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Rape Myths Among Appalachian College Students

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Rape myths regularly admonish victims for supposedly provoking the violence done against them. While rape attitudes have been studied in national and urban samples, the support of rape myths in rural populations is seldom investigated. Furthermore, the few empirical studies on sexual coercion in Appalachia are mostly descriptive and rarely compare the sentiments of Appalachians and non-Appalachians. To address this gap, this study surveyed 512 college students at a public university in Eastern Kentucky. In testing an Appalachian distinctiveness question, this study revealed that Appalachian students were less likely to criticize rape victims. Students were also less inclined to condemn rape victims when they were victims themselves, came from egalitarian families, stayed in college longer, rejected modern sexism, and felt little animosity toward women.

Keywords: rape myths; victim blame; attitudes toward women; Appalachian status; traditional gender roles; modern sexism

It is estimated that one in every four women will be the victim of rape in their lifetime, and up to 45% of collegiate women have endured some form of sexual assault since leaving high school (Dekeseredy & Kelly, 1993). Victims of rape not only suffer from direct physical and psychological hardships of such violence but must deal with societal interpretations that blame them for their misery. This constellation of beliefs have come to be known as rape myths, or the "set of beliefs and narratives that explain why rapes occur in a fashion that absolves the perpetrator of guilt and rests the source of the problem on the victim" (Ward, 1988, p. 129). In essence, this narrative contends that rape can be traced to lapses in female judgments and morality. With a fixation on the victim's demeanor, these accounts insist that women trigger stranger and date rapes by being too alluring, naïve, or dishonest. To adherents of this worldview, the solution to this problem is victim based; if women conform to a long list of proscribed rules, then rape would disappear.

In addressing the issue of rape myths, this work primarily focuses on the "she deserved it" rationale. While national studies discover rape throughout the country, some works highlight apparent regional differences within the United States (Gagné, 1992; Shwaner & Keil, 2003; Websdale & Johnson, 1998). While Appalachian peoples are usually ignored by academic studies, the characterizations in movies, books, and cartoons regularly chide Appalachians for being simple-minded fools who are inarticulate, prone to violence,

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incestuous, bucktoothed, and lazy (historian Phyllis Wilson Moore coined the acronym PIWASH—poor, ignorant, White, Anglo-shoeless, hillbilly). In fact the prominent Appalachian scholar Dwight Billings (1999) contends, “While the peoples and cultures in the Appalachian mountains are decidedly plural, outside the region in the arts, the academy and popular culture, many representations of them now, as for the past one hundred years, are often monolithic, pejorative and unquestioned” (p. 3).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rape Myths and Appalachian Status

Some empirical studies on sexual aggression repeat the “Appalachian distinctiveness” characterization. In doing so, they assert that the cultural, economic, and geographic milieus of Appalachia breed greater violence against women (Denham, 2003; Dye, Tolliver, Lee, & Kinney, 1995; Fiene, 1995; Gagné, 1992; Willis, 1998). In exemplifying this argument, Patricia Gagné (1992) claims that the structural settings of central Appalachia foster greater gender violence because women often live in geographically isolated homes, have little surplus income, and lack access to competent human service agencies. Likewise, Gagné suggests that the overarching mores devalue female worth, endorse sexual double standards, and demand greater passivity in wives. Much like Gagné, Websdale (1995) sees the same patterns but adds that Appalachians show a greater fondness toward the “disciplinary violence” that keeps women, children, and others fearful and compliant. Moreover, Websdale contends that rural rape victims consistently endure sexual violence in deadening silence because sexuality is regularly deemed a “private matter” or that local police officers or social workers cannot be trusted to follow professional standards of displaying empathy and practicing confidentiality.

Other empirical research confirms these assertions. Case studies in West Virginia and Eastern Tennessee found that domestic violence survivors are often berated while abusers face little repercussions (Fiene, 1995; Willis, 1998). Two studies of medical patients found that the incidence of domestic violence and rape was slightly higher in Appalachian settings than that of national samples (Denham, 2003; Dye et al., 1995), and a study in Kentucky found that Appalachian rape survivors anticipated more dismissive or punitive reactions than did their urban counterparts (Logan, Evans, Stevenson, & Jordon, 2005).

