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College Students' Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence

and Rape Myth Acceptance

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious social dilemma with detrimental consequences. Rape myths are inaccurate beliefs that neutralize and elicit sexually aggressive behavior (Burt, 1980). Educational programs are needed in order to reduce and prevent IPV and rape myth acceptance on college campuses. The current study sought to find whether men and women's perceptions of IPV differ. It also examined whether race is a factor in one's perception of IPV and rape myths acceptance. An online survey was administered to 241 students at a midsized Midwestern university to evaluate attitudes toward IPV in this community. The investigator found that men report a more positive attitude toward IPV and a greater acceptance of rape myths than women. The students of color did not significantly differ from the white students in neither their perceptions of IPV nor their rape myth acceptance. By better understanding existing views of IPV in the midsized-Midwestern community, service providers may be better able to address that community's needs.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV), defined as actual or threatened violence or abuse against one's partner (Swanberg, Logan, & Macke, 2005), has been and continues to be a grave social problem. According to Swanberg, Logan, and Macke (2005), 22.1% of American women have rates of lifetime prevalence of IPV, meaning that they will deal with issues surrounding IPV for most of their lives. In that same study, the authors found that women who have been physically assaulted by their partners are likely to experience 3.4 separate incidents of violence in one year (Swanberg et al., 2005).

Dating violence is not unique to one particular demographic. It occurs in all classes, communities, ethnic groups, educational levels, age groups, and sexual orientations (Jackson & Oates, 1998). Thirty to sixty percent of college women experience at least one instance of physical violence in their intimate relationships (Albaugh & Nauhta, 2005). An estimated 1.3 million women--in the United States alone--are subjected to IPV (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). However, Campbell, Sharps, Gary, Campbell, and Lopez (2002) estimate a number even higher, suggesting 1.8 million to 3.6 million women are severely injured by their partners each year in the United States.

Intimate partner violence is a broad, general term that is defined in many different ways. Campbell (2002) labeled IPV as a "physical or sexual assault, or both, of a spouse or sexual [I]ntimate" (p. 1331). However, this broad definition excludes verbal aggression and stalking, which are both forms of IPV. It also excludes abuse from unmentioned relationships (e.g., past and current dating partners, and/or marital partners). For the purposes of this study, the definition provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as used in Swanberg, Logan and Macke (2005), was utilized. They define IPV as: "actual or threatened physical or

sexual violence or psychological and emotional abuse directed toward a spouse, ex-spouse, current or former boyfriend or girlfriend, or current or former dating partner” (p. 289). This definition of IPV includes domestic violence, sexual violence, rape, sexual assault, stalking, battering, verbal aggression, and spousal or partner abuse. However, the definition of IPV does not include any form of stranger assault. IPV is also dissimilar from domestic violence, as the latter term refers only to partners who cohabit. Having defined IPV, it is important to understand its relevance to the field of communication.

Renz defines communication as “processes by which verbal and nonverbal messages are used to create and share meaning...a tool to exchange information” (M. Renz, personal communication, January 28, 2007). Relationships are formed, maintained, and ended through communication. IPV is an unhealthy response to relational conflict and communicates power in the form of gendered violence, both of which are areas of interest to communication scholars. IPV is an injurious expression of anger that can occur when partners lack communication and relational skills. Therefore, a better understanding of IPV is important to communication researchers.

IPV may be perpetuated through the acceptance of rape myths. As stated above, the rape of a current or former dating partner, cohabitating partner, or spouse is considered a form of IPV. Acceptance of a rape myth signifies people’s attitudes about what constitutes rape which, in turn, is associated with how males and females view IPV. O’Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, (2003, p.516) defined rape myths as “irrational beliefs that act as ‘releasers’ or ‘neutralizers’ that then elicit sexually aggressive behavior.” In 1980, Burt found that men and women differ in their attitudes about rape myths; specifically, men are more likely to accept rape myths than women.

The current research sought to replicate and extend Burt's research by examining the relationship between the acceptance of rape myths and males' and females' perceptions of IPV.

While several studies (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005; Burt, 1990; Carr & VanDeusen, 2002; Goetz, Shackelford, Schipper, & Stewart-Williams, 2006; Ramirez, 2005) have researched IPV and rape myth acceptance, few have examined the specific community of interest: mid-sized Midwestern universities. Additionally, this study used both Burt's traditional measures of IPV and rape myths acceptance and newer measures of these constructs, allowing for the comparison of these measures. The relevant literature that follows led to the development of specific research questions about the effects of gender and race upon college men and women's perceptions of IPV and rape myths acceptance.

