault cases to be more blameworthy. However, some studies have demonstrated that women are more likely to blame other women (Cameron & Stritske, 2003; Pinciotti and Orcutt, 2021). Due to differences across cultures, many studies find that some races and ethnicities are more likely than others to attribute blame to the victim and perceive them at a higher risk for sexual assault. In fact, some studies have found previously that individuals who identify as non-Hispanic white tend to accept rape myths less than other races and ethnicities (Hayes et al., 2016; Jones, 2021; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Lee et al., 2005).

Lastly, an outsider's perceptions may vary based on the different victim characteristics just as they do in risk perceptions. Women are seen as more blameworthy in their sexual assaults than men (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Certain races and ethnicities are blamed more for their sexual violence. Specifically, Latina and black women are often hypersexualized making it easier for outsiders to place the blame on them for being

misinterpreted as “overly sexual” (Feagin & Feagin, 1996; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003).. As discussed in some studies, Latina women are considered to be more ‘sexual’ in nature due to specific systemic racism that manifests through stereotypical views of these women (Feagin & Feagin, 1996; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). Many individuals perceive this behavior as inviting the sexual victimization to take place. While this study specifically focuses on the rape myths in the scenarios, it is important to consider how these characteristics would affect the perceptions of the scenarios if the demographics of the individuals involved were mentioned.

## CHAPTER 3

### CURRENT STUDY

Within the current study, I collected data via an online survey using scenarios surrounding rape myths to understand how those myths may affect individuals' perceptions of victim blame and perceived victim risk. The data will be used to test whether the situation shown in each scenario influences college students' perceptions of risk and blameworthiness. My research study focuses on further analyzing and answering the following questions:

**Research Question 1.** Is the scenario the respondent receives independent of their assessment of a victim's perceived risk and blame? As I discussed above the characteristics of sexual assaults have been theorized to matter in situations, and different characteristics are displayed in the scenarios. In this case, if the scenarios are independent from respondents' perceptions of risk or blameworthiness, that would demonstrate that the rape myths in the scenarios do not play a role in the respondent's perceptions of risk and blame.

**Research Question 2.** Does the situation portrayed in the scenario influence whether the respondent perceives that the victim was at risk or to blame for their assault and if they do perceive the victim to be at risk or to blame, what is the amount of risk or blame the respondents are most commonly attributing to the victim? Specifically, do the scenarios showing varying rape myths (i.e., drinking behaviors, placing self in an unsafe situation, or dressing provocatively) influence the respondent's attribution of the victim's risk and blame?

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

#### **Participants**

Participants for the survey were college students from Arizona State University. Students that participated in the survey were from within the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions. In this study, the survey link was sent to professors, who then shared the survey with students in their courses. The initial survey was sent out to 1,780 students and subsequently another 1,048 students were invited to participate, for a total of 2,828 students. Overall, my survey received a total of 591 students resulting in a 20.9% response rate. Of the 591 responses received, 395 remained in the analyses. Approximately, 31 respondents were dropped from the survey given they did not fully consent and an additional 131 were dropped because they reported that they took the survey more than once for different classes. An additional eight participants who identified as transgender were excluded given that their small numbers in the survey did not afford enough statistical power to adequately model. After cleaning the data, the analyses were conducted on 395 participants across 4 scenarios, making for 1,579 observations within 395 participants. These participant responses were used to understand the differences in perceptions in college students between victim blame and victim risk across four scenarios.

#### **Survey**

This study utilized four scenarios to understand how respondents perceived the victims' blameworthiness as well as the victims' risk. These four scenarios varied by the rape myth portrayed, for example scenarios one and four had the prominent rape myth of



victims' drinking behavior, while scenario two had a prominent rape myth surrounding risky situational characteristics (i.e., risky locations, times of day), and lastly, scenario three had a prominent rape myth of clothing and attire worn by the victim. While each scenario discussed the circumstances of the sexual assault, the scenarios varied in which rape myth was the most prominent. The clothing varied throughout the scenarios from a mini dress and heels to a sweatshirt and jeans and the amount of drinking portrayed in the scenarios ranged from no drinking to excessive shots.

Aside from the scenarios and questions immediately after the scenarios, there were also pre-test and post-test questions that were used to assess the college students' perceptions of victim blameworthiness and victim risk. These questions will not be addressed in this study. These survey questions occurred before and after the college students went through the series of scenarios (see Appendix I). These questions were answered on a 5-Point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' with 'Don't Know' as an option (Jones, 2021).

### *Scenarios*

The survey consisted of four different scenarios. Each of the scenarios was centered around a different common rape myth and students were asked to answer questions after each scenario. Each of the scenarios was placed in the survey as follows:

**Scenario 1.** "A buttoned-up short sleeve shirt with blue jeans. He was my best friend's boyfriend's roommate. My friend told me it was okay to crash on their couch after we had all been drinking. She told me the roommate was 'cool.' She told me to just get over it." The focus of this scenario is the victim's drinking behavior and the situation

that the behavior ended in. In this scenario, the victim was unable to go home after drinking too much.