While some works depict Appalachia as an extremely brutal place, other research only partially confirms this Appalachian tendency (Cantrell, 1995; Websdale & Johnson, 1998). Sometimes these works find that only certain types of sexual aggression are higher in Appalachia. For example, Cantrell’s (1995) sample of Appalachian high school students found that girls in this area were twice as likely to be raped by a brother or uncle. However, when exploring rape by strangers, the divergence of national and Appalachian trends disappeared. Such inconsistencies were also gleaned by Websdale and Johnson’s (1998) study of women in Kentucky’s domestic violence shelters. In exploring urban–rural differences in domestic violence, they found that only three types of spousal abuse occurred more frequently in women from Appalachian backgrounds (hair pulling, being tortured, and being shot). However, eleven other types of physical abuse saw equivalent levels of victimization for urban and rural women (regional differences were minimal because of the high prevalence of gender violence across the entire United States).

Another group of studies dispute these findings (Goodrum, Wiese, & Cookefeld, 2004; Shwaner & Keil, 2003; Vicary, Klingaman, & Harkness, 1995). An ethnographic work suggests that West Virginian men did not display any greater preferences for male-dominated and authoritarian marriages (Stratton & Moore, 2002), while a quantitative study discovered similar levels of unwanted sexual activity for both Appalachian and non-Appalachian teenage girls (Vicary et al., 1995). Moreover, in one of the few multivariate studies on this topic, Shwaner and Kiel (2003) contend that an association between Appalachian residency and violence is limited to only bivariate analysis. However, the statistical significance of Appalachian status disappears when researcher control for the effects of poverty and "internal colonization" variables. Thus, they argue that the dynamic of economic exploitation, rather than inherent cultural differences, is the chief force behind the greater prevalence of deadly violence in the region.

As this description suggests, this literature is riddled with incompatible findings on violence in Appalachia. While there may be numerous theoretical and methodological reasons as to why the literature is so divided, one problem may be the way Appalachians are often treated as a single block of like-minded peoples. In short, as researchers assume the existence of a monolithic Appalachian subculture, they seem to ignore any signs of diversity or differentiation within this population. To counter this notion of homogeneity, this study explored why some Appalachians would or would not eschew rape myths.

Rape Attitudes and Other Demographic Factors

With women being victimized more often, almost all studies find a gender gap on rape attitudes (Anderson, Cooper, & Okamusa, 1997; Giacopassi & Dull, 1986; Gilmartin-Zena, 1988; Gray, Palileo, & Johnson, 1993; Hinck & Thomas, 1999; Johnson, Kuck, & Schander, 1997; Ward, 1988). Hence, studies like Tetreault and Barnett (1987) and Monson, Laughinrichsen-Rohling, and Binderup (2000) have found that females attributed less responsibility to a victim of stranger rape than men.

The research on race/ethnicity effects is less consistent. A number of inquiries suggest that Blacks are more likely to adopt rape myths (Giacopassi & Dull, 1986; Johnson et al., 1997; Locke & Richman, 1999; Varelas & Foley, 1998). Yet multivariate studies often find that direct associations between rape myths and race are erased when holding other factors constant (Anderson et al., 1997; Carmody & Washington, 2001; Varelas & Foley, 1998).

The relationship between respondent sexual orientation and rape myth acceptance has gone mostly untested. To date, some studies reveal that heterosexual respondents have harsher judgments of gay victims or homosexual rapists (Doherty & Anderson, 2004; Ford, Liwag McLamd, & Foley, 1998; White & Robinson-Kurpius, 2002), and one work argues that heterosexuals condone rape myths more than gay or lesbian respondents (Davies & McCartney, 2003).

Victimization and Rape Perceptions

Shaver's (1970) widely cited "defensive attribution hypothesis" contends that rape survivors, and those who fear being raped, are more likely to sympathize with victims. In seeing a tendency toward self-protection, Shaver contends that individuals who envision themselves as possible rape victims are disinclined to accuse a victim of wrongdoing (people do not want to criticize "people like themselves"). Also, the act of being raped may shatter illusions that the victim did something wrong and that the perpetrator's aggressions were unavoidable, benign, or excusable.

While this hypothesis sounds plausible, the empirical literature suggests reactions to one's rape are not so linear and universal. Although numerous studies highlight that self-identified rape victims cast less aspersions on other victims (Anderson et al., 1997; Littleton & Axsom, 2003; Mason, Riger, & Foley, 2004; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004), another set of studies concludes that being a victim of rape is not connected to the repudiation of rape myths (Burt, 1980; Carmody & Washington, 2001; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990; Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, & DeLuca, 1992).

This apparent inconsistency of reactions lies in the fact that the meaning of violence is created through an interpretive process. That is, rape victims make sense of this event by reflecting upon their previously held values and decoding the messages that reside in social contexts (Abrams, Viky, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Anderson et al., 1997; Burt, 1980; Messerschmidt, 1993; Swim & Cohen, 1997).

