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The Effects of Rape Myths and Expert Testimony on Juror Decision Making in a Sexual Assault Case

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in Psychology.

By
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Under the mentorship of Amy Hackney, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

When a sexual assault case is tried in court there is often a lack of physical evidence, leading jurors to rely on the general information they know about a topic when determining a verdict. When jurors rely on their general knowledge, preexisting stereotypes and prejudice can influence their decision. One type of stereotype is rape myths- false beliefs about rape victims, the situation surrounding a rape, and rapists. One understudied rape myth is the myth that victims who report their rape immediately are more credible than those who wait to report. Rape myths can be used to shift blame away from a perpetrator and onto a victim and to justify the sexual victimization of women. Within the court system, expert testimony has been used to debunk preexisting beliefs about many topics, such as rape myths. The current study sought to analyze the effect of expert testimony on mock jurors' levels of rape myth acceptance and victim blame. In this online study, participants read a sexual assault vignette in which the victim reported a rape to the police immediately or delayed by one week. Participants were also randomly assigned to receive an expert testimony or no expert testimony. Results indicated that the use of an expert testimony was effective in reducing belief in the myth that timing of report was related to victim credibility. Results also showed that men were significantly higher in levels of victim blame, belief in timing myth, and general levels of rape myth acceptance than women. Implications and limitations of findings are discussed.

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The Effects of Rape Myths and Expert Testimony on Juror Decision Making
in a Sexual Assault Case

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey conducted in 2011, nearly 1 in 5 (18.3%) women and 1 in 71 men (1.4%) reported experiencing rape at some time in their lives (Breiding et al., 2014). Despite the high prevalence of rape, very few perpetrators of rape are prosecuted and even less are convicted. For instance, the National Violence Against Women Survey estimated that 37% of reported rapes of adult women were prosecuted and that only 18% of these prosecuted rape cases result in a conviction. Because most rapes are not reported to police, the study estimated that only 3.4% of all rapes will lead to the conviction of the perpetrator. (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

With such a high prevalence of rape yet low conviction rate, there must be some influencing factors causing this disconnect. One answer may lie in the beliefs of jurors or judges who are relied upon to make important decisions in sexual assault trials but whose supposedly unbiased judgment can often be impaired by their belief in stereotypes. In the United States, jury members are chosen from the general public and decide whether or not the evidence presented satisfactorily proves that the defendant is guilty (Dinos, Burrowes, Hammond, & Cunliffe, 2014). In many rape cases there is an absence of physical evidence and jurors must decide whether to believe the story of the complainant or the defendant. This can cause jurors to rely on the general information they know about the topic and allows for the influence of stereotypes and prejudices to bias their decision (Dinos et al., 2014). The purpose of the current study was to examine the effects of report timing and expert testimony on jurors' levels of stereotypes about rape, or rape myth acceptance (RMA), victim blame, and belief in the timing myth when presented with a sexual assault case.

Rape Myth Acceptance

Rape myths are false stereotypical beliefs that are held about rape victims, the situation surrounding a rape, and rapists (Burt, 1980). Because the crime of rape can happen to anyone, individuals, women in particular, often endorse rape myths to distance themselves from the threat of rape and to create a sense of control over the situation (Bohner, Weisbrod, Raymond, Barzvi, & Schwarz, 1993). Rape myths can be used to shift blame away from a perpetrator and onto a victim as well as serve to justify the sexual victimization of women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). According to Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki (2009) rape myths generally fall into four categories: beliefs that blame the victim, beliefs that excuse the offender, beliefs that doubt claims of rape and beliefs that suggest only certain types of women are raped.

In a recent meta-analysis conducted by Dinos et al. (2014), eight out of nine studies supported the idea that juror judgments are influenced by rape myths and that RMA is positively associated with not guilty verdicts. When jury members' hold stereotypes and prejudices, their verdicts become influenced by external factors rather than being based solely on the evidence presented to them. Jurors who believe in rape myths may allow their beliefs to take blame away from the perpetrator and put it onto the victim, often leading to reduced sentencing recommendations, a not guilty verdict, or even case dismissal, despite evidence that the rape did occur (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). For this reason, it is important to inform jurors about the existence of and truth behind rape myths in order to enable them to make a conscious and informed decision when giving their verdict.

Expert Testimony

One way to inform jurors about the invalidity of rape myths is by providing them with expert testimony. Expert testimony has previously been effective in influencing juror decision

making (Kovera, Borgida, Gresham, Gray, & Regan, 1997) and gives an individual who has advanced knowledge about a subject an opportunity to educate the jury and judge about the facts regarding the subject. When dealing with sensitive topics in a courtroom, such as a sexual assault case, there is an added burden for the expert witness to not bias the outcome of the trial while still upholding their ethics and credibility (Gemberling & Cramer, 2014, Kovera et al., 1997).

When dealing with the trial of a sexual assault case, the expert witness should be aware that the topic could elicit intense responses from jurors due to biases of personal experience, negative emotions, and the belief systems of individuals (Gemberling & Cramer, 2014). Jurors who receive information that they do not agree with and that is not delivered in a sensitive manner may come to resist the new information or even support their original views more strongly than before they received the information (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). This reactive strength in belief is referred to as a “backfire effect” and is part of an inherent process in which individuals argue against information that is presented to them but does not line up with their personal worldview (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012).

In order to encourage psychological professionals to be cautious of these sensitivities and the potential backfire effects, Gemberling and Cramer (2014) proposed the following suggestions and accompanying explanations on how to be sensitive when discussing topics such as a sexual assault case: stress the average experience, acknowledge potential emotional reactions, and avoid moral judgments. By stressing the average experience, it should be emphasized that research is based on many individuals rather than just one individual. In order to acknowledge potential emotional reactions, expert witnesses should ensure that jurors know the information is sensitive and prepare them for the experience (Konradi, 1993). Because topics in a sexual assault trial can often include subjects such as drug use, underage drinking, or premarital sex, the expert witness

should avoid moral judgment by evading the discussion of morality all together. By ignoring any or all of these suggestions, the expert's testimony could become overshadowed with false information or could be rejected by the jurors.