**Scenario 2.** “I was wearing khaki shorts and a cotton tank top. He convinced me to come back to his house with him after a lame date. I was told by a friend to keep the clothes I was wearing in case I decided to report it. They are still in a bag hidden in my closet.” The focus of this scenario is the victim’s choice to put themselves in what most would consider an unsafe situation. In this scenario, the victim went home alone with a stranger.

**Scenario 3.** “A cute mini-dress. I loved it the moment I saw it. I had some killer heels, too. I just wanted to have a good time that night, look cute, and hang with my sisters. He kept getting me shots, over and over again. The next thing I remember is crawling around on the floor looking for that stupid dress.” The focus of this scenario is the victim’s choice of clothing. The outfit described in the scenario is one that is usually seen as provocative in society. In this scenario, the victim wore provocative clothing while going out with a friend. Additionally, the victim engaged in excessive drinking.

**Scenario 4.** “It was February, so I was wearing an oversized sweatshirt and jeans. We were drinking and the friend who hosted the party told me I needed to stay over because I was too drunk to drive. The next day I woke up in his bed with no pants on.” The focus of this scenario is the victim’s drinking behavior. Again, in this scenario, the victim in the scenario was unable to drive home after drinking too much.

The questions presented after the respondents read through these scenarios focused on the role the clothing and drinking had on sexual victimization as well as the amount of risk that the victim was perceived to have put themselves at. The two questions

discussing how the victims' clothing and drinking behavior contributed to their blameworthiness for the sexual assault were answered through a 6-Point Likert Scale that had the following selections: 'None', 'A Very Small Role,' 'A Small Role', 'A Moderate Role,' 'A Strong Role,' and 'A Very Strong Role,' (Jones, 2021). The question assessing perceived risk was also answered through a 6-Point Likert Scale that had the following selections: 'None', 'A Very Small Amount of Risk,' 'A Small Amount of Risk,' 'A Moderate Amount of Risk,' 'A Strong Amount of Risk,' 'A Very Strong Amount of Risk,' (Jones, 2021).

### **Procedure**

The survey was approved by Arizona State University's institutional review board (IRB). The consent form for the survey and the survey were administered online through a Qualtrics link provided by professors to their students. Individuals gave consent for the survey online before they completed the survey by checking a box that followed the consent form. After giving consent, students continued forward in the survey and answered the survey questions. The survey did not ask for any identifying information allowing us to keep all survey answers anonymous.

This study was inspired by the "What Were You Wearing?" survivor art installation from Kansas State University. The "What Were You Wearing?" installation usually consists of an in-person art installation; however, the stories were instead used in the survey as scenarios. This installation uses stories from survivors surrounding rape myths to help others understand the impact victim blaming can have. To create the scenarios for my survey, I used survivor stories from this art installation that were given from Kansas University students and incorporated them into my survey to demonstrate

different rape myths and gather information about college students' perceptions on the situations (Jones, 2021).

Along with this, I also utilized Payne and colleagues (1999) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale to create the pre and posttest questions within my survey (Payne et al., 1999). The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale consists of 45 items that focus on common rape myth statements where individuals rated their level of agreement with each of the rape myths. The survey's pre-test and post-test questions were formulated to assess both perceived victim blameworthiness as well as perceived victim risk (Jones, 2021). The statements in the pre-test and post-tests were answered by individuals rating how much they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements (see Appendix I). The questions directly after the scenarios were used to understand how college students felt about different rape myths (i.e., clothing, drinking, or unsafe situations) in terms of victim blameworthiness and perceived victim risk (See Appendix II and III).

## **Data**

### ***Collection Methods***

The survey data were collected by reaching out to professors in the Watts College at Arizona State University. The professors were invited to send the survey to their students. If the professor decided to send out the survey it was their choice on how they wanted to do so. Most professors shared the survey link through Canvas and via email and only some professors decided to offer it as extra credit to their students. Once the students had the link, they were able to access and take the survey through Qualtrics. The survey took approximately 25 minutes to complete. Once the survey responses were

completed, the data was then exported from Qualtrics into Stata where we conducted the data cleaning process. From here, the data analysis was conducted.

### ***Variables***

Within the current study, I focused on the following variables: scenarios one through four, the questions following the scenarios which were broken down into blame variables (clothing and drinking behavior) and a risk variable (See Appendix V). For our analysis we controlled for age, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (See Appendix IV). The independent variables were the scenarios, and the dependent variables were the clothing and drinking behavior blame questions along with the risk question following each scenario.

The questions following the scenarios used in the analysis measured the college students' perceptions of victim blameworthiness and victim risk. For clothing and drinking blame, the survey questions were "How much of a role do you think the victim's outfit played in the sexual assault?" and "How much do you think the victim's drinking behavior played a role in increasing the likelihood of their sexual assault?" and measure the role the college student believes the victim had in their own assault through their choice of clothing and drinking behaviors thus putting blame onto the victim. Answer choices for these questions consisted of 'None' meaning the victim did not play a role followed by 'A very small role', 'A small role', 'A moderate role', 'A strong role', 'A very strong role'. These two variables were coded as 0 being 'No Role' and other options coded as 1-5 with 1 being the smallest role and 5 being the strongest role.