Familial, Peer Contexts, and Educational Forces Behind Rape Myths

In corroborating a defensive attribution hypothesis, some studies announce that chronic household violence will curb the support of rape myths (Anderson et al., 1997; Carmody & Washington, 2001; Follette, Polusney, & Naugle, 1996). However, paradoxically, other studies argue that people who are bullied or brutalized by family members are more likely to identify with aggressors and rapists (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Gwartney-Gibbs, Stockard, & Bohmer, 1987). This siding with the abuser may come from typical emulation processes or the creation of a trauma bond for victims who cannot escape their tormentors. Regardless of the exact mechanisms, some studies conclude that authoritarian and combative families generate offspring who are comfortable with rape myths (Aberle & Littlefield, 2001; Noland, Liller, McDermont, Coulter, & Seraphine, 2004).

While a long debate exists on how adults respond to violence in their youth, several studies find some salience in other sorts of parental signals. In focusing on parallels between paternal and child attitudes, some research argues that rape myths are transferred intergenerationally (Ex & Janssens, 1998; Moen, Erickson, & Dempster-McClain, 1997; Quiñones, Phares, Bryant, & Stenmark, 1999). For example, Quiñones et al. (1999) demonstrated that daughters regularly copy their mother's pronouncements on rape attributions.

With undergraduates often experimenting with new lifestyles and identities in college, peer groups often impart guidelines and advice on how men and women should interact (Stombler, 1994). No matter if peer mindsets reinforce or dispute the gender outlooks of family members, studies often find a correspondence between the rape attitudes of college students and the attitudes of their acquaintances and buddies (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Boeringer, Shehan, & Atkins, 1991; Gwartney-Gibbs et al., 1987; Reitzel-Jaffe & Wolfe, 2001; Schwartz & Nogrady, 1996). Subsequently Dekeseredy and Kelly (1993) concluded that male newlyweds hit their spouses more frequently when their friends objectify women and Boeringer et al. (1991) noted that males presented greater rape proclivities when their college friends condoned the right to rape a "known tease."

While the modeling of family and friends might have durable effects, so may the official curriculum of a college. Since general education classes often ask students to critically evaluate cultural ideologies and parochial truisms, the simple act of completing classes might have a liberalizing effect. In fact, several studies suggest that the further a person progresses in their educational career the less likely they are to accept rape myths (Blumburg & Lester, 1991; Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Gray et al., 1993; White &

Robinson-Kurpius, 1999). While the general curriculum may reduce the acceptance of rape myths, the participation in classes that specifically target sexism may achieve even larger outcomes (Fonow, Richardson, & Wemmers, 1992; Gidycz et al., 2001; Gray et al., 1993; Hinck & Thomas, 1999).

Ideological Correlates of Rape Myths

Gender roles offer societal perspectives on appropriate behaviors, rights and privileges for both men and women. Feminist frameworks assume that traditional gender roles give credence to rape myths. For example, conventional dating proscriptions warn that "pure" women ought to be demure, chaste, and deferential, while "sexy" women ought to be slim, busty, male-directed, and proud to strut for the male gaze. Moreover, women who cannot successfully meet these goals are routinely chastised about their lack of good manners or their departure from conventional beauty standards. As for men, the crudest tenants of hegemonic masculinity vow that assertiveness, toughness, and the willingness to resolve interpersonal disputes through violence are central to the masculine way of being (Bourgois, 1995; Messerschmidt, 1993). Further, this approach emphasizes that men ought to be after sexual conquests and men have the right or duty to use violence to silence "uppity" women who challenge male ascendancy. Even traditional narratives that highlight male chivalry and benevolence assume that men are the protectors of defenseless women who are deemed sweet enough to save (Abrams et al., 2003; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004). Hence, traditional musings assume that women who are receding, asexual, and eager to please are safer than "tramps" and "sluts" who breach such codes. Likewise, images of male machismo harp upon the need to acquire more sexual "booty," keep "his women" compliant, and enact violence when he thinks it is necessary.

While these gender archetypes are embraced by numerous Americans, there are some others who want to avoid such expectations. It is in this variance and contested terrain that one might find a key to why some students reject rape myths. Accordingly, works such as those by Johnson et al. (1997) find that people who cherished traditional gender roles were more likely to scold rape victims and forgive male perpetrators. Similarly, numerous studies agree that respondents find little solace in blaming rape victims when they embraced more liberal and egalitarian stances on gender relations (Abrams et al., 2003; Anderson et al., 1997; Boeringer et al., 1991; Burt, 1980; Willis, 1992).