While advising the expert witness to deliver information in a sensitive manner, Gemberling and Cramer (2014) also suggested a specific method for debunking myths, such as rape myths. Their recommendations are based on the research of Lewandowsky et al. (2012) and can be implemented in order to better inform the jury before they issue a verdict in a trial. The first step for an expert witness in debunking a myth is to emphasize the facts in order to protect against backfire affects. If a myth is brought up during the trial, the expert witness should give a myth warning to clarify that it is in fact a myth and, if possible, discuss why the myth exists. Another way in which expert testimony can be used to debunk rape myths is through the use of graphics; simple visual graphics can be used to emphasize the facts in a case and help jurors stay attentive and understand more of the expert testimony. (Apperson, Laws, & Scepansky, 2006)

In the present study, we sought to analyze the effect of expert testimony on juror's levels of RMA and victim blame in a sexual assault case. Participants in the study read about a hypothetical sexual assault and then received an expert testimony debunking rape myths or, in the control condition, received no expert testimony. The participants then answered a series of questions to measure their levels of RMA and victim blame as well as their verdict and sentencing recommendations in the hypothetical trial. Based on current literature, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: If participants read that a sexual assault victim waited one week before reporting the rape to the police, then they will be more likely to blame the victim than participants who read that the victim immediately reported the rape to the police.

Hypothesis 2: If participants read the expert testimony, then they will be less likely to blame the victim than participants who do not read the expert testimony.

Hypothesis 3: If participants read the expert testimony, then they will be less likely to endorse a timing-specific myth than participants who do not read the expert testimony.

METHOD

Participants

Recruitment. Participants were recruited from Georgia Southern University through the university's online SONA survey system. Individuals 18 years or older were eligible to participate and there were no race or gender restrictions. Participants received partial credit (1 credit) towards their course research requirement or extra credit from their professors in return for their participation.

Demographics. After excluding 104 participants (a more detailed explanation of the exclusion procedures are reported in the analyses and results section), the final sample consisted of 170 undergraduate students (31.8% men and 68.2% women). Participants were between the ages of 18 and 40 years old, with a mean age of 19.86 years ($SD = 2.62$). The majority of the sample identified as White or Caucasian (58.8%), and 31.2% as African American or Black, 4.1% as Hispanic or Latino, 1.2% as Asian or Pacific Islander, and 4.7% as multiracial. For more detailed demographics information from the current sample, see Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	19.86	2.62
	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Female	116	68.2
Male	54	31.8
Race/Ethnicity		
White or Caucasian	100	58.8
African American or Black	53	31.2
Hispanic or Latino	7	4.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	2	1.2
Other/Multiracial	8	4.7
Level in School		
1 st year	75	44.1
2 nd year	46	27.1
3 rd year	32	18.8
4 th year	15	8.8
Other	2	1.2
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	159	93.5
Bisexual	8	4.7
Gay or Lesbian	2	1.2
Other	1	0.6

Materials

Sexual Assault Vignette. The sexual assault vignette was an acquaintance rape vignette from Abrams, Viki, Masser, and Bohner (2003) that was adapted for the goals of the current study. The vignette detailed the story of Kathy who went to a party and met a man named Jason. After the party, Kathy invited Jason to her apartment and after she began kissing him, he later raped her.

Timing of report. The timing of the sexual assault to the police was added to the sexual assault vignette in order to assess how rape myths and juror judgments were affected. Participants were randomly assigned to receive the vignette in which Kathy reported the assault

to the police immediately or the vignette in which Kathy waited one week to report the assault. The full version of this stimulus can be found in Appendix A.

Expert Testimony. Participants were randomly assigned to read expert testimony or not. The expert testimony was constructed by the researcher using the method suggested by Gemberling and Cramer (2014) to debunk myths, such as rape myths, and consisted of 4 questions and answers by an expert on the subject of rape myths. The expert testimony was written with the intent to debunk the myth that women will always immediately report a rape to the police. The testimony was written from the results reported by Jones, Lexander, Wynn, Rossman, & Dunnuck (2009) who found that psychosocial variables predict victim reports to the police. Participants assigned to the expert testimony condition read that at the trial Dr. Pat Johnson, an expert on issues of sexual assault victimization and criminal justice response, was called to the witness stand. Below is one of the four questions and responses.

Q: Is it true that women who have been raped always immediately report their rape to the police? No, this is a myth. The length of time in which women report rape to the police varies from one woman to another. Some women report the rape immediately, some women wait a considerable length of time before reporting, and some women never report their rape to the police.

The full version of this testimony can be found in Appendix B.

Guilt Measure. Participants completed a 3-item questionnaire to assess their level of guilt assigned to the defendant in the sexual assault case. The first item on the measure stated: “The defendant is most likely _____ of sexual assault”. Participants selected between options “Guilty” or “Not Guilty”. The next item stated “On a scale ranging from 1 (not confident) to 5 (very confident), please indicate your certainty in your verdict.” The final item of the measure

stated “If you found the defendant guilty, how many years in prison do you believe he should serve for sexual assault? Please enter a number between 1 and 25.” For analyses we also created a continuous verdict score by multiplying the dichotomous verdict (-1 = not guilty, 1 = guilty) by the verdict confidence, resulting in a scale from -5 (very certain that the defendant was not guilty) to 5 (very certain that the defendant was guilty). Such continuous verdict scores are often calculated in juror decision making research in order to obtain a more sensitive test of the independent variables (e.g., Cohn, Bucolo, Pride, & Sommers, 2009).