The question, "How much risk do you think the victim put themselves at for being sexually assaulted?" measures the amount of risk the college student believes the victim

put themselves in for their own assault throughout the scenario. Answer choices for this question consisted of 'None' meaning the victim did not put themselves at risk for the sexual violence followed by 'A very small amount of risk', 'A small amount of risk', 'A moderate amount of risk', 'A strong amount of risk', 'A very strong amount of risk'. For risk, this variable was coded similarly where 0 represented 'No Risk' and the other options were coded as 1-5 with 1 being the smallest amount of risk and 5 being the strongest amount of risk.

Age, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality were all used as controls within the models (See Appendix IV). Age was broken down into three separate dummy variables representing 18-20 years old, 21 and 25 years old, and 26 years old and above. The reference category for age was 18-20 years old. Race and ethnicity were broken down into four dummy variables, Caucasian/White, Latino or Hispanic, African American, and Other Race which included Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American and those who selected other but did not specify. The reference category for race and ethnicity was Caucasian/White. Gender was broken down into two separate dummy variables: woman and man, with woman being the reference category. Lastly, sexuality was also broken into two separate dummy variables: heterosexual, that is not lesbian or gay, and anyone identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community with those identifying as heterosexual as the reference category.

### **Analysis Plan**

Within the current study I am interested in analyzing college students' answers to the scenario questions looking at perceived victim blameworthiness and perceived victim risk. This was done using chi-square tests to determine if perceptions of risk and blame

were independent of the scenarios. The second part of this study was to understand if there was a significant difference across risk and blame perceptions throughout the different scenarios using a zero-inflated ordered probit regression (ZIOP) with clustered standard errors.

A ZIOP model runs two models at once: an inflated and an ordered probit. In the inflated portion of the model, models a binary outcome, where, using risk as an example, 1= the respondent did not perceive any risk and 0= the respondent did perceive some level of risk. The inflated portion of the ZIOP models are similar for clothing and drinking blame. For the clothing blame variable is it measured as 1= the respondent did not perceive any clothing blame and 0= the respondent did perceive some level of clothing blame. Lastly, for the drinking blame variable it is measured as 1= the respondent did not perceive any drinking blame and 0= the respondent did perceive some level of drinking blame. The ordered probit portion of this model explains the variation in the ordered categorical dependent variable as a function of one or more independent variables and does not require that the distance between each category is equal (SAGE Research Methods, n.d.). In my model, the dependent variables including risk, clothing blame, and drinking blame are shown as a function of our independent variables, the scenarios in the survey. For this study, an ordered probit was chosen over an ordered logit because of a violation of the parallel regression assumption. The ordered logit model assumes that the relationships between predictor variables and the categories shown in the dependent variables are all the same, after testing for parallel lines, I discovered my variables violate the parallel regression assumption. Since the ZIOP model relaxes this assumption, it was the best fit for modeling my data and doing the analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

**Chi-Square Tests.** After conducting a chi square test to determine whether the scenarios are independent from risk and blameworthiness, I find that for all three of the risk and blame questions, respondents' answers were dependent on the scenario. The results demonstrate that the scenarios are not independent of the questions and do have some sort of relationship together. These results for the chi-square tests are shown in Appendix VI. The chi-square test examining whether the outcome risk perceptions and the scenario are independent is significant with a value of 88.86 ( $p < 0.000$ ). Therefore, respondents' level of risk perceptions is dependent on the scenario. The chi-square test examining whether the outcome clothing blame perceptions and the scenario are independent is significant with a value of 229.36 ( $p < 0.000$ ). Therefore, respondents' level of clothing blame perceptions is dependent on the scenario. The chi-square test examining whether the outcome drinking blame perceptions and the scenario are independent is significant with a value of 301.76 ( $p < 0.000$ ). Therefore, respondents' level of drinking blame perceptions is dependent on the scenario.

**Zero-inflated Ordered Probit.** Appendix VII presents the results from the zero-inflated ordered probit model. The full results for each of the scenarios nested within risk, clothing blame, and drinking blame are shown in this appendix. Given the importance of limiting the discussion of results to the independent variables (see Keele, Stevenson, and Elwert, 2020), I limit the discussion of my results to the predicted probabilities of the various scenarios. Appendices VIII through X present the predicted probabilities for each



outcome from the results of the zero-inflated ordered probit models, though focusing exclusively on the independent variables, namely the scenario variables.

***Predicted Probabilities for Risk.*** The predicted probabilities did vary across scenarios. Starting with Appendix VIII, for the risk questions in the scenarios there were significant differences across responses. In scenario two, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said there was no risk associated with the scenario is 2.4%. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a very small amount of risk present after seeing scenario two was 6.6% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a small amount of risk present after seeing scenario two was 0.5% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a moderate amount of risk present after seeing scenario two was 5.1% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a strong amount of risk present after seeing scenario two was 3.5% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a very strong amount of risk present after seeing scenario two was 1.5% more than their responses after seeing scenario one.