Review of Previous Research

Intimate Partner Violence

The majority of the population of interest -- college students -- are in dating relationships rather than marital relationships, though the number of college couples who cohabit continues to rise (Guttmacher Institute, 1980). One study has shown that women in dating relationships are more likely to experience IPV than married couples, making college students more vulnerable than married couples (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005). Albaugh and Nauta also suggest that college students' perceptions of the definition of IPV are inaccurate, and that further research is needed to investigate students' perceptions of IPV. Prior IPV studies have examined assessing blame for IPV (Witte, Shroeder, & Lohr, 2006), effects of race upon IPV perspectives (Klevens et al., 2007; Ramirez, 2005; Smith, Thompson, Tomaka, & Buchanan, 2005), and the effects of history of violence in family of origin on IPV (Carr & VanDeusen, 2002).

One factor affecting college students' perceptions of IPV is race. Ramirez (2005) and Smith, Thompson, Tomaka, and Buchanan (2005) looked at IPV attitudes in Mexican communities. Ramirez (2005) compared the role of criminal history and abuse of intimate partners on Mexican and White college students' predictions of IPV. He found that those who had committed crimes before the age of 15 were significantly more likely to be abusive toward a partner than those who had committed crimes after the age of 15. Ramirez also found that a history of poverty was more strongly correlated with IPV than a history of crimes committed at an early age. Ramirez's study did not find race to be as significant of a factor in these predictions, as was the history of poverty. Smith, Thompson, Tomaka, and Buchanan (2005) looked at a non-student sample of Mexican men and women's attitudes about IPV. Like Ramirez, Smith et al. also found no significant difference between Mexican Americans' attitudes of IPV and Whites' attitudes.

Klevens et al.'s (2007) qualitative study explored the experiences and perceptions of IPV in a Latino community in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. They found, through focus groups and interviews with community members, that the greatest need was for prevention programs (Klevens et al., 2007). Another study looked at IPV in the female African American community (Campbell et al., 2007). Through previous empirical studies, this study focused on the prevalence of violence against African American females and health outcomes. They found that African American women have higher reported rates of IPV than Caucasian women. In attempt to explain this phenomenon, they hypothesized that the high rates of IPV are directly related to years of chronic racism and history of abuse.

The connection between the relationship of IPV in one's family origin and dating violence has also been explored (Carr & VanDeusen, 2002). Carr and VanDeusen found that

there was a positive correlation between witnessing IPV as a child and either perpetrating or becoming a victim of IPV in the future. In their study of college undergraduate men, the researchers found that participants believed that they were abusive because of their past experiences with violence in their homes. They perceived their abusive acts as non-abusive because of the violence they had witnessed in the past.

Mullin and Linz (1995) also confirmed that viewing violence increases physically aggressive behavior and may increase desensitization to violence. They conducted a study in which they asked male participants to watch sexually violent videos, and then asked about their participants' feelings of sympathy for the victim and perceptions of the victim's injury. They found that the male participants became desensitized after watching the video with sexual violence. This study demonstrates the effects of exposure to violence and the normalizing of violent acts by men in the study.

On a topic related to the effects of exposure to violence, Byers, Shue, and Marshall (2004) investigated associations between communicative acts of abuse, relationship quality, and commitment in relationships and the differences between physically abused women and those who were not physically abused. As one might expect, Byers et al. found a negative correlation between verbal aggression and relationship quality, commitment, and communication. This study also concluded that women who had been in past abusive relationships are more likely to stay in an abusive relationship longer and are more likely to have children with their abuser than women with no past abusive experience. Adding children to these abusive relationships may further contribute to the women's decision to remain in their abusive relationships.

A study that contributes to the notion that students have misperceptions about IPV is Witte, Schroeder, and Lohr (2006), which looked at IPV from a "blame" perspective. In their

study, college students were asked to assign blame to either the perpetrator or the survivor after they watched a vignette. Witte et al. found that the students discounted the perpetrator's actions when the survivor was verbally aggressive before the confrontation became physical. This finding clearly supports the idea that students have misperceptions about IPV. Students reported feeling that the perpetrator was justified in the abuse because the survivor "had it coming" to her. This finding further supports the notion that myths exist in many college students' perceptions of IPV.

Nabors, Dietz, and Jasinski (2006) examined both college age students' perceptions of and attitudes toward IPV. They found that students were more likely than not to believe that, in IPV situations, women were the cause of the violence. The researchers also stated that greater efforts are needed to educate students about domestic violence myths and what verbal abuse entails especially within the male student population. Goetz, Shackelford, Schipper and Stewart-Williams (2006) looked at how men degrade their partners through verbal abuse. They found data that suggest that men who denigrate their partner's worth and intelligence are most dangerous to their partners and are more likely to use violence in their relationship. These studies clearly support the assertion that college students have misperceptions about IPV.

Miller and Bukva (2001) conducted a study in which they asked college students to look at vignettes of escalating conflicts between heterosexual couples and then judge the seriousness of the conflict. They found that college students often classified a threatening situation as a non-serious situation. The prevailing perception in the study was that IPV is usually not a serious situation. This study further contributes to a body of knowledge suggesting that college students may not be able to identify the characteristics that constitute a healthy relationship. The study

concluded that college students need nonviolent role models in both social institutions and social contexts.