Blame Index. The blame questionnaire in the study was also adapted from the research of Abrams, Viki, Masser, and Bohner (2003). This questionnaire included seven questions that assess victim and perpetrator blame in the sexual assault scenario described above. Sample items include “How much do you think Kathy should blame herself for what happened?” and “How much sympathy do you feel for Kathy?” Participants answered the questions on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all/none at all to 7 = completely/a lot). Additional questions were added to the blame questionnaire in order to assess sympathy towards Jason and determine how much responsibility participants attributed to both Kathy and Jason, since this was not included in the original set of questions. Consistent with past research (Abrams et al., 2003), the scale for the current study showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$). This measure included a catch question instructing participants to select the answer choice “not at all” to ensure validity of participant responses. The full version of this measure can be found in Appendix D.

Timing of Report Validity. Participants completed a 3-item questionnaire to assess their belief in how the timing of report (immediate versus delayed) affects the validity of the report. The three items were created by the current researchers. Items include the following statements: “If a woman is raped, she will report the rape to the police immediately”, “Women who wait to

report rape to the police are often lying”, and “Sometimes women wait to report a rape to the police because they feel ashamed (reverse scored).” For all three items, participants indicated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the presented statements using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree). Although the measure showed low internal consistency ($\alpha = .44$), we computed an average of the three items to indicate participants’ belief in the timing myth because reliability estimates for measures with a small number of items tend to be less accurate. The full version of this measure can be found in Appendix E.

AMMSA. The Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression (AMMSA; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007) is a 30-item questionnaire that was used to assess participants’ rape myth acceptance (RMA). We used a version of the AMSSA that was adapted for an American sample (Watson, 2016). Participants indicated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the presented statements using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree). Higher scores on the AMMSA represent greater endorsement of adversarial beliefs. The AMMSA was validated on a diverse range of individuals, including college students. Consistent with past research (Gerger et al., 2007), the scale for the current study showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$). This measure included a catch question instructing participants to select the answer choice “agree” to ensure validity of participant responses.

Participant Demographics. Participants completed a 7-item self-report questionnaire to evaluate their current demographic information, including their age, gender, race/ethnic identity, level in school, primary language, and fluency in English. The full version of this measure can be found in Appendix F.

Manipulation Check. Participants received a manipulation check to determine whether participants attended to the "timing of the report" manipulation and whether participants who received expert testimony attended to the information presented in the testimony.

Suspicion Check. Participants also received a suspicion check in order to ensure that they did not guess the hypothesis of the study. The suspicion check consisted of one question which asked participants to generate an explanation about what they believed was the purpose of the research.

Procedure

After signing the informed consent, participants were instructed to imagine that they were a juror in a criminal sexual assault case. Participants were told that they would be reading a summary of a sexual assault case and would then be deciding whether or not they believed the defendant to be guilty or not guilty. All participants received a sexual assault vignette of an acquaintance rape. The vignette was the same for all participants, however, the timing of the report was manipulated. Participants were randomly assigned to receive a testimony in which the victim either immediately reported the rape to the police or waited one week to report. Participants were then randomly assigned to receive one of two conditions regarding expert testimony. Participants received either the expert testimony that debunked the rape myth that reporting time is related to the veracity of the rape claim or participants did not receive this expert testimony.

Next, all participants completed the guilt measure, the blame questionnaire, the timing myth questionnaire, the AMMSA, and demographics, in that order. Following completion of the demographics, participants completed the manipulation check and suspicion check, and then were debriefed.

RESULTS

Data Preparation & Preliminary Analyses

In total, 274 undergraduate students participated in this study. After the researchers downloaded the data from the Qualtrics software analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 23.0).

Participant Exclusion. All participant responses were individually examined by the researchers to ensure that necessary participants were excluded from analyses. Participants who did not answer all three catch questions correctly and/or did not answer manipulation checks correctly ($N = 98$), who were suspicious of the study's hypotheses ($N = 5$), or did not report a female or male gender ($N = 1$) were excluded. After these participants were excluded, the final sample consisted of 170 participants.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, including Cronbach's alphas, means, standard deviations, and ranges, were calculated for each measure used in the current study (perceived guilt, confidence in decision, guilt index, recommended sentence, victim blame, belief in timing myth, and AMMSA). Four participants did not provide a recommended sentence because they found the defendant not guilty. One participant that found the defendant not guilty recommended a sentence of eight year. This caused the number of participant responses to differ in this particular scale. Detailed descriptive statistics for each scale and subscale are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for All Scales

Variable	<i>N</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	
					Actual	Potential
Perceived Guilt	170		0.97	0.17	0 to 1	0 to 1
Confidence in Decision	170		4.39	0.79	1 to 5	1 to 5
Guilt Index	170		4.19	1.53	-4 to +5	-5 to +5
Recommended Sentence	167		9.47	7.52	0 to 25	0 to 25
Victim Blame	170	.78	3.24	0.86	2 to 6	1 to 7
Belief in Timing Myth	170	.44	2.36	0.89	1 to 5.33	1 to 7
AMMSA	170	.92	3.50	0.85	1.27 to 5.40	1 to 7

Correlational Analyses

To assess the relationships between all scales and subscales, correlations were computed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r). Correlations between all scales and subscales are reported in Table 3.

For perceived guilt, there was a small positive association between perceived guilt and confidence in decision, such that participants who found the participant guilty were more confident in their decision than participants who found the defendant not guilty. There was a small negative association between perceived guilt and belief in the timing myth, such that participants who found the defendant guilty were less likely to believe in the timing myth, a small negative association between perceived guilt and victim blaming, such that participants who found the defendant guilty were less likely to blame the victim, and a small negative association between perceived guilt and AMMSA scores, such that participants who found the defendant guilty were less likely to believe in general rape myths.