Continuing with Appendix VIII, in scenario three, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said there was no risk associated with the scenario is 3.5%. For the risk questions in regarding scenario three the predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a very small amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 13.5% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a small amount of risk present after seeing

scenario three was 1.6% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a moderate amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 8.9% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a strong amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 8.2% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a very strong amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 4.6% more than their responses after seeing scenario one.

The last portion of Appendix VIII, in scenario four, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said there was no risk associated with the scenario is 10%. For the risk questions regarding scenario four the predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a very small amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 6.8% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a small amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 1.5% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a moderate amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 1.7% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a strong amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 1.6% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying there was a very strong amount of risk present after seeing scenario three was 0.7% more than their responses after seeing scenario one.

*Predicted Probabilities for Clothing Blame.* Moving on to the clothing blame questions in Appendix IX, the predicted probabilities also varied. In scenario two, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said clothing played no role associated with the scenario is -3.7%. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victims clothing played a very small role after seeing scenario two was 4.5% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a small role after seeing scenario two was 3.5% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a moderate role after seeing scenario two was 2.9% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a strong role after seeing scenario two was 1.3% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a very strong role after seeing scenario two was 0.6% more than their responses after seeing scenario one.

In the second section of Appendix IX, we see that in scenario three, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said clothing played no role associated with the scenario is -16.5%. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victims clothing played a very small role after seeing scenario three was 13% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a small role after seeing scenario three was 8.7% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a moderate role after seeing scenario three was 10.5% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent

saying the victim's clothing played a strong role after seeing scenario three was 6.2% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a very strong role after seeing scenario three was 4.1% more than their responses after seeing scenario one.

In the last section of Appendix IX, scenario four shows that compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said clothing played no role associated with the scenario is 11.1%. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a very small role after seeing scenario four was 3% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a small role after seeing scenario four was 4.6% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a moderate role after seeing scenario four was 2.5% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a strong role after seeing scenario four was 0.8% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's clothing played a very strong role after seeing scenario four was 0.3% less than their responses after seeing scenario one.

***Predicted Probabilities for Drinking Blame.*** Lastly, within the drinking blame questions shown in Appendix X the predicted probabilities also varied. In scenario two, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said drinking behavior played no role associated with the scenario is 32.2%. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a very small role after seeing scenario two was 2.7% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability

of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a small role after seeing scenario two was 9% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a moderate role after seeing scenario two was 11.7% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a strong role after seeing scenario two was 8.7% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a very strong role after seeing scenario two was 5.5% less than their responses after seeing scenario one.

In the second section of Appendix X we see that in scenario three, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said drinking behavior played no role associated with the scenario is - 5.6%. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a very small role after seeing scenario three was 10.3% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a small role after seeing scenario three was 2.8% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a moderate role after seeing scenario three was 3.1% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a strong role after seeing scenario three was 6.7% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a very strong role after seeing scenario three was 9% more than their responses after seeing scenario one.

In the last section of Appendix X within scenario four, compared to scenario one the likelihood that a respondent said drinking behavior played no role associated with the scenario is 3.2%. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a very small role after seeing scenario four was 4.4% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a small role after seeing scenario four was 1.5% less than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a moderate role after seeing scenario four was 0.1% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. The predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a strong role after seeing scenario four was 1.1% more than their responses after seeing scenario one. Lastly, the predictive probability of a respondent saying the victim's drinking behavior played a very strong role after seeing scenario four was 1.5% more than their responses after seeing scenario one.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I sought to examine how college students' attitudes towards victim risk and victim blameworthiness varied across scenarios containing rape myths. Understanding these attitudes has important policy implications for understanding how to prevent victim-blaming and creating more exposure to sexual assault education on college campuses. Being able to understand which scenario has the largest impact on attitudes of blame and risk will help us understand which rape myths carry the most weight in individuals' decision to place blame and perceive risk. This knowledge will help college campuses to cater their sexual assault awareness courses to bring to light some of the issues many individuals may face following their sexual victimization. For example, creating a course that highlights why victims should not be blamed for participating in these types of behaviors portrayed in rape myths will help individuals understand how to avoid these blaming behaviors and reduce future trauma for victims. Looking at how individuals can reduce their perceptions of risk and blame surrounding rape myths to looking at how perpetrators of sexual violence should change their behaviors instead can help create a better criminal justice process. A criminal justice system where victims are not blamed and are taken seriously when reporting their victimizations.

Starting with the chi-square tests shown in Appendix VI, I first demonstrate that the risk and blame questions in my study are dependent of the scenarios meaning that the characteristics within each scenario do make a difference in respondents answers. This

indicates that the characteristics surrounding different rape myths shown in each scenario change the way individuals perceive the sexual violence.