While each of these studies has added important insights to the IPV literature, there remains much work to do and many questions that still need to be asked. For example, additional research on gender differences in perceptions of IPV is needed. Miller and Bukva (2001) also call for a future study to examine how race may influence perceptions of IPV. Past studies that looked at race as a predictor of IPV (Ramirez, 2005; Smith et al., 2005) were limited by the narrow geographical location of the sample they used. Both studies recruited participants in two different cities with a predominantly Mexican American population. This population is not reflective of the majority of traditional college students; as these studies were non-representative, they cannot be applied to all U.S. regions.

Overall, studies of college students' perceptions of IPV have been limited; these studies primarily surveyed students about their attitudes toward domestic violence (i.e., partners cohabiting instead of traditional college relationship living arrangements). The majority of this research also failed to look at gender differences in the students' perceptions of IPV, the effects of race on IPV, nor on the perceptions of IPV reported by students at mid-sized Midwestern university campuses. Rape myths can also be an influencing factor on a college students' perceptions of IPV and past rape myth research has also failed to look at the current researcher's population of interest.

Rape Myths

Rape myths, based upon one's definition of rape, also contribute to one's perceptions of IPV. As stated above, rape myths are "irrational beliefs that act as 'releasers' or 'neutralizers' that then elicit sexually aggressive behavior" (O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003, p. 516).

Rape myths play a central role in male sexual dominance and power struggles; individuals with negative stereotypes of women often report higher levels of rape myth acceptance (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001). There have been studies of rape myths and college women's race (Carmody & Washington, 2001), relationships to sexual assault, sexual coercion, and revictimization (Chiroro, Bohner, Viki, & Jarvis, 2004; Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001), and the effects of rape prevention programs on rape myths acceptance (Frese, Moya, & Megias, 2004; Heppner, Humphrey, Hillenbrand-Gunn, DeBord, 1995; Hinck & Thomas, 1999; O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003).

Carmody and Washington (2001) looked at how black and white women differ in their rape myth acceptance. They found that there was not a substantial difference between black and white women's acceptance of rape myths, a finding that is inconsistent with past research (Giacopassi, & Dull, 1986, Burt, 1980; as cited in Carmody, & Washington, 2001). Giacopassi and Dull (1986, as cited in Carmody and Washington, 2001) found that black men had the greatest acceptance of rape myths and that blacks assessed more blame to the victims than whites did.

A more recent study found that sexual aggression and rape myth acceptance may not be as monumental as previous research suggests (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001). Forbes and Adams-Curtis found that men at their participating school reported more negative attitudes about rape myths than in other studies. O'Donohue, Yeater, and Fanetti (2003) reported that

participants who adhere to more rape supportive attitudes report a more extensive history of sexual aggression, indicate more likelihood of future sexual aggression if assured of not getting caught, and display a more deviant pattern of sexual arousal than those of participants who hold less rape supportive attitudes. (p. 516)

In other words, the students who believed in rape myths were more likely to have past and present encounters with sexual aggression than students who did not believe in rape myths.

Prevention Program Research

Numerous studies have found rape prevention programs ineffective in changing students' attitudes toward rape myths (e.g. Heppner, Humphrey, Hillenbrand-Gunn, & DeBord, 1995). Heppner et al. examined interventions as a form of preventative programming and found that their ability to produce quality programs to change students' attitudes toward rape myths were longitudinally unsuccessful.

Frese, Moya, and Megias (2004) administered a study in Spain to find whether the role of rape myths and situational factors have an effect on the perceptions of date rape, marital rape, and stranger rape. They discovered that the less stereotypic a rape scene was, the more likely the students were to place blame on the survivor. The social perception of rape persists that "real" rape only occurs when a young girl walking home alone is attacked by a masked stranger in a dark alley, not in college dating relationships. To further support this notion, Chiroro, Bohner, Viki, and Jarvis (2004) found that men predisposed to rape held stereotypical views on rape (i.e., they believed in rape myths). However, Hinck and Thomas (1990) looked at how far society has come in the accepting rape myths. In their college student sample, they found that, generally, students disagreed with the myths. Further, they reported that men who have attended rape awareness workshops were less likely to accept the rape myths than men who had not attended. The study suggests that the workshops were successful in changing students' attitudes toward rape myths.

These contradictory findings regarding the disparity between different genders and races warrant further research. While many colleges and universities recognize their responsibility to

offer programs that educate students on healthy relationships, little is known about the factors affecting college students' perceptions of IPV and rape myths. Studies have often looked at sexual assault rather than the perceptions of IPV; they also looked at rape myth acceptance, but they did not assess the factors that may influence these perceptions and acceptances.

Summary

Prodigious amounts of people remain in unhealthy relationships; to better implement college programs designed to raise awareness of the problem of sexual assault, we must first try better understand when and why IPV occurs. Previous research has allowed us to make great strides in understanding IPV and its components. However, those great strides have not alleviated the high percentage of violence in relationships. Also, past research has not addressed whether college students are able to recognize IPV indicators before the point of physical violence.