For confidence in decision, there was a small negative association between confidence in decision and victim blame, such that participants who were more confident in their decision were less likely to blame the victim, a small negative association between confidence in decision and

belief in the timing myth, such that participants who were more confident in their decision were less likely to blame the victim, and a small negative association between confidence in decision and AMMSA scores, such that participants who were more confident in their decision were less likely to believe in general rape myths. There was also a small positive association between confidence in decision and recommended sentencing, such that participants who were more confident in their decision were more likely to have higher sentence recommendations.

For guilt index, there was a small negative association between guilt index and victim blame, such that participants with a higher continuous guilt index were less likely to blame the victim, a small negative association between guilt index and belief in the timing report, such that participants with a higher continuous guilt index were less likely to believe in the timing myth, and a small negative association between guilt index and AMMSA scores, such that participants with a higher continuous guilt index were less likely to believe in general rape myths. There was also a small positive association between guilt index and recommended sentencing, such that participants with a higher continuous guilt index were more likely to have a higher sentence recommendation.

For recommended sentencing, there was a small negative association between recommended sentence and victim blame, such that participants who had a higher sentence recommendation were less likely to blame the victim, a small negative association between recommended sentence and AMMSA scores, such that participants who had a higher sentence recommendation were less likely to believe in general rape myths, and a small negative association between recommended sentence and belief in the timing myth, such that participants who had a higher sentence recommendation were less likely to believe in the timing myth.

For victim blame, there was a moderate positive association between victim blame and belief in the timing myth and a large positive association between victim blame and AMMSA scores.

For belief in timing myth there was a moderate positive association between belief in timing myth and AMMSA scores.

Table 3

Correlations for All Scales

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Perceived Guilt	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
2. Confidence in Decision	.22**	---	---	---	---	---	---
3. Guilt Index	.87***	.65***	---	---	---	---	---
4. Recommended Sentence	.08	.30***	.25***	---	---	---	---
5. Victim Blame	-.23**	-.17*	-.27***	-.29***	---	---	---
6. Belief in Timing Myth	-.17*	-.13	-.19*	-.01	.43***	---	---
7. AMMSA	-.13	-.17*	-.19*	-.29***	.64***	.39***	---

Note: * indicates $p \leq .05$; ** indicates $p \leq .01$; *** indicates $p \leq .001$

Gender Differences

A frequency calculation indicated that 97.1% of participants found the defendant guilty of sexual assault. Due to this lack of variability in the guilt measure, it was dropped from further analyses. A series of between-subjects independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine potential gender differences for confidence in decision, guilt index, recommended sentence, victim blame, belief in timing myth, and AMMSA. The descriptive statistics from all t-tests examining gender differences are reported in Table 4.

Confidence in Decision. A two-tailed independent samples t-test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and confidence in decision. Results from the t-test did not reveal significant gender differences on confidence in decision, such that men and women reported similar levels of confidence in decision.

Guilt Index. A two-tailed independent samples t-test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and the continuous guilt index. Results from the t-test did not reveal significant gender differences on the continuous guilt index, such that men and women reported similar levels of confidence in a guilty verdict.

Recommended Sentence. A two-tailed independent samples t-test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and recommended sentencing. Results from the t-test did not reveal significant gender differences on recommended sentencing, such that men and women reported similar levels of recommended sentencing.

Victim Blame. A two-tailed independent samples t-test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and victim blame. Results from the t-test revealed significant gender differences for victim blame, such that men blamed the victim more than women.

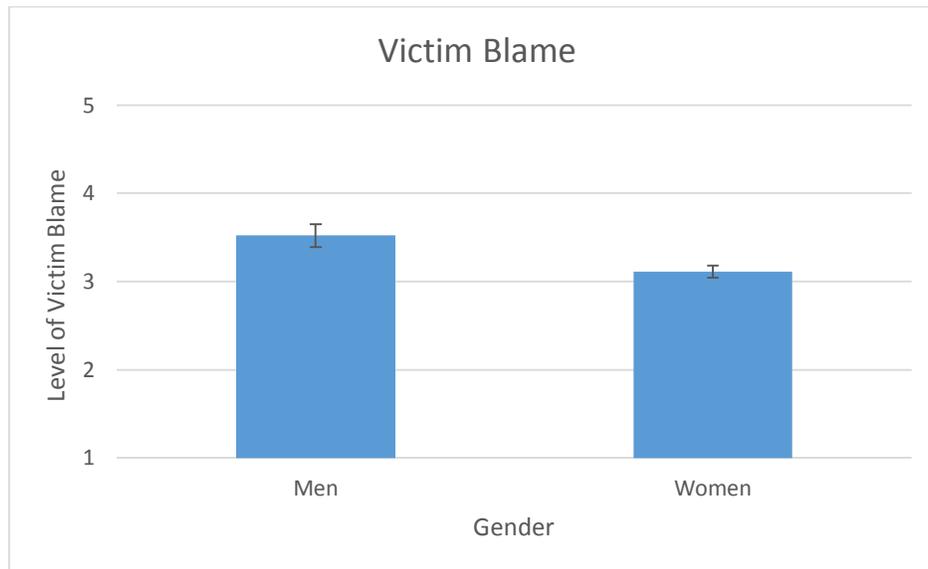


Figure 1. The interaction between participant gender and level of victim blame.

Belief in Timing Myth. A two-tailed independent samples t-test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and belief in timing myth. Results from the t-test revealed

significant gender differences on belief in the timing myth, such that men believed in the timing myth more than women.