When looking at Appendix VIII, for risk perceptions, I see that in scenarios two through four there is a higher likelihood of individuals saying there was no risk associated with the victim in the scenario. These scenarios involved the rape myths surrounding clothing, drinking behavior, and situational myths. When individuals do perceive some level of risk, across all scenarios we see an increase in their risk perceptions compared to scenario one.

When looking at Appendix IX for clothing blame perceptions, I see that in scenarios two and three with the clothing and situational rape myths there is a lower likelihood of individuals saying there was no blame associated with the victim in the scenario, however, in scenario four with the drinking rape myth we see that individuals had a higher likelihood of saying there was no blame associated with the victim in the scenario. When individuals do perceive some level of blame, across scenarios two and three we see an increase in their blame perceptions while in scenario four we see a decrease in their blame perceptions. Overall, the clothing and situational rape myths shown in scenarios two and three seem to hold a powerful influence on how people increased and decreased their perceptions of blame to the victim via their clothing.

When looking at Appendix X for drinking blame perceptions, I see that in scenarios two and four there is a higher likelihood of individuals saying there was no blame associated with the victim in the scenario, however, in scenario three there is a lower likelihood of individuals saying there was no blame associated with the victim. When individuals do perceive some level of blame, in scenario there is a decrease in their



blame perceptions while in scenarios three and four we see an increase in their blame perceptions. The rapes myths in scenarios three and four, clothing and drinking, appear to continue to powerfully influence individuals' willingness to ascribe blame to the victim given their drinking behaviors.

Specifically, this demonstrates that overall, many individuals are completely unwilling to assign risk and blame to the victims described in the scenarios. Specifically, in risk questions, we see that the scenario does not change the likelihood that an individual will or will not assign risk. In fact, all scenarios increase the likelihood that an individual will assign no risk to the victim. For the clothing blame question, I found that scenario four increases the likelihood of an individual saying there is no blame associated with the victim and scenarios two and three decrease the likelihood of an individual saying there is no blame associated with the victim. Lastly, for drinking blame, scenarios two and four increase the likelihood of an individual saying there is no blame associated with the victim and scenario three decreases the likelihood of an individual saying there is no blame associated with the victim. This demonstrates that the willingness to assign blame and risk to victims is decreasing.

As demonstrated in the literature review, studies are still showing that victim-blaming is a significant problem, yet these results demonstrate that individuals are becoming less likely to assign any risk and blame to victims in sexual assault scenarios. It is possible that this demonstrates the loss of power in rape myths and their effect on the respondents assigning risk and blame to victims. As sexual assault awareness increases, especially with things like the #MeToo Movement, victims are now being painted in a new light: as exclusively victims, rather than being responsible for their own assault.

College students are often more exposed to these movements, possibly resulting in differing views on risk and blame in victims. College students are also often exposed to sexual victimization awareness courses which impacts how they assign risk and blame to victims (Fox & Cook, 2011). Individuals may be finding that clothing and drinking behaviors are becoming part of the victim's control rather than something others can use to blame them for their sexual violence.

It is important to discuss that when individuals are willing to assign blame, scenarios two and three showed a higher level of clothing blame and risk, with scenario four occasionally showing a higher level of risk and drinking blame. With the most prominent rape myth in scenario two and three having provocative clothing characteristics – specifically a mini dress and tank top – which may demonstrate why individuals were more likely to assign clothing blame in these scenarios. For scenario four, which had drinking as a prominent rape myth in the scenario and with risk being commonly associated with drinking this may explain why I saw higher levels of blame and risk being associated with the victim in this scenario.

One limitation within my study is that my scenarios did not include specific demographic characteristics for the victims. For example, my scenarios did not include the victim's race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or age. My scenarios also did not include this demographic information for the perpetrator of the sexual violence. While leaving these characteristics out of my study allowed respondents to visualize the victim and perpetrator, in future studies, it would be important to create scenarios that include these characteristics to understand the differences in perceptions of blame and risk across different ages, race/ethnicities, sexualities, and genders. It would also be important to

understand how these dynamics change when the race/ethnicities, ages, and genders of the perpetrators and victims differ from one another. For example, considering sexual assault situations where there is a male victim, and a female perpetrator may be vastly different from scenarios where the victim is female, and the perpetrator is male. This could be because males tend to be blamed for their victimization in different ways than females. Specifically, one study found that male victims were likely to blame a gay male when he fought back during the sexual assault while they were more likely to blame a heterosexual male when they did not fight back (Davies, Rogers, & Bates, 2008). This has implications for how scenarios may be viewed differently in terms of risk and blame if the characteristics were changed. Another example would be to consider how sexual assault situations differ based on the race and ethnicity of the victim and perpetrator. Specifically, it is important to look at how the different combinations of races of the victim and perpetrator may change how the case is viewed by outsiders and the criminal justice system in terms of risk and blame. Understanding how these characteristics may alter individuals' views of the sexual assault is important in understanding blame and risk across all situations.