Based on the literature reviewed, the following questions were investigated:

RQ1: Do college men and women differ in their perceptions of IPV?

RQ2: Do college men and women differ in their rape myth acceptance?

RQ3: Is race a factor in college students' perceptions of IPV?

RQ4: Is race a factor in college students' rape myth acceptance?

The current research surveyed college students at a midsized Midwestern university with the goal of learning more about perceptions of IPV and rape myths acceptance. A better understanding of these perspectives may allow campus programmers to tailor their healthy relationship educational programs to better fit students' perceptions.

Methodology

The variables of interest in the current study included biological sex and race as potential factors associated with perceptions of IPV and rape myths acceptance. The following sections will detail the current study's design, participants, measures, procedure, and data treatment.

Design

The researcher employed a quantitative online survey method because IPV and rape are not topics easily discussed. If college students can respond to questions about IPV and rape through an anonymous questionnaire, then they may be more likely to respond honestly than if the researcher chose a different method (e.g., interviewing). Therefore, the researcher used an online survey design and protected participants' anonymity by specifying that no names were to be used on the questionnaire. The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey.com, a commercial online survey hosting service.

Participants

A convenience sample ($N=241$) was recruited through advertisements placed on a popular online social networking site, Facebook.com, and through classroom recruitment. Of the 241 students recruited, 72 were male, 152 were female, and 17 chose not to answer the biological sex question. Only 25 percent of the participants identified themselves as students of color (11 Latinos/as, 28 Black, 163 White, 3 Asian, 3 Pacific Islander, 3 Native American, and 13 other), 67 percent were white, and 17 participants chose not to answer the race demographic question.

Measures

This study included four different measures: Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (1980), Burt's (1980) Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale, Lonsway and Fitzgerald's (1995) Attitudes toward Violence Scale, and Lonsway and Fitzgerald's (1995) Rape Myth Scale. These

scales measure the individual's attitudes toward IPV and acceptance of rape myths. In addition, demographic items asked about the participant's age, biological sex, and race/ethnicity.

Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance scale was created to measure college students' acceptance of rape myths (see Appendix A). It includes 19 items and uses a seven point scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). Burt (1980) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .875. Similarly, the current study found this scale to have a Cronbach's alpha of .861. This measure is a traditional measure used in the relevant literature, but has been criticized by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) for its hostile attitudes toward women. They find the titles of Burt's scales to insinuate that women are both deceitful and manipulative. Lonsway and Fitzgerald also critique the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale in the following areas: content validity, item wording, and criterion-related validity.

Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) revised Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and dubbed it the "Rape Myth Scale" (see Appendix B). This scale differs from Burt's in that it lists the rape myths and asks participants whether they agree with the statements. Items are positively worded, unlike the Rape Myths Acceptance Scale, which is neutrally worded. This measure also includes 19 items assessed on a seven point scale. The coefficient alpha for the Rape Myth Scale was .890 in the development sample (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1995). However, the present study found a reliability of Cronbach's alpha .927. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) deemed their scale better than Burt's (1980) because it addresses the operational definition of critical variables problem that Burt's contained.

The current research also utilized the Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence created by Burt (1980) to measure attitude toward IPV (see Appendix C). This measure contains six items asking participants to evaluate attitudes toward violence on a seven point scale ranging from

strongly agrees (7) to strongly disagree (1). The scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of only .586 in Burt's original study and a .570 in the present study. Due to its history of low reliability, a second scale was used to measure this construct, as well.

The second measure of attitudes toward IPV came from Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995); their measure was derived from Velicer, Huckel, and Hansen (1989). The Attitudes Toward Violence Scale (see Appendix D) asks participants about their general thoughts about violence. It is composed of 20 questions and uses a seven point scale, from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). The development sample reported an alpha of .870. The present researcher found a Cronbach's alpha of .873. This measure differs from Burt's (1980) because it asks about socialized violence, not about violence committed against women.

Procedure

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before the execution of any data collection. Participants were recruited either in class or through an advertisement on Facebook.com.

Facebook.com advertisement data collection. Paid advertisements and free group invitations were placed on the Facebook.com, an online social networking site, for five days. To attract a larger number of participants, the advertisements were extended for five additional days. Facebook.com advertisements were displayed only to those in the mid-sized Midwestern university network of interest. Advertisements invited all students over the age of 18 to complete the online questionnaire.

Since race has been found to affect perceptions of violence and rape myth acceptance (Carmody et al., 2001, Ramirez, 2005; Smith et al., 2005), and race is one of the variables of interest in the current study, participation by students of color was especially important. To

encourage participation from students of different races, an invitation to participate in the study was placed on the university's minority student listserv. Also, the researcher sent an email to invite students to participate to both, scholars from a multicultural scholarship cohort, and students from a program that prepares inner city adolescents over the summer for their arrival in the fall.