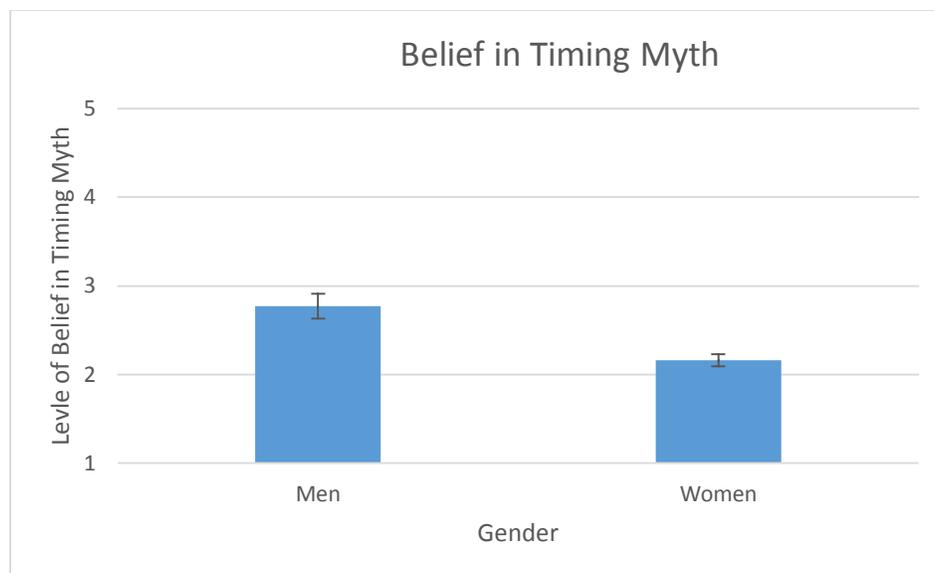


Figure 2. The interaction between participant gender and belief in the timing of report myth.

AMMSA. A two-tailed independent samples t-test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and RMA. Results from the t-test revealed significant gender differences on AMMSA scores, such that men were more likely to accept rape myths than women.

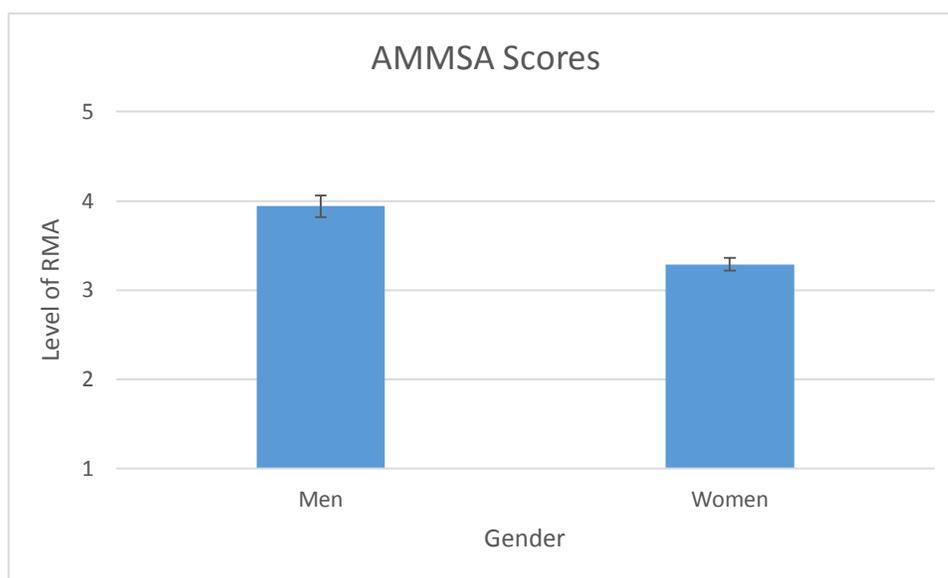


Figure 3. The interaction between participant gender and level of rape myth acceptance.

Table 4

T-test Results for Examining Gender Differences

Measure	Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	dF	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Confidence in Decision	Men	54	4.33	0.82	-0.69	168	.49	0.11
	Women	116	4.42	0.77				
Guilt Index	Men	54	4.11	1.61	-0.48	168	.63	0.08
	Women	116	4.23	1.50				
Recommended Sentence	Men	52	8.94	7.76	-0.61	165	.54	0.10
	Women	115	9.71	7.43				
Victim Blame	Men	54	3.52	0.93	2.93	168	.004**	0.48
	Women	116	3.11	0.79				
Belief in Timing Myth	Men	54	2.77	1.04	3.85	78.73	<.001***	0.68
	Women	116	2.16	0.74				
AMMSA	Men	54	3.94	0.85	5.00	168	<.001***	0.80
	Women	116	3.29	0.77				

Note: ** indicates $p \leq .01$; *** indicates $p \leq .001$.

Hypothesis Testing

A series of between-subjects factorial Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine potential effects of report timing and expert testimony on the participant's confidence in their decision, recommended prison sentence, victim blame, and belief in the timing of report myth.

Confidence in Decision. A 2 (timing of sexual assault report: immediate versus one week) x 2 (expert testimony: present versus absent) factorial ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects of timing of the sexual assault report and presence of expert testimony and the interaction effects on participants' confidence in their decision. There was not a significant effect

of the timing of the sexual assault report, $F(1, 166) = 0.41, p = .52, \eta_p^2 = .002$. Participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault immediately ($M = 4.35, SEM = 0.09$) had similarly high levels of confidence in their decision as participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault after one week ($M = 4.42, SEM = 0.09$). There was not a significant effect of expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 0.71, p = .40, \eta_p^2 = .004$. Participants who read the expert testimony ($M = 4.33, SEM = 0.10$) had similarly high levels of confidence in their decision as participants who did not read the expert testimony ($M = 4.44, SEM = 0.08$). There was a significant interaction between the timing of the report and expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 5.40, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .031$. Follow up independent samples t -tests indicated that of participants who read the immediate report to the police, those who did not receive the expert testimony ($M = 4.54, SD = .58$) were more confident in their decision than participants who received expert testimony ($M = 4.15, SD = 0.87$), $t(50.59) = 2.26, p = .03$, Cohen's $d = 0.53$.