It is also important to note that my scenarios included multiple rape myths instead of only discussing one myth per scenario. This means that the perceptions demonstrated in my results may have been due to a mixture of all the included rape myths and not one in particular. It is difficult to determine whether the college students focus on each scenario was the rape myth I deemed to be the most prominent in the scenarios or one of the smaller ones that they felt was most important. The more prominent rape myths shown in the scenarios may have contributed significantly to the college students'

perceptions of blame and risk, however, because multiple rape myths were shown in each scenario these perceptions may be due to more than a singular rape myth. Future studies should utilize scenarios that one discusses one rape myth per scenario. This will allow future studies to single out the effects of one rape myth on perceptions of risk and blame allowing for a better interpretation of the results.

It has been demonstrated in my study that college students' perceptions of victim risk and blame do vary across the circumstances of the assault. I demonstrated that individuals are becoming less willing to assign risk and blame to victims in sexual assault scenarios. I have also shown that these perceptions, when individuals did indicate risk or blame associated with the victim, varied based on the different scenarios given to the students meaning that the type of rape myth portrayed does influence individuals' perceptions of risk and blame. It is important to think about how we can use this information to work on better understanding sexual victimization, victim blaming, and perceived victim risk. It is possible that these findings demonstrate that exposure to risk perceptions and victim blameworthiness within institutions has provided college students with the tools needed to help reduce their perceptions of blameworthiness. Since college campuses have extremely high risk for sexual assaults among their students, it is important to consider how this exposure educates college students on both victim blame and victim risk (RAINN, 2021, n.d.; Sinozich & Langton, 2014). It has been demonstrated that trainings centered around reducing victim blame on college campuses can help reduce individuals' perceptions of rape myths and lower sexual victimizations making it extremely important for us to continue to offer courses that create this exposure for more college students (Fox & Cook, 2011). In future studies it is important to

consider how these perceptions of risk and blame differ throughout the different characteristics of those perceiving the assault as well as how these perceptions may differ across who is the perpetrator and who is the victim in the scenarios. Future studies should also consider utilizing a single rape myth in each scenario with similar situational characteristics to see which rape myth is leading to the highest blame and risk perceptions.

This study looked at understanding college students' attitudes towards rape myths prompted by varying sexual assault scenarios. The study focused on college students specifically due to the large amount of college students, both graduate and undergraduate, that are sexually victimized while attending college (RAINN, 2021, n.d.). It is important to understand rape myths and an acceptance of rape myths because they help others wrongly justify sexual assault and it diminishes the chances of convictions of the perpetrator due to an increased blame placed on the victim (Beichner & Spohn, 2012; Spohn & Tellis, 2012). The inherent consequences of rape myths are important to understand as they are often done by professionals within this field (Beichner & Spohn, 2012; Spohn & Tellis, 2012). Within my study I saw that despite many individuals being unwilling to assign risk and blame to the victim, there was a still a small number of individuals assigning risk and blame to the victims in the scenarios. My sample was from the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, a program that is full of college students who will become future criminal justice officials and social workers who may be in contact with sexual assault survivors in various ways. Given that these students still perceived and assigned some level of blame and risk to victims it is important to continue to investigate ways that these students can be educated to completely get rid of

victim-blaming tendencies. These students should be the least likely to assign blame to victims, yet we still see that they are assigning risk and blame to victims within the scenarios. This can impact how they interact with victims within their field of study demonstrating how pervasive rape myths can be showing that even individuals with training in victimization and advocacy still assign this risk and blame. This again demonstrates the need for pointing education on rape myths and victim-blaming to not only the students who are going into these professions, but also other college populations who may have even larger tendencies to assign risk and blame (Fox & Cook, 2011). All of this helps demonstrate the importance of sexual victimization and victim-blaming education on college campuses and how this can be used to ensure these individuals avoid victim-blaming behaviors in the future.

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APPENDIX I  
PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST VICTIM BLAMEWORTHINESS AND RISK  
QUESTIONS

Question Type	Question
<b>Victim Blame - Clothing</b>	Individuals who dress more provocatively are more to blame for their sexual assault than those who dress more conservatively.
<b>Perpetrator - Blame</b>	People that take advantage of individuals in vulnerable situations are more to blame for the sexual assault than the victim of the sexual assault.
<b>Victim Blame - Drinking</b>	Individuals who excessively drink around others are to blame for their sexual assault compared to those who drink little to no alcohol.
<b>Victim Blame - Walking Alone</b>	Individuals who walk alone at night are more to blame for being sexually assaulted than those who walk with others at night.
<b>Victim Blame - Unsafe Situations</b>	Individuals who place themselves in unsafe situations are more to blame for their sexual assault than the perpetrator of the sexual assault.
<b>Risk - Clothing</b>	Individuals who dress more provocatively are at greater risk for becoming a victim of sexual assault than those who dress more conservatively.
<b>Risk - Drinking</b>	Individuals who excessively drink around others are at greater risk for being sexually assaulted compared to those who drink little to no alcohol.
<b>Risk - Alone</b>	Individuals who walk alone at night are at greater risk for being sexually assaulted than those who walk with others at night.
<b>Risk - Unsafe Situations</b>	Individuals who placed themselves in unsafe situations are at greater risk of becoming a victim of sexual assault.