Participants clicking on the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) link in the invitation to participate were directed to the online consent form. The informed consent form described the potential risks and benefits associated with participation in this study. The form listed the researcher and her mentor's contact information, as well as a space to type in the students name and her/his instructor if they were receiving extra credit. As the topic under investigation could be upsetting, especially to those with a history of violence, a counseling reference was included in the informed consent form. Survey instructions also reminded participants that they could cease participating at any time if they began to feel uncomfortable.

After electronically "signing" the informed consent form, participants were automatically directed to the online survey. Responses were indicated by clicking a radio button or by typing a response in a text box. The questionnaire took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. When finished, participants clicked a "submit" button to end the questionnaire.

In-class data collection. For in-class recruitment, the primary researcher attended several university classes and asked students to complete the online questionnaire outside of class. Participation was voluntary and extra credit was given at the discretion of each class' professor. An oral overview of the study and informed consent information were given in class by the researcher. Participants then received a slip of paper with the URL for the online informed consent form. Those receiving extra credit for their participation could type in their name and

their instructor's name in a text box provided. Alternative extra credit options were provided for those choosing not to participate. After electronically "signing," participants were directed to the online questionnaire. From this point, the data collection procedure was the same as for the Facebook.com advertisement data collection.

Data Treatment

The data were downloaded from SurveyMonkey.com, and then converted into a Microsoft Excel file. After the data was converted to the Excel file, it was then opened in SPSS (v.15). The informed consent information was collected in a database separate from the survey response data, and no attempt was made to link the participants' names with their survey responses. The electronic data collected will be kept by the researcher and her adviser indefinitely.

The researcher then defined the variables, cleaned the data, and reversed all of the reverse-scored variables in each measure. The reliabilities of each scale were then determined using SPSS's scale reliability analysis. Scores were then computed; a summed score was found for the items in the Attitudes Toward Violence scales (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1995). For the other three scales, means were computed. To analyze the data, the researcher computed Independent-Samples *t*-tests and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results

Research Question 1

For the question of whether males and females differ in their perceptions of IPV, an independent samples *t* test was utilized to analyze the data. For the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale, there was a significant difference between males and females. Males ($M=60.93$, $SD=19.82$) reported significantly more positive attitudes toward violence than did females ($M=$

51.56, $SD= 13.47$), $t(221) = 4.145$, $p < .001$. Using the Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale, males ($M=2.44$, $SD=.84$) once again were significantly more accepting of interpersonal violence than were females ($M= 2.17$, $SD= .73$), $t(222) = 2.43$, $p=.016$.

Research question 2

Males ($M=2.67$, $SD= .60$) also reported significantly more acceptance of rape myths than females ($M=2.33$, $SD=.51$) using the Rape Myth Acceptance scale, $t(222) = 4.43$, $p < .001$. In a separate scale that measured one's acceptance of rape myths, the Rape Myth Scale, men ($M=2.12$, $SD=.86$) once again scored significantly higher than women ($M=1.7$, $SD=.74$) in their support of rape myths, $t(221) = 3.82$, $p < .001$.

Research question 3

An ANOVA examining racial differences in IPV revealed a significant difference in attitudes toward IPV, but only on the Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence scale, $F(6, 217) = 2.75$, $p < .014$. Using this scale, Latinos were found to be more accepting of violence than the white students using a more liberal form of comparison, the Least Square Difference ($MD= .723$, $p=.003$). However, no significant difference was found between Latinos and whites using the more conservative Scheffe follow-up test ($MD=.723$, $p=.168$). It is also important to note that, on the more reliable Attitudes Towards Violence Scale, no significant difference was found between the seven racial groups, $F(6, 216) = .88$, $p < .508$.

As previously mentioned, some of the racial groups were represented by only a few participants (e.g. 28 self-identified as Blacks, 11 Latinos, 3 Asians, 3 Pacific Islanders, 3 Native Americans, and 13 self-identified as "others"). Due to the low number of participants in some racial groups, racial categories were combined to form two larger comparison groups: students of color ($n = 61$) and white students ($n = 163$). An independent samples t -test comparing students of

color and white students on the two measures of attitudes toward IPV revealed no significant differences between students of color ($M= 56.52, SD= 12.82$) and white students ($M= 54.03, SD= 17.38$) in perceptions of interpersonal violence using the Attitude Towards Violence scale, $t(221) = 1.02, p=.309$. Using the Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence scale, once again, no significant differences were found between students of color ($M= 2.57, SD=.93$) and white students ($M=2.16, SD= .70$), $t(222) = 3.50, p<.001$.

Research question 4

When comparing students of color with white students on rape myths acceptance, the results were similar to the findings on perceptions of interpersonal violence. Using Burt's rape Myth Acceptance Scale, students of color ($M=2.53, SD=.66$) were not significantly more accepting of rape myths than white students ($M= 2.40, SD= .52$), $t(222) =1.61, p=.108$. Results were similar using Lonsway and Fitzgerald's Rape Myth Scale; there was no significant difference in rape myth acceptance between students of color ($M= 2.0, SD= .89$) and white students ($M=1.78, SD=.78$), $t(221) = 1.529, p =.128$.