Guilt Index. A 2 (timing of sexual assault report: immediate versus one week) x 2 (expert testimony: present versus absent) factorial ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects of timing of the sexual assault report and presence of expert testimony and the interaction effects on participants' certainty in guilt. There was not a significant effect of the timing of the sexual assault report, $F(1, 166) = 0.33, p = .57, \eta_p^2 = .002$. Participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault immediately ($M = 4.26, SEM = 0.17$) had similarly high levels of confidence in guilt as participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault after one week ($M = 4.12, SEM = 0.09$). There was not a significant effect of expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 0.30, p = .59, \eta_p^2 = .002$. Participants who read the expert testimony had similarly high levels of confidence in guilt ($M = 4.12, SEM = 0.19$) as participants who did not read the expert testimony

($M = 4.25$, $SEM = 0.15$). The interaction between the timing of the report and expert testimony approached significance, $F(1, 166) = 3.36$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Follow up independent samples t -tests indicated that of participants who read the immediate report to the police, those who did not receive the expert testimony ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.58$) were more confident in the defendant's guilt than participants who received expert testimony ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.86$), $t(38.27) = 2.07$, $p = .04$, Cohen's $d = 0.78$.

Follow up t -tests also showed that of participants who did not receive the expert testimony, participants were more confident in the defendant's guilt if they read about an immediate report to the police ($M = 4.54$, $SD = .58$) than if they read about a one week delayed report ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 2.01$), $t(62.39)$, $p = .047$, Cohen's $d = 0.39$.

Recommended Prison Sentence. A 2 (timing of sexual assault report: immediate versus one week) x 2 (expert testimony: present versus absent) factorial ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects of timing of the sexual assault report and presence of expert testimony and the interaction effects on participants' recommended prison sentence. There was not a significant effect of the timing of the sexual assault report, $F(1, 166) = 0.05$, $p = .83$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. Participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault immediately ($M = 9.07$, $SEM = 0.85$) recommended similar prison sentences as participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault after one week ($M = 9.32$, $SEM = 0.84$). There was a not a significant effect of expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 0.88$, $p = .35$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Participants who read the expert testimony had similar prison sentence recommendations ($M = 8.64$, $SEM = 0.93$) as participants who did not read the expert testimony ($M = 9.76$, $SEM = 0.74$). There was not a significant interaction between the timing of the report and expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 1.59$, $p = .21$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

Victim Blame. A 2 (timing of sexual assault report: immediate versus one week) x 2 (expert testimony: present versus absent) factorial ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects of timing of the sexual assault report and presence of expert testimony and the interaction effects on participants' levels of victim blame. There was not a significant effect of the timing of the sexual assault report, $F(1, 166) = 0.18, p = .67, \eta_p^2 = .001$. Participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault immediately ($M = 3.19, SEM = 0.10$) had similar levels of victim blame as participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault after one week ($M = 3.25, SEM = 0.10$). There was not a significant effect of the expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 1.87, p = .17, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Participants who read the expert testimony ($M = 3.13, SEM = 0.11$) had similar levels of victim blame as participants who did not read the expert testimony ($M = 3.31, SEM = 0.08$). There was not a significant interaction between the timing of the report and expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 0.07, p = .79, \eta_p^2 < .001$.

Belief in the Timing of Report Myth. A 2 (timing of sexual assault report: immediate versus one week) x 2 (expert testimony: present versus absent) factorial ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects of timing of the sexual assault report and presence of expert testimony and the interaction effects on participants' belief in report timing myths. There was not a significant effect of the timing of the report of the sexual assault report, $F(1, 166) = 0.01, p = .94, \eta_p^2 < .001$. Participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault immediately ($M = 2.29, SEM = 0.10$) believed in the timing myths at a similarly low level as participants who read that the victim reported the sexual assault after one week ($M = 2.30, SEM = 0.09$). There was a significant main effect of expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 16.39, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$. Participants who read the expert testimony were less likely to endorse the timing myths ($M = 2.03, SEM = 0.11$)

than were participants who did not read the expert testimony ($M = 2.57$, $SEM = 0.08$). There was not a significant interaction between the timing of the report and expert testimony, $F(1, 166) = 1.45$, $p = .23$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. A graph of these effects can be seen in Figure 4.

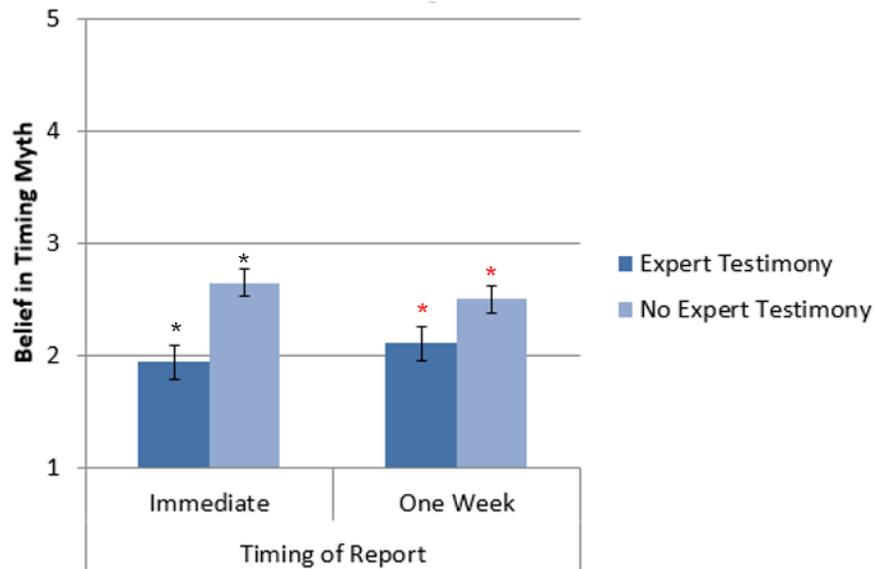


Figure 4. The effect of expert testimony on belief in timing myth.