While gender roles are crucial guides to thoughts and actions, other elements of gender narratives can be important as well. When addressing the emotive side of gender, people may generally detest or feel affection for members of a particular sex. In turn, some studies have discovered that rape myth proponents generally abhor, distrust, and resent women (Burt, 1980; Cowan, 2000; Forbes et al., 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Ong & Ward, 1999). Most importantly, people seem more likely to sanction revenge rapes when they retain protracted animosities against women.

While positions on proper female etiquette may sway rape attitudes, so might other interpretations of gender relations. According to modern sexism theorists, a new version of sexism justifies inequalities without explicitly restricting female opportunities or degrading women in any way (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Instead, this modern or "gender-blind" version of sexism legitimizes the gendered status quo by insisting that sexism is a thing of the past. By discounting evidence of ongoing discrimination, people may minimize the extent of rapes and dismiss a link between rape and patriarchy. Subsequently, several works have found that people are more likely to attach negative

connotations to rape victims when they insist sexism is passé and confined to a bygone era (Forbes et al., 2004; Kane & Schippers, 1996; Swim & Cohen, 1997).

METHODS

Sampling Unit

Our sample of 512 students was collected at a public university in eastern Kentucky (fall semester of 2005). Being a regional university in central Appalachia, the characteristics of the undergraduate population mirror the qualities of the surrounding communities (roughly 85% of the students come from the Appalachian part of Kentucky). This means the student body is predominantly White (95.2% of the 8,000 students) and many of the students are first-generation college students (in the surrounding counties, only 11% of adults have college degrees). Likewise, there is a noticeable contingency of older returning students (24% of the students are over 25 years old), and a large percentage of the students grew up in economically distressed communities (the Appalachian Regional Commission estimates that most students were raised in counties that had per capita incomes of $16,366 per year in 2002 and poverty rates between 19% and 33% of the adult populace).

Sampling Technique

Respondents were selected through a purposive sample of different academic disciplines. Surveys were distributed to 36 sections of classes that were offered in the Natural Science, Social Science, Education, Humanities and Business Schools (the lead author solicited voluntary participation after we acquired Institutional Review Board approval). The different disciplines were selected because attitudes often vary by major and academic department (Gilmartin-Zena, 1988). Likewise, efforts were made to get an equal number of upper- and lower-division classes in each discipline (the total sample held 25% freshmen, 14% sophomores, 24% juniors, and 35% seniors).

The profile of respondents closely matches that of the campus population. The gender distribution was skewed toward women (61.9% of respondents were female) and the sample was extremely White (95% were White and 3.3% were Black). Fifty-three percent of the students indicated an Appalachian background, 90% declared complete heterosexuality, and 8.4% of students acknowledged being rape victims.

Measurements

Our rape myth scale is limited to the notion that victims summon the rape upon themselves (Cronbach's alpha = .751). In crafting a six-item additive scale, we borrowed statements from Lonsway and Fitzgerald's (1995) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, Ward's (1988) Attitudes Towards Rape Victims Scale, and Giacopassi and Dull's (1986) Acceptance of Rape Myths. One item focuses on universal rejections of rape myths, "A victim of rape is never to blame," while other measures dwell on specific accusations of victim indiscretions. Some items allege that female sexuality provokes rape: "When women talk and act sexy, they are inviting rape." Other items suggest that victims are inattentive and make mistakes: "When a woman is raped, she usually did something careless to put herself in that situation." Our last item bemoans sinister survivor motives: "Some women ask to be raped and may enjoy it" (see Table 1 for all the wording in all items).

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics for Items in the Rape Myth Scale (n = 518)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
When women talk and act sexy, they are inviting rape.	7 1%	31 6%	32 6%	146 28%	296 58%	1.6
Women who sleep around are more likely to be raped.	47 9%	159 31%	118 23%	142 28%	45 9%	3
A victim of rape is never to blame. (reverse coding)	21 4%	111 22%	140 27%	123 24%	115 23%	3.4
Some women ask to be raped and may enjoy it.	8 2%	19 4%	77 15%	147 28%	258 50%	1.8
Women who are raped while walking alone are somewhat to blame.	10 2%	28 6%	41 8%	167 33%	262 51%	1.7
When a woman is raped, she usually did something careless to put herself in that situation.	5 1%	59 12%	68 13%	208 41%	168 33%	2.1

Note. Higher means indicate higher levels of rape myth acceptance.