Discussion

The present study's researcher asked whether men and women differ in their acceptance of rape myths and attitudes toward IPV. In fact, men were significantly more accepting of rape myths and had more positive attitudes toward IPV than did women across multiple measures of each construct. While there was some weak evidence suggesting that Latino students may be more accepting of interpersonal violence than are whites, this finding did not withstand the rigor of more conservative comparisons of difference. Therefore, overall, the researcher found no significant difference between the students of color's and white students' perceptions of IPV and

rape myth acceptance. In this section, the implications of these results for college programs on sexual assault awareness and prevention will be explored.

Gender differences in perceptions of IPV and rape myth acceptance

The current study found that the males held a higher acceptance of violence and support of rape myths. Males were significantly more tolerant of interpersonal violence and were also more accepting of rape myths. These findings are consistent with those of past research (Burt, 1980; Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Goetz, Shackelford, Schipper, & Stewart-Williams, 2006). Since a growing body of research supports this conclusion, researchers must now focus on how this difference develops, and why.

One reason why this difference may occur could be due to societal-enforced, strict gender role guidelines. Men often feel the pressure to conform to society's expectations of what it means to be a "man." Numerous studies have researched how masculinity typically implies aggressiveness and competition (Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, MacEachern, Marty, & Schedeker, 1992; Philaretou & Allen, 2001, Pleck, 1992). Men are socialized to be masculine and unafraid to fervently pursue their sexual desires. Often force may seem even acceptable to men whom hold traditional perceptions of male definition. Philaretou and Allen (2001) discuss how men are taught to be capable of dominating their women sexually. This pressure to be sexual beings may be the driving force of males' acceptance of sexualized violence.

A similar study by Pleck (1992) found that men measure their success and competency with a "yardstick of power" and superficial acquisition. To be a competent man often means to have material possessions and status, not to be sensitive to a woman's needs, or to take it a step further, her cry to stop. Responses to the current study's measures support these previous researchers' claims. When asked, "It is all right for a partner to slap the other if they are insulted

or ridiculed,” even though the majority (67%) of participants disagreed, 12 students were neutral on this item, and four somewhat agreed. Another item that yielded surprising results stated, “Many times a woman will pretend she doesn’t want to have intercourse because she doesn’t want to seem loose, but she’s really hoping the man will force her.” On this item, 25 responded neutrally and 33 somewhat agreed with the statement. These numbers are alarming, and the factors affecting these perceptions beg for additional attention from researchers.

Those who create and evaluate sexual assault prevention programs should consider this research and tailor programs to reach all-male audiences. Often, men feel the need to impress their other male friends and reject educational efforts. Maybe educators should approach men in a one-on-one setting. Such programming might be time consuming, but the benefits could outweigh the costs.

Programs should also encourage males to have the strength to step outside their traditional male roles. It may be beneficial to encourage males to reflect on their childhood experiences, on the treatment that their mothers may have felt at the hands of their fathers. They should be encouraged to evaluate their fathers’ actions and consider why they think those actions were appropriate or inappropriate. Programs should also ask males to consider how they want the women that they love to be treated and whether they enact this ideal treatment.

Most importantly, the lesson that needs to be stressed in programming for men is that it is not acceptable to be a bystander when IPV occurs. Choosing not to act to prevent or stop a violent situation is just as bad as being the perpetrator of the violence. Men need positive role models to redefine masculinity in ways that do not condone violence. Definitions of masculinity that promote treating women with respect and doing the “right” thing, could result in important decreases in the prevalence of IPV.

Racial differences in perceptions of IPV and rape myth acceptance

Overall, there were no significant differences in perceptions of IPV between students of color and whites. One must exercise caution in making any assumptions based on the current study's racial difference findings, keeping in mind the small number of participants of color. These findings differ somewhat from a few previous studies that found significant differences between racial groups in IPV tolerance (Burt, 1980; Carmody & Washington, 2001). Though the current researcher is not nearly capricious enough to believe that discrimination is not still pervasive and immensely powerful, the results suggest that maybe racial differences are not nearly as great as they have been previously (Burt, 1980; Carmody & Washington, 2001).

One of the current study's findings was a difference in IPV tolerance between Latino and white college students using the Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence (AIV) scale. Though only eleven students identified themselves as Latino/as, an independent sample *t*-test found that was significantly more accepting of violence than were whites. However, this result must also be interpreted with caution for two reasons. First, this significant result was found only when using independent samples *t*-tests as follow-up tests to an ANOVA. As repeated use of *t*-tests compounds error, these tests are more likely to find significant results than more conservative tests, like the Scheffe follow-up procedure. Using the Scheffe procedure, no significant difference was found between Latino and white students on the AIV scale. Second, it is important to note that the AIV scale did have a lower reliability ($\alpha = .570$) than the second measure of IPV (Attitudes Towards Violence Scale, $\alpha = .873$). On the more reliable measure, no significant difference was found between the racial groups. Given these reasons for caution, there is some weak evidence to suggest a possible difference between Latino and white students' tolerance of interpersonal violence, as been suggested by a previous study (Ramirez, 2005). If