Note: Within each block, bars marked with asterisk are significantly different from one another at the $p < .05$ level.

Discussion

This study was designed to test the effects of rape myths and expert testimony on mock jurors' levels of rape myth acceptance and victim blame in a sexual assault case. In hypothesis 1, we predicted that if participants read that a sexual assault victim waited one week before reporting the rape to the police, then the participants would find the victim less credible compared to participants who read that the victim immediately reported the rape to the police. Contrary to what we expected, the timing of the sexual assault report did not result in significantly different levels of victim credibility between those who received the immediate report and those who received the one week report. We speculate that this result may be related to the short time difference between the reporting conditions (i.e., immediate versus one week). In this case, the length of time manipulation may not have been long enough to have a significant impact on the way the participants viewed the sexual assault. In future studies, increasing the length of time between reporting in the two conditions could influence the level of credibility assigned to the victim in the sexual assault case.

In hypothesis 2, we predicted that if participants read an expert testimony attempting to debunk the myth that report timing is related to veracity, then participants would be less likely to blame the victim than participants who did not read the expert testimony. Our findings did not support this hypothesis and there was no significant effect of expert testimony on levels of victim blame. We speculate that this result may also be due to the conditions not being different enough to produce change. This could also be due in part to the expert testimony's focus on exclusively debunking the timing of the report myth. In future studies, the expert testimony might aim to debunk more myths related to victim blaming in order to significantly influence participant levels of victim blame.

In hypothesis 3, we predicted that if participants read an expert testimony attempting to debunk the myth that report timing is related to veracity, then participants would be less likely to endorse a timing-specific myth compared to participants who did not read the expert testimony. This hypothesis was supported. We found that participants who received the expert testimony were less likely to endorse the timing myth than participants who did not receive the expert testimony. Because the expert testimony was based on the suggestions by Gemberling and Cramer (2014) for debunking myths, this finding suggests that their method may be an effective tool for experts to use to debunk timing-related rape myths in a real-life sexual assault case.

Another noteworthy finding of the study was that reading the expert testimony debunking timing-related rape myths led to a small reduction in confidence in guilt for those who read the immediate report scenario. This reduction was approaching statistical significance and future research should investigate this relationship further.

In addition to these findings, there were significant gender differences for victim blame, AMMSA scores, and the belief in the timing myth. Supporting past research (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russel, 2008; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), we found that men were more likely to blame the victim, more likely to endorse general rape myths as measured by the AMMSA, and more likely to believe in the timing myth. We also found that there were significant positive associations between victim blame, AMMSA scores, and the belief in the timing myth. This suggests that participants who held higher beliefs in one (victim blame, AMMSA scores or belief in the timing myth) would likely be higher in the others as well.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations that could have affected the results of the study. First, almost all participants found the defendant guilty, leading to very little variability. Future

research should employ a more realistic trial scenario in order to allow for more variability in responses. Second, a large number of participants had to be dropped from the expert testimony condition, resulting in uneven numbers between the expert testimony and no expert testimony conditions. The majority of these exclusions were due in part to the participants' failure to answer catch questions or manipulation checks correctly. For this reason, future research should be collected in person in order to control for environment and ensure active participant involvement and focus.

A third limitation of the study is the lack of male participants. Because the sample consisted largely of women, there were not enough male participant to test the interaction between gender and the independent variables in the study. Future research should include a large male sample in order to test if there is a significant interaction between gender and timing of report as well as between gender and expert testimony. As stated prior, future research could also be done on the manipulation of length of time in sexual assault reporting. This would likely enable researchers to observe a larger effect of timing on victim credibility and belief in rape myths.

Conclusion

The results of the present study suggest that expert testimony is effective in reducing rape myths, particularly the belief in the timing of report myth, regardless of the time that the sexual assault was reported to the police. Additionally, the research supported previous findings that men were higher in rape myth acceptance, victim blame, and scores on the AMMSA. The results of the study shed light on the impact expert testimony can have on the beliefs of jurors and the need for more research in the area of study.

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APPENDIX A

SEXUAL ASSAULT CASE

INSTRUCTIONS: Imagine you are a juror in a criminal sexual assault case. As a juror, it is your job to decide whether you believe the defendant is guilty or not guilty in the case before you. You will read a brief case summary in which the defendant has been charged with sexual assault. After you read the case summary, you will receive more information and be asked your opinions about this case.

Reported Immediately

Jason and Kathy met and got acquainted at a party thrown by a mutual friend. Since they had a lot in common, they spent the night laughing, dancing, talking and flirting with each other. At the end of the party, Kathy invited Jason over to her apartment to talk some more and have coffee. When they got to her room, Kathy started kissing and caressing Jason. Jason then grabbed Kathy and tried to take her clothes off in order to have sex with her. At this point Kathy pushed him away and asked him to stop. However, Jason did not listen to her, and instead used force to hold her down and eventually penetrated her. Jason then left the apartment.

Immediately after Jason left, Kathy called the police and reported the sexual assault. Jason agrees that he had sex with Kathy, but claims that the sex was consensual.

Reported One Week Later

Jason and Kathy met and got acquainted at a party thrown by a mutual friend. Since they had a lot in common, they spent the night laughing, dancing, talking and flirting with each other. At the end of the party, Kathy invited Jason over to her apartment to talk some more and have coffee. When they got to her room, Kathy started kissing and caressing Jason. Jason then grabbed Kathy and tried to take her clothes off in order to have sex with her. At this point Kathy pushed him away and asked him to stop. However, Jason did not listen to her, and instead used force to hold her down and eventually penetrated her. Jason then left the apartment.

One week later, Kathy called the police and reported the sexual assault. Jason agrees that he had sex with Kathy, but claims that the sex was consensual.