Most demographic variables were measured by self-identifications. *Appalachian status* was ascertained by the question of "Do you identify as Appalachian?" and *gender* was determined by "Please identify your gender" (Appalachian = 1, other = 0; male = 1, other = 0). The possible responses to racial identity were exhaustive in the survey, but *race* was broken into a binary scheme because the White complexion of this campus (White = 1, other = 0). *Heterosexual orientation* was measured in a five-point continuum of completely heterosexual to completely homosexual (completely heterosexual = 5, completely homosexual = 1).

Rape victim status was estimated through first- and second-degree approaches (see Koss & Oros, 1982, Sexual Experience Survey). To ascertain if a *respondent was victimized,* the survey asked "Have you ever been raped?" We intentionally used the word "rape," because we hoped an analysis of self-identified survivors would avoid the complications of people who distance themselves from their own victimization. Second-degree victim status, or the recognition of rape among primary group members, was gauged through several items. The variable of *friend victim* contained questions of knowing a close friend or acquaintance who was the victim of sexual assault (with a score of 1 for each yes, this scale ranged from 2 to 0). For *family victims,* we asked if a sister or mother was ever sexually assaulted (again, 0 indicated a lack of second-degree victim status among female relatives).

A shortened version of the Conflict Tactics Scale traced the *family violence orientation* (Straus 1979). This much-used scale focuses on different types of overt physical violence. The five items we utilized focused on family members throwing, kicking, biting, and using weapons (Cronbach's alpha = .845). With responses resting on a four-point spectrum of never to more than once a month, the composite scores ranged from a possible score of 0 to 20.

In focusing on *authoritarian families,* the survey contained one statement from the Authoritarian Parenting Index: "my mother makes rules without asking me what I think" (Jackson, Henriksen, & Foshee, 1998). *Parent's traditional gender role* was quantified by the statement "My parents agree that a husband's career should come before a wife's" (*SA* = 5).

The role of peer influence was assessed through the variable of *feminist friends:* "Most of my college friends are feminists" (*SA* = 5). This item was designed to test whether friends who publicly embraced feminism would counter the victim blaming that emanates in other settings. *Gender class participation* was gleaned through questions of attendance in one of three classes (Introduction to Women Studies, Sociology of Gender Violence, and Gender Studies). If a student attended any of these three classes, they received a 1, while a no for all three items received a 0. *Year in college* was measured from a low of freshman to a high of senior (freshman = 0, senior = 4).

To address the acceptance of *traditional gender roles,* we utilized an item of the conservative subscales of the Feminist Perspective Scale (Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998). In emphasizing the traditional division of labor in the family, the survey declared, "A man's first responsibility is to obtain economic success, while his wife should care for family needs" (*SA* = 5). The Modern Sexism Scale distinguishes the extent to which respondents noticed gender biases during their lifetime (Swim & Cohen, 1997). The two-item scale dealt with the denial of institutionalized sexism, such as, "Women often miss out on good jobs due to sexual discrimination" (*SD* = 5 and a Cronbach's alpha of .672). To check the bitterness or abhorrence of women, we modified the Hostility Towards Women Scale (Check & Malamuth, 1985). The two-item composite scale of *hostility towards women* contained accusations such as "When it really comes down to it, a lot of women are deceitful" (Cronbach's alpha of .643).

FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

The extent of victim blame is detailed in Table 1. Some items suggest that little victim blaming occurs in this populace. For example, the charge that sexy women "invite rape" accrued a small mean of 1.64. In a similar vein, three other items saw samples skewed toward an absence of victim blame. That is, most students objected to claims that victims are inattentive, alone, or secretly desiring a rape (strongly disagrees ranged between 50% and 58% for these items, and the combined scores of disagree and strongly disagreed ranged between 77% and 86%).

While four items saw greater concentrations of antiblame sentiments, the remaining items did not. The aggregate became divided when asked to renounce all aspects of victim culpability. In being unable to fully repudiate rape myths, 74% of the students could not unequivocally agree that a victim never did anything wrong, and another 63% were unable

to disavow the accusation that rape victims are more promiscuous. This means that most students could not entirely abandon victim blaming when the topic was phrased in the most absolute and universal terms (this hesitancy could indicate a desire to retain the right to blame victims under certain circumstances).