supported with further research, this finding could be linked to the traditional standards of gender roles held by many middle-aged and older Mexican-American men (Klevens et al., 2007). Sometimes, men from very traditional Latino households still maintain that women should be housewives and mothers with no potential of financial independence and success without a man's help. As Rosario Enriquez-Leder (1995) reminds us that "[m]achismo is still rampant...not only the church, but the government as well (for example via documents read during wedding ceremonies) emphasize women's duty of obedience and submission to men" (p. 9). Abalos (2005) stated that the problem is not with men or machismo, but with the distortion of the definition of the word "man" in Latino communities. If so, then we must work more vigorously to redefine masculinity in these communities. Abalos suggested reject our patriarchal upbringing and embrace male feminism. Abalos (2005) acknowledged that such change might be a struggle for Latino men; it could take many generations to completely overcome the desire to dominate over and protect women. Future researchers should attempt to replicate and extend the research in this area.

Overall, the current study's findings raise concerns about the ways in which men and women are socialized today. Women are often objectified in the media. Every day, American college students receive messages reinforcing the notion that women are sexual objects. Women are often reduced to selling a car in a bikini, or flashing their breasts in front of video cameras; these mediated messages are continuous and persistent. As Sunny Hansen (2004) points out, there is a

proliferation of sports bars, adult shows, "sex entertainment" bars, certain TV programs, and web pornography along with predominately male faces in Congress, government, corporations, and room boards, [that] reminds us of the dominant male values in positions

of power and sexist attitudes which still prevail and keep women from taking their place as equal partners. (p. 96)

If men do not perceive women as equals, then men are permitted to see women as mere possessions that could be used and simply discarded. Gender stereotypical mediated messages perpetuate unhealthy perceptions of violence and reinforce rape myth acceptance.

There were several limitations of the current research. The first pertains to demographics; future research should consider recruiting a more diverse population of participants. However, considering the demographics at the university from which participants were recruited, the researcher's efforts to recruit as many students of color were successful; the percentage of students of color in this study is considerably higher than in the parent university population. Another limitation of this research was the dearth of male participants (67.9% of participants identified themselves as females, while only 32.1% identified as males). Again, while the ratio of females to males may favor females, it is fairly representative of the university's overall gender breakdown (as reported on the university's website) and perhaps a reflection of many Midwestern universities. In order to replicate and expand upon these results, future studies should survey more males and students of color. Another suggestion for future researchers is to utilize open-ended questions to elicit more detailed responses about college students' perceptions of violence and acceptance of rape myths, and perhaps shed some light on how and why these beliefs were formed.

Steps can and should be taken to solidify advocacy plans across U.S. college campuses. Advocacy plans could include the creation and implementation of new campus programs. The current study's researcher will share these results with the director of the university's sexual aggression student advocate group. The student advocate group may then use the information to

assess the problems students may have in recognizing IPV and revise their coeducational program to better serve the students' needs. If males are more accepting of violence and hold more rape myth acceptance, the program should tailor its presentations to reach more male audiences. For example, the group can make more efforts to educate in all-male environments on their campus, such as fraternities or all-male residence halls.

Hansen (2004) offered a variety of different ways to advocate the importance ending sexual violence against women to boys and men. She suggested that universities look for ways to teach male students how to adapt to nontraditional roles, how to become more affectionate, and to control their aggression. She also stated that mentorship could be useful in having young men exposed themselves to healthy positive images of men in egalitarian roles. Colleges should offer classes on the benefits of conflict resolution and mediation. In all actuality, these communication skills need to be developed before college, and might be most advantageous at the elementary school level. If students do not learn mediation and conflict resolution skills until college, by then, it may be too late. Hansen also offered that we should campaign for legislation and the allocation of federal funding to educate boys and men on gender equality. She recommended that anecdotal information be share with those whom are in need of education, to illustrate the need for healthy relationship education.

Finally, researchers may want to further investigate potential sources of gender stereotypes for Latino racial communities. This study's findings could reflect the existence and continuance of "machismo" in Latino communities. Given these findings, Latino-centered groups on campuses may benefit from workshops and presentations on topics of interpersonal violence. Latino students may also be more receptive to receiving this information from educators who share their racial background and with whom they can identify.

Until we gain a better understanding of IPV, it will continue to plague college campuses - and the rest of our world -- as a major social problem. Though the current study will not rid the world of IPV or rape myth acceptance, by gaining a better understanding of IPV and rape myths, the present study may inform universities' IPV prevention programs to better prevent IPV situations on university campuses. Overall, the results of this study suggest the need for male intervention and education about IPV. Perhaps some of the men reached by the new programming efforts mentioned above will be inspired to become allies or even activists in the continuing struggle for gender equality and interpersonal violence prevention.