APPENDIX B

EXPERT TESTIMONY

INSTRUCTIONS: At the trial, Dr. Pat Johnson was called to the witness stand. Please carefully read the transcript from the expert testimony.

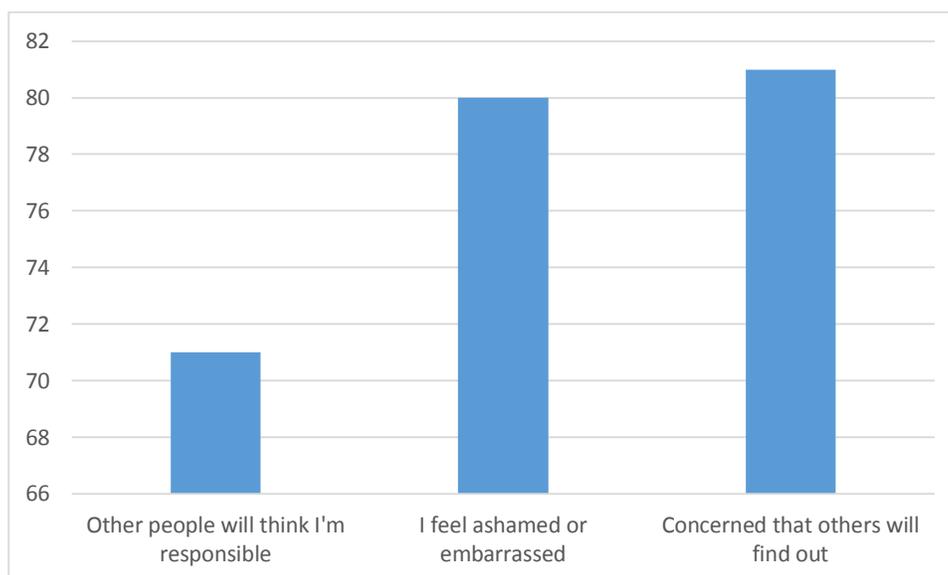
At the trial, Dr. Pat Johnson was called to the witness stand. Dr. Johnson earned a doctorate degree in psychology from the University of Florida and focuses professionally on the issues of sexual assault victimization and criminal justice response.

Q: Is it true that women who have been raped always immediately report their rape to the police? No, this is a myth. The length of time in which women report rape to the police varies from one woman to another. Some women report the rape immediately, some women wait a considerable length of time before reporting, and some women never report their rape to the police.

Q: Why do some women wait to report their rape to the police or never report?

There are a variety of factors that inhibit reporting to the police. For example, one study conducted by Jones and colleagues in 2009 (see Figure 1) found that out of 111 women who reported rape, the three most common barriers to reporting the rape to the police were:

- (1) “Other people will think I’m responsible”
- (2) “I feel ashamed or embarrassed”
- (3) “Concerned that others will find out”



Q: How do you know that the victim had these feelings?

I was not asked to assess the victim in this case. Therefore, I cannot describe what she is experiencing. However, the research, which is based on many individuals, indicates that it is

incorrect to believe that rape victims always immediately report their rape to the police. The research shows that women may wait a considerable amount of time before reporting the rape to the police.

Q: What makes the public misperceive the reporting of rape to the police?

Many people have false beliefs about the reporting of rapes to the police for different reasons. For example, one reason is wanting to live in a world that is orderly and predictable, which is understandable. Sometimes it is easier to believe that all women who have been raped act in the same way afterwards. But the research shows that women who have been raped have many different responses to the rape, which leads some women to immediately report the rape, some women to wait to report, and some women to never report.

APPENDIX D**BLAME INDEX**

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each statement carefully and then indicate the answer that you feel best represents your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers – we are only interested in your personal opinion. Use the complete range of the scale to express your exact opinion.

Scale:

1 (not at all/ none at all)

2

3

4

5

6

7 (completely/ a lot)

1. How much do you think Kathy should blame herself for what happened?
2. How much control do you think Kathy had over the situation?
3. How much control do you think Jason had over the situation?
4. How much do you agree Kathy should not have invited Jason over if she did *not* want to have sex with him?
5. Do you think this incident could have been avoided?
6. Whose fault do you think it is that things turned out the way they did?

Scale: 1 (Jason) to 7 (Kathy)

7. How much sympathy do you feel for Kathy?
8. How much sympathy do you feel for Jason?
9. How responsible was Jason for the alleged sexual assault?
10. How responsible was Kathy for the alleged sexual assault?

APPENDIX E

TIMING OF REPORT VALIDITY

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each statement carefully and then indicate the answer that you feel best represents your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers – we are only interested in your personal opinion. Use the complete range of the scale to express your exact opinion.

Scale:

- 1 (completely disagree)
- 2 (disagree)
- 3 (disagree somewhat)
- 4 (neutral)
- 5 (agree somewhat)
- 6 (agree)
- 7 (completely agree)

1. If a woman is raped, she will report the rape to the police immediately.
2. Women who wait to report rape to the police are often lying.
3. Sometimes women wait to report a rape to the police because they feel ashamed.

APPENDIX F**PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

INSTRUCTIONS: Please complete the following demographic information.

1. Age (in years): _____
2. Gender (Please select one):
 - Female
 - Male
 - Transgender (specify) _____
 - Other (Specify) _____
3. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation? (Please select one)
 - Bisexual
 - Heterosexual
 - Gay or Lesbian
 - Other (Specify) _____
4. Which of the following best describes your racial/ethnic identity? (Please select all that apply)
 - African American or Black
 - American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - Asian or Pacific Islander
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - White or Caucasian
 - Other (Specify) _____
5. Which of the following best describes your level in school? (Please select one)
 - 1st year
 - 2nd year
 - 3rd year
 - 4th year
 - Other (Specify) _____
6. Is English your primary language?
 - Yes
 - No
7. Would you consider yourself fluent in English?
 - Yes
 - No