Explanatory Statistics

In applying our theoretical model to the rape myth scale, we ran four Ordinary Least Squares regressions (the dependent variable has an interval level of measurement and the sample lacks multicollinearity and heteroskedasticity). When utilizing a hierarchal approach, the first regression limits itself to similar variables that came from our literature review (demographic factors). The ensuing regressions add new batches of similar variables (educational effects, extra curricular contexts, and belief systems). As with any regression, this technique deciphers the direct association for each variable when controlling for the other independent variables (coefficients) and discerns the amount of variance explained by all of the variables included in the step (*R*-squared). Additionally this technique illuminates the additional explanatory power of the new set of predictors (*R*-square change and *F*-change identify the improvement in *R*-square when the latest variables were placed into the regression).

In the initial regression, it appears as if the first cluster of demographic variables did fairly well (see Table 2). As a total package, the group of demographic variables accounted for almost 7% of the variance in the rape myth scale ($p < .001$). When looking at specific factors, three of the variables met statistical significance (Appalachian identity, gender, and sexual orientation). Gender produced the largest association (.247). With slightly lower beta coefficients, Appalachian and heterosexual identities also reached significance ($p < .05$). The discovery that straight respondents were more inclined to blame victims came as no surprise, while the direction of the Appalachian identity runs counter to the "distinctiveness" claims. Rather than seeing a greater adherence to rape myths among Appalachians, we discovered the exact opposite (Appalachian students repudiated victim blaming faster than students from elsewhere). Finally, racial status did not offer a unique contribution in this sample.

In the third column of Table 2, our educational factors were merged with the demographic influencers. As individual variables, the act of completing gender classes and staying longer in college had direct associations. Although their contributions were not immense, their significance suggests that these educational interventions lessened rape myth adherence. While classroom effects slightly dampened the strength of Appalachian and gender identities, the educational factors washed out the significant association with sexual orientation. This might mean that the day-to-day experiences of being a gay or lesbian student in a heterosexist society may intrinsically dispel rape myths, while heterosexual students need access to feminist classrooms to challenge rape myths. This loss of significance for sexual orientation might also suggest some sort of selection bias in educational settings (homosexual students are less likely to drop out of college or they gravitate to feminist classes). Finally, the two educational variables delivered an extra 4.1% of the explained variance, while all six variables accounted for 10% of rape myth inclinations ($p < .001$).

The seven contextual variables, entered as the third step, had mixed results. As a group, they increased the portion of the variance explained by 10% and nudged the total adjusted r-squared up to .203 (both $p < .001$). As individual variables, it seems that only four of the

TABLE 2. Regressions of Demographic, Educational, Contextual, and Attitudinal Variables on the Rape Myth Scale (n = 516, n = 510, n = 503, n = 497)

Independent Variables	Demographics	Demographics + Education	Demographics + Education + Contextual	Full Model
Demographics				
Appalachian identity	–.082*	–.075*	–.072*	–.084*
Gender (female = 1)	–.242***	–.234**	–.188***	–.015
Race (White = 1)	–.016	–.015	–.004	–.005
Sexual orientation (hetero)	.073*	.049	.014	.008
Educational effects				
Gender relations class		–.158**	–.120**	–.048
Year in school (senior = 4)		–.133**	–.140**	–.092*
Extracurricular contexts				
Family member victim			–.062	–.023
Friend victim			–.049	–.029
Respondent victim			–.116*	–.083*
Authoritarian parenting			.146**	.121**
Traditional parental gender roles			.192***	.080*
Family violence			–.032	–.044
Feminist friends			–.120**	–.002
Belief systems				
Traditional gender roles				.163**
Modern sexism scale				180***
Hostility toward women				.410***
Adjusted *R*-squared		.102	.203	.423
F-score	.067	9.990***	9.836***	20.446***
R-squared change	8.518***	.046	.103	.229
F-change		12.133***	8.721***	37.871***

Note. Scores for the independent variables are standardized beta coefficients.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

individual variables were the impetus behind this improvement. In support of modeling and political socialization theories, our findings suggest that student creeds corresponded with much of the general attitudes of significant others. Students who were nested in feminist networks were disinclined to blame rape victims, as were children who were raised in egalitarian households. In fact, two of the three largest coefficients were found in the offspring from autocratic families that wholeheartedly want women to stick to domestic duties.

Although this regression highlights the consequences of friend and family attitudes, the ramifications of experiencing violence are murkier. Of the four behavioral measures of violence, only enduring a rape netted consistent results (people who survived a personal rape repelled the narratives of victim blame at higher rates). Conversely, the variable of enduring household violence and knowing other victims of sexual aggression did not produce any additional predictive power. Hence, while the direction between violence and victim blame were always negative, a familiarity with violence in the domestic realm does not inevitably lessen victim blaming in and of itself.