## APPENDIX II

### VICTIM RISK AND BLAMEWORTHINESS SCENARIOS

<b>Scenario 1</b>	<p>“A buttoned-up short sleeve shirt with blue jeans. He was my best friend’s boyfriend’s roommate. My friend told me it was okay to crash on their couch after we had all been drinking. She told me the roommate was ‘cool.’ She told me to just get over it.”</p>
<b>Scenario 2</b>	<p>“I was wearing khaki shorts and a cotton tank top. He convinced me to come back to his house with him after a lame date. I was told by a friend to keep the clothes I was wearing in case I decided to report it. They are still in a bag hidden in my closet.”</p>
<b>Scenario 3</b>	<p>“A cute mini-dress. I loved it the moment I saw it. I had some killer heels, too. I just wanted to have a good time that night, look cute and hang with my sisters. He kept getting me shots, over and over again. The next thing I remember is crawling around on the floor looking for that stupid dress.”</p>
<b>Scenario 4</b>	<p>“It was February, so I was wearing an oversized sweatshirt and jeans. We were drinking and the friend who hosted the party told me I needed to stay over because I was too drunk to drive. The next day I woke up in his bed with no pants on.”</p>

APPENDIX III

QUESTIONS FOLLOWING THE SCENARIOS



<i>Question Type</i>	<i>Question</i>
<b>Blame - Clothing</b>	How much of a role do you think the victim's outfit played in the sexual assault?
<b>Blame - Drinking</b>	How much do you think the victim's drinking behavior played a role in increasing the likelihood of their sexual assault?
<b>Risk - Situation</b>	How much risk do you think the victim put themselves at for being sexually assaulted?

APPENDIX IV

SUMMARY STATISTICS – CONTROL VARIABLES

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	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Scenario 1	0.250	0.433	0.000	1.000
Scenario 2	0.250	0.433	0.000	1.000
Scenario 3	0.250	0.433	0.000	1.000
Scenario 4	0.250	0.433	0.000	1.000
18–20-Year-Old	0.370	0.483	0.000	1.000
21–25-Year-Old	0.383	0.486	0.000	1.000
26 and above	0.248	0.432	0.000	1.000
Caucasian/White	0.559	0.497	0.000	1.000
Latino or Hispanic	0.294	0.456	0.000	1.000
African American	0.053	0.224	0.000	1.000
Other Race (Asian/PI/NA/Other)	0.094	0.292	0.000	1.000
Straight, that is, not lesbian or gay	0.797	0.402	0.000	1.000
LGBTQ Community	0.203	0.402	0.000	1.000
Woman	0.730	0.444	0.000	1.000
Man	0.270	0.444	0.000	1.000

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APPENDIX V

SUMMARY STATISTICS – DEPENDENT VARIABLES

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
No Risk	0.300	0.000	1.000
A very small amount of risk	0.212	0.000	1.000
A small amount of risk	0.189	0.000	1.000
A moderate amount of risk	0.193	0.000	1.000
A strong amount of risk	0.077	0.000	1.000
A very strong amount of risk	0.028	0.000	1.000
Clothing - No role	0.486	0.000	1.000
Clothing - A very small role	0.308	0.000	1.000
Clothing - A small role	0.101	0.000	1.000
Clothing - A moderate role	0.064	0.000	1.000
Clothing - A strong role	0.027	0.000	1.000
Clothing - A very strong role	0.015	0.000	1.000
Drinking - No role	0.283	0.000	1.000
Drinking - A very small role	0.199	0.000	1.000
Drinking - A small role	0.167	0.000	1.000
Drinking - A moderate role	0.163	0.000	1.000
Drinking - A strong role	0.111	0.000	1.000
Drinking - A very strong role	0.077	0.000	1.000

APPENDIX VI

CHI SQUARE TESTS FOR SCENARIOS

	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Chi</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<b>Scenarios</b>	<i>Risk</i>	88.86	0.000***
	<i>Clothing</i>	229.36	0.000***
	<i>Drinking</i>	301.76	0.000***
*** $p < 0.01$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; + $p < 0.10$			