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Appendix A

Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

Directions: Read the items below. Try to think about the following questions and then answer as honestly as possible whether you strongly agree or disagree or somewhere in between.

Strongly Disagree			Moderate				Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

- _____ 1. A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex.
- _____ 2. Any female can get raped.
- _____ 3. One reason that women falsely report a rape is that they frequently need to call attention to themselves.
- _____ 4. Any healthy woman could successfully resist a rape if she wanted to.
- _____ 5. In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation.
- _____ 6. If a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, it's her own fault if her partner forces sex on her.
- _____ 7. Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve.
- _____ 8. A woman who is stuck up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson.
- _____ 9. Many women have an unconscious wish to be raped, and may then unconsciously set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked.
- _____ 10. If a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with a man she's just met there, she should be considered "fair game" to other males at the party who want to have sex with her too, whether she wants to or not.

_____11. What percentage of women who report a rape would you say are lying because they are angry and want to get back at the man they accuse?

_____12. What percentages of rapes would you guess were merely invented by women who discovered they were pregnant and wanted to protect their own reputation?

13. A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were:

_____a. your best friend

_____b. an Indian woman

_____c. a neighbor woman

_____d. a young boy

_____e. a black woman

_____f. a white woman

Appendix B

Burt's (1980) Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence

Directions: Read each statement below and then answer with a number that corresponds with your level of acceptance. Place the numbers on the spaces beside the question number.

Strongly Disagree			Moderate			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

_____ 1. People today should not use “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” as a rule of living.

_____ 2. Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women.

_____ 3. Many times a woman will pretend she doesn't want to have intercourse because she doesn't want to seem loose, but she's really hoping the man will force her.

_____ 4. A wife should move out of the house if her husband hits her.

_____ 5. Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to force her.

_____ 6. A man is never justified in hitting his wife.

Appendix C

Attitudes Toward Violence Scale

(derived from Velicer, Huckel & Hansen, 1989; found in Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1995)

Directions: Read the statements below and place the number that corresponds with the degree in which you agree/disagree. Place the number beside the number of the question.

Strongly Disagree			Moderate			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- _____ 1. Violent crimes should be punished violently.
- _____ 2. The death penalty should be part of every penal code.
- _____ 3. Any prisoner deserves to be mistreated by other persons in jail.
- _____ 4. Any nation should be ready with a strong military at all times.
- _____ 5. The manufacture of weapons is necessary.
- _____ 6. War is often necessary.
- _____ 7. The government should send armed soldiers to control violent university riots.
- _____ 8. Our country should be aggressive with its military internationally.
- _____ 9. Killing of civilians should be accepted as an unavoidable part of war.
- _____ 10. Our country has the right to protect its borders forcefully.
- _____ 11. A child's habitual disobedience should be punished physically.
- _____ 12. Giving mischievous children a quick slap is the best way to quickly end trouble.
- _____ 13. Children should be spanked for temper tantrums.

_____14. Punishing children physically when they deserve it will make them responsible and mature adults.

_____15. Young children who refuse to obey should be whipped.

_____16. It is all right for a partner to hit the other if they are unfaithful.

_____17. It is all right for one partner to slap the other if they are insulted or ridiculed.

_____18. It is all right for a partner to slap the partner's face if challenged.

_____19. An adult should whip a child for breaking the law.

_____20. It is all right for a partner to hit the other if they flirt with others.

Appendix D

Lonsway and Fitzgerald's (1995) Rape Myth Scale

Directions: Read each statement below and then answer with a number that corresponds with your level of acceptance. Place the numbers on the spaces beside the question number.

Strongly Disagree			Moderate			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- _____ 1. When women talk and act sexy, they are inviting rape.
- _____ 2. When a woman is raped, she usually did something careless to put herself in that situation.
- _____ 3. Any woman who teases a man sexually and doesn't finish what she started realistically deserves to get anything she gets.
- _____ 4. Many rapes happen because women lead men on.
- _____ 5. Men don't usually don't intend to force sex on a woman, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
- _____ 6. In some rape cases, the woman actually wanted it to happen.
- _____ 7. Even though the woman may call it rape, she probably enjoyed it.
- _____ 8. If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you really can't say that it was rape.
- _____ 9. A rape probably didn't happen if the woman has no bruises or marks.
- _____ 10. When a woman allows petting to get to a certain point, she is implicitly agreeing to have sex.
- _____ 11. If a woman is raped, often it is because she didn't say "no" clearly enough.

- _____12. Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them.
- _____13. When men rape, it is because of their strong desire for sex.
- _____14. It is just part of human nature for men to take sex from women ho let their guard down.
- _____15. A rapist is more likely to be black or Hispanic than white.
- _____16. In any rape case one would have to question whether the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation.
- _____17. Rape mainly occurs on the “bad” side of town.
- _____18. Many so-called rape victims are actually women who had sex and “changed their minds” afterwards.
- _____19. If a husband pays all the bills, he has the right to have sex with his wife whenever he wants.