In the final regression, the crucial role of ideological filters is apparent. As a totality, the newly added belief systems pushed up the explanatory power of the model by 24% and more than doubled the *r*-squared of the earlier models. In the end, all of the worldviews obtained the largest associations in this analysis. With a beta coefficient of .410, it seems that much of the blaming of women has to do with a universal antipathy toward women (i.e., women were characterized as deceptive, malicious, and untrustworthy). However, the stereotypes of women as callous or spiteful schemers were not the only key worldviews. The students who avoided rape myths also spotted institutionalized sexism throughout society. Likewise, students who were comfortable with conservative gender expectations were more inclined to endorse rape myths. Hence, victim blamers saw benefits in traditional gender arrangements and did not envision much gender injustice in the world.

As these ideological factors seemed to drive rape attitudes, some of the other variables were able to keep much of their relevance. Regardless of how students saw gender relations, victim blamers were more often raised by authoritarian or traditional-minded parents. This suggests that parents leave lingering imprints despite any later collegiate experiences. Likewise, Appalachian status and year-in-college were able to maintain significance; thus these factors seem to fend off the tendency to welcome rape myths. On the other hand, the ideological factors usurped some of the explanatory power of previously significant variables. Student gender, taking a gender class, and having feminist friends all fell out of significance. Subsequently, with the ideological factors being more important, it may be safe to assume that simply being a female or resting in a feminist-friendly college environment is less important than the way people use these contexts to inform their perceptions of how gender works in the world.

DISCUSSION

Like any empirical work, this study has some methodological limitations. Because of the emotional difficulty and stigmatized nature of this topic, issues of social desirability, overdemanding recall, and item wording might restrict the validity of our measures. Likewise, research may garner different results if it explores dimensions of rape myths other than victim blame (i.e., the victim invented the allegation or the sex was consensual). There also may be some concerns over the representativeness of the sample. In relying on college

students, we caution that the attitudes of college students and all U.S. adults are probably not identical (i.e., college students are often from a higher socioeconomic status, White, more female, and mostly confined to a cohort of young adults). Likewise, the regular problems of generalizing from students may be amplified by the fact that this region has one of the lowest college attendance rates in the nation. This possibility of greater selection biases may lead one to wonder if the attitudes of Appalachian college students may be more mutable or liberal than noncollegiate Appalachians.

Nevertheless, this study adds some insights into some antecedents of rape myths. Our data suggest that victim blame is not endemic to this populace. Instead of widespread chastising of victims during their anguish, most students were unwilling to place full responsibility on victims. For example, over 75% of the students were against the claims that women enjoy rape or that acting sexy incites rape. However, this opinion was not unanimous, and a sizable segment of the sample evoked victim blaming. At least 10% of the students felt that victims always instigate rapes, and another 64% were unwilling to totally absolve the victims from all responsibility. Thus, a majority sought some discretion in their blaming practices since they hesitated when divorcing victim blame from all rapes.

In moving to the explanatory analysis, our theoretical framework was overwhelmingly validated. In the final regression, the entire model was robust enough to explain 44% of the variance in the victim blame distribution. Additionally, eight of the predictors reached statistical significance when controlling for the other factors.

In exploring the role of specific factors, our calculations suggest that an Appalachian identity does influence student perceptions of sexual aggression. However, the direction of this relationship bucked the expectation of subculture theorists. That is, self-identified Appalachians were less likely to embrace rape myths in this multivariate context. This suggests that future researchers ought to be suspicious of the notion that Appalachians are quicker to accommodate or sanction sexual violence against women. While we think this work begs for a rejection or reconsideration of the Appalachia violence hypothesis, we realize that our findings are far from definitive. As stated earlier, the use of college students limits the study's generalizability and there can be a problem of selection biases in our comparison group (the non-Appalachian students who enroll in this college may not totally fit the attitudes of students from colleges located in the northeast or far west). Thus, we urge the creation of national random samples that can juxtapose the sentiments of Appalachians and non-Appalachians from all sorts of communities.

While our Appalachian results challenges some previous research, the rest of our findings overwhelmingly replicate previous conclusions. Our study upholds the claim that hostility toward women is one of the strongest predictors of victim blame (i.e., students were quicker to find victim faults when they felt women are naturally disingenuous and cruel). This misogyny in turn reinforces the threat that women may meet violence when they fail at being honest, kind, loving, agreeable, accommodating, modest, patient, and so forth.

We also found that deliberations on other sorts of gender expectations were connected to expressions of victim blame. As hypothesized, the students who championed the ideals of an exclusive stay-at-home mother were pulled to images of victim wrongdoing. Similarly, it seems that rape perceptions are closely aligned with recognitions of contemporary sexism. Students who ignore or dismiss male privilege are often those who profess rape myths.