APPENDIX VII

ZERO-INFLATED ORDERED PROBIT MODELS SHOWN AS ODDS RATIOS



Variables	Risk	Inflated Risk	Clothing	Inflated Clothing	Drinking	Inflated Drinking
Scenario 2	1.494*	0.911	1.491*	1.099	0.487*	0.396*
	-0.123	-0.201	-0.149	-0.053	-0.041	-0.03
Scenario 3	2.240*	0.873	2.879*	1.540*	1.661*	1.249*
	-0.205	-0.274	-0.291	-0.091	-0.099	-0.087
Scenario 4	1.312*	0.702	0.591*	0.750*	1.151*	0.895
	-0.102	-0.162	-0.076	-0.04	-0.069	-0.061
21–25-year-Old	0.640*	1.092	0.661*	0.969	0.667*	0.921
	-0.088	-0.198	-0.094	-0.123	-0.076	-0.118
26 and above	0.848	1.304	0.95	0.8	0.943	1.1
	-0.123	-0.374	-0.154	-0.121	-0.116	-0.155
Latino or Hispanic	1.331*	0.85	1.188	0.989	1.122	0.906
	-0.185	-0.164	-0.177	-0.13	-0.13	-0.119
African-American	0.653	2.252	0.731	1.174	1.093	1.461
	-0.146	-2.184	-0.153	-0.253	-0.234	-0.31
Other Race (Asian/PI/NA/Other)	1.572*	1.056	1.489	1.305	1.568*	1.366
	-0.262	-0.306	-0.303	-0.238	-0.243	-0.234
LGBTQ Community	0.961	0.854	1.285	0.857	0.963	0.91
	-0.148	-0.168	-0.204	-0.12	-0.12	-0.124
Man	1.401*	2.073*	1.492*	1.354*	1.296*	1.645*
	-0.161	-0.519	-0.202	-0.177	-0.137	-0.212
cut1		0.349*		0.003*		0.003*
		-0.173		-0.001		-0.001
cut2		0.99		2.061*		0.558*
		-0.214		-0.33		-0.063
cut3		1.953*		4.109*		1.106
		-0.352		-0.68		-0.126
cut4		4.689*		8.125*		2.163*
		-0.806		-1.384		-0.259
cut5		10.104*		14.764*		4.205*
		-1.883		-2.709		-0.538
Constant		2.078		0.965		2.060*
		-0.867		-0.117		-0.265
Observ.	1,579	1,579	1,579	1,579	1,579	1,579

APPENDIX VIII

ZIOP- PREDICTIVE PROBABILITY FOR RISK PERCEPTIONS

	<b>Ordered Probit</b>		<b>Likelihood of No Risk</b>	
	Coefficient	Predicted Probability	Coefficient	Predicted Probability
Scenario 2	1.494*	-	0.911	0.024
	A very small amount of risk	-0.066**	-	-
	A small amount of risk	0.005	-	-
	A moderate amount of risk	0.051**	-	-
	A strong amount of risk	0.035**	-	-
	A very strong amount of risk	0.015**	-	-
Scenario 3	2.240*	-	0.873	0.035
	A very small amount of risk	-0.135**	-	-
	A small amount of risk	-0.016	-	-
	A moderate amount of risk	0.089**	-	-
	A strong amount of risk	0.082**	-	-
	A very strong amount of risk	0.046**	-	-
Scenario 4	1.312*	-	0.702	0.100*
	A very small amount of risk	-0.068**	-	-
	A small amount of risk	-0.015*	-	-
	A moderate amount of risk	0.017+	-	-
	A strong amount of risk	0.016**	-	-
	A very strong amount of risk	0.007**	-	-

*\*Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; + $p < 0.10$*

APPENDIX IX

ZIOP – PREDICTIVE PROBABILITY FOR CLOTHING BLAME PERCEPTIONS

	<b>Ordered Probit</b>		<b>Likelihood of No Clothing Blame</b>	
	Coefficient	Predicted Probability	Coefficient	Predicted Probability
Scenario 2	1.491*	-	1.099	-0.037*
	A very small role	-0.045*	-	-
	A small role	0.035**	-	-
	A moderate role	0.029**	-	-
	A strong role	0.013**	-	-
	A very strong role	0.006**	-	-
Scenario 3	2.879*	-	1.540*	-0.165**
	A very small role	-0.13**	-	-
	A small role	0.087**	-	-
	A moderate role	0.105**	-	-
	A strong role	0.062**	-	-
	A very strong role	0.041**	-	-
Scenario 4	0.591*	-	0.750*	0.111**
	A very small role	-0.03	-	-
	A small role	-0.046**	-	-
	A moderate role	-0.025**	-	-
	A strong role	-0.008**	-	-
	A very strong role	-0.003*	-	-

*\*Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$*

APPENDIX X

ZIOP – PREDICTIVE PROBABILITY FOR DRINKING BLAME PERCEPTIONS

	<b>Ordered Probit</b>		<b>Likelihood of No Drinking Blame</b>	
	Coefficient	Predicted Probability	Coefficient	Predicted Probability
Scenario 2	0.487*	-	0.396*	0.322**
	A very small role	0.027	-	-
	A small role	-0.09**	-	-
	A moderate role	-0.117**	-	-
	A strong role	-0.087**	-	-
	A very strong role	-0.055**	-	-
Scenario 3	1.661*	-	1.249*	-0.056**
	A very small role	-0.103**	-	-
	A small role	-0.028**	-	-
	A moderate role	0.031**	-	-
	A strong role	0.067**	-	-
	A very strong role	0.09**	-	-
Scenario 4	1.151*	-	0.895	0.032
	A very small role	-0.044**	-	-
	A small role	-0.015*	-	-
	A moderate role	0.001	-	-
	A strong role	0.011	-	-
	A very strong role	0.015*	-	-

\*Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

x