Another finding highlights the significance of certain types of victimization statuses. In a partial confirmation of the defensive attribution hypothesis, our data suggest that victim

blaming decreases when an individual survives her own rape. Even when holding contextual and ideological frameworks constant, victims are more likely to doubt rape myths when they reflect on the events and emotions that surround their personal case of sexual coercion. This reveals a good deal of victim resiliency and an ability to deflect some forms of self-recriminations. On the other hand, the impact of other types of violence was negligible. Knowing a sister or friend who was raped did not automatically translate greater victim empathy. However, we fear the phrase "knowing a victim" may have missed some key elements of second-hand victimization (respondents may indicate knowing a victim without having any in-depth discussions on the topic with the victim). Thus, future studies should see if stronger secondary effects occur when respondents talk in detail with rape survivors. Family violence also had little bearing on rape myths. While this may be due the traumatic bonding that leads some victims into tolerating or exonerating the violence of authority figures, we caution that this result can be due to shortcomings of the Conflict Tactics Scale (the scale does not differentiate between doing and receiving violence and does not identify the gender of abusers and the abused). This finding can also indicate that family violence undermines rape myths only when such violence is mediated through worldviews that foster solidarity with women and critical appraisals of traditional gender roles.

While family violence failed to generate consistent outcomes, other sorts of family factors did. It seems that parents who enact traditional gender expectations beget children who assume that rape occurs because of female misdeeds. Likewise, children who are exposed to overbearing and undemocratic disciplinarians are more receptive to the notion that rape victims acted indecently and were too flirtatious.

As children seemed to habitually copy parental attitudes, the effects of peer attitudes were a little less decisive. In the early regressions, it seemed that feminist friendships inhibited victim blaming. Yet a membership in a feminist network later lost its potency when the ideological factors were considered. This might mean that students rebuff the messages of feminist friends or that students maintain friendships with peers who have attitudes that diverge from their own. However, this conclusion might be hasty and premature. The term "feminist friend" could have undercut the impact of liberal conversations with peers. For example, a large number of students may voice feminist perspectives and dodge a feminist label.

While many forces promote rape myths, it is refreshing to note that some educational processes counter such trends. It appears as if students are less likely to reprimand victims the longer they stay in college. Thus, the accumulative effects of collegiate experience may make students more suspicious of traditional doctrines on masculinities and femininities (it is also possible that the change is due to maturation effects or that a greater proportion of conservative students withdraw after their first or second year). The direct impact of a feminist class is little more conditional. Before controlling for ideological factors, it appeared as if participating in gender classes automatically shrinks the amount of victim blame. However, with its significance being usurped in the last regressions, it seems safe to assume that effects of feminist classes are probably mitigated by student reactions to the course (i.e., rape myths lessen when students are receptive to class discussions on gender biases). However, we do caution that the full effects of gender relations classes may be underestimated because we asked no questions on class content and the surveys were distributed midway through the semester.

While the aforementioned variables hit significance, three of the demographic measures failed to do so. First, race/ethnicity was never a potent variable. While this is probably a

correct assessment for this particular college, we do have to remind readers that our college lacks racial diversity (95% of the sample was White). Conversely, gender and sexual orientation offered some early ramifications, but their potency tailed off as contextual and ideological factors were included. Thus any differences on these factors do not seem to be connected to any essential differences between men and women or gays and straights (as long as our measures are valid). Instead, the apparent differences are probably due to the fact that women and homosexuals are more comfortable with women, more attuned to gender biases, and less likely to romanticize the virtues of conventional nuclear families.

In synthesizing these findings into a larger argument, some insights emerge. This research suggests that people should be dubious of reductionistic assertions that link Appalachian peoples to a greater condolence of violence. Likewise, violence in the domestic realm and knowing rape victims do not seem to spurn any inevitable reactions. Instead, a good deal of rape myths are linked to general parental practices and broader concepts of gender consciousness. On one level, students who cling to rape myths are those who fuse three overarching gender beliefs. First, students admonish rape victims when they consider contemporary gender practices as basically fair, just, and impartial. Likewise, they believe conventional dictates on legitimate family structures work well and women should be attuned to the world of motherhood, domesticity, and emotional labor. Likewise, both men and women belittle victim claims when they show less emotional affinities with women and characterize women as conniving, devious plotters. Finally, feminist consciousness is probably nurtured by several contextual factors.

Progressive family practices seem to produce less victim blame in their children, as does the length of one's college experiences.

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