Research reveals that sexual assault is a significant problem on college campuses, occurring especially frequently among the student population (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Lonsway, 1996; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). The significant majority of rape victims are female (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Hsu, Reid, & Schult, 2009; Poppen & Segal, 1988) while 9 out of 10 perpetrators of all forms of sexual violence are male (Fisher et al., 2000; Poppen & Segal, 1988). Illogically, attempts at preventing sexual assault on college campuses usually target women (the victims); yet men are far more likely to be the perpetrators of sexual violence. The present study evaluated how male attitudes, measured by rape myth acceptance, and behaviors, measured by willingness to seek information, could be changed pro-socially. A false feedback paradigm was used to manipulate male personal responsibility by presenting men with sham rape myth acceptance scores. Results indicate that men who received the “high score” (signifying high rape myth acceptance) had greater personal responsibility for the issue, and thus increased concern, as determined by lower rape myth acceptance at post-test and willingness to seek out further information on SA minimization. In order to incite change, men need to feel personally responsible for the issue of SA.

Prevalence of Sexual Assault

For the purpose of this study, sexual assault is defined in accordance with most state penal codes: “Non-consensual oral, vaginal, or anal penetration by force or threat of force” constitutes sexual assault or rape (New York Coalition Against Sexual Assault [NYSCASA], 2008a). Sexual abuse differs from sexual assault in that it is “non-consensual fondling, kissing, or rubbing against private areas where there was no attempt or occurrence of sexual penetration” (NYSCASA, 2008a). The findings of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Sexual Assault Study (2000) supported the overrepresentation of

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college students in statistics pertaining to sexual victimization and perpetration, finding 84 incidents of completed rape and 71 incidents of attempted rape in a national sample of nearly 4,500 women during an academic semester (Fisher et al., 2000).

The Colgate Campus Life Survey (Hsu et al. 2009) confirmed that Colgate students’ experiences are consistent with those of college and university students nationwide. More than 70% of Colgate students reported experiencing some type of sexual harassment. Almost 50% of all female students reported experiencing sexual abuse; more than 25% reported experiencing attempted sexual assault or attempted rape; and more than 16% reported having been the victims of sexual assault since moving to Colgate. Sexual assault is associated with greater psychological distress, drug and alcohol abuse in adulthood, poorer perceptions of physical health, and increased rates of attempted suicide (NYSCASA, 2007; NYSCASA, 2008b). Thus, rape constitutes a serious problem and warrants increased attention.

Rape Myth Acceptance
Prevention and intervention programs that target the issue of sexual assault generally aim to alter underlying attitudes regarding gender relations and rape. The literature on this topic often refers to “rape myth acceptance” as the predominant indicator of a proclivity to rape (Burt, 1980; Gilmartin-Zena, 1987; Lerner, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape myths have been defined as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false, but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). Rape myths have also been expressed as an example of the just-world phenomenon, which is “the predisposition to believe that the world is a just place where good things happen to good people and bad things happen only to those who deserve them” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 36). To defend this belief system, people often seek evidence that supports the idea that victims brought about or deserved their adversity (Lerner, 1980). Rape myths thus function to explain why rape victims deserved the rape, and, interestingly, to reaffirm a person’s false sense of security regarding immunity to sexual assault.

Rape myth acceptance scales have been devised to measure willingness to believe or accept these ideas that a) trivialize the crime and b) shift the blame from the perpetrator to the victim (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). These rape myth acceptance scales have been useful in determining associated attitudes. In fact, higher levels of rape myth acceptance have been found to correlate with more negative and stereotypical attitudes toward women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), higher tolerance for sexual harassment (Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, & DeLuca, 1992), and actual sanction for domestic violence (Saunders, Lynch, Grayson, & Linz, 1987).

Rape myth acceptance scales have been useful in discovering associated attitudes and associated behaviors. Higher rape myth acceptance has been correlated with self-reported likelihood of raping (Briere & Malamuth, 1983; Check & Malamuth, 1985; Hamilton & Yee, 1990), sexually aggressive behavior (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), significantly less blame for the perpetrating man (Check & Malamuth, 1985; Quackenbush, 1989), and greater likelihood of blaming the victim (Blumberg & Lester, 1991; Check & Malamuth, 1985). Individuals with greater acceptance of rape myths are less likely to label a scenario “rape” (even when it meets the legal criteria), in both student (Fischer, 1986; Norris & Cubbins, 1992) and non-student samples (Burt & Albin, 1981).

Men and Rape Myth Acceptance
The aforementioned findings of rape myth acceptance and related attitudes and behaviors are typically true for both men and women. However, men are more likely to accept rape myths than women (Burt, 1991; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) in both student (Ashton, 1982; Blumberg & Lester, 1991) and non-student samples (Dye & Roth, 1990). Intuitively, this suggests that men are more likely to hold the associated attitudes and engage in the associated behaviors that have been found to correlate with higher levels of rape myth acceptance. For example, college men are more likely than college women to view sexually coercive behavior as acceptable (Hattery-Freetly & Kane, 1995; Haworth-Hoepner, 1998). The fact that men are more likely to accept and promote rape myths is a compelling reason to aim efforts in minimizing sexual assault at men.

Sexual Assault Prevention Programs
Most intervention programs focus on minimizing rape myth acceptance and other relevant attitudes by incorporating theoretical models of attitude change in programming. Potter, Moynihan, Stapleton, and Banyard (2009) make use of Peripheral
Changing Male Attitudes and Behaviors Regarding SA

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Gilbert et al. (1991) reported that the effect size
than attitude change created by peripheral route
ability, and thought favorability could effectively
change male attitudes regarding sexual assault.
They found that the group of men receiving the
ELM-based intervention showed significantly more
attitude change than a control group. It is believed
that central-route attitude changes are longer-
lasting and exert more influence over behavior
than attitude change created by peripheral route
processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However,
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post-test comparisons that a two-part educational
workshop significantly shifted men’s attitudes
toward rape over time. The effective program first
reviewed myths and facts about rape, and then used
empathy exercises and suggestions of personal and
political actions to prevent rape. The inclusion of
definitions and statistics about the prevalence of
sexual assault often utilizes fear appraisals. Lee
(1987) proposed that men can be presented with
shocking statistics regarding rape, but until they
recognize their own responsibility for rape, rape
prevention efforts will have limited success. While
potentially successful, the fear appraisal approach
relies upon empathy for the victim rather than
negative consequences for the perpetrator and
feelings about oneself.

The Present Study
The primary aim of the present study is to
determine if and how male attitudes and behaviors
regarding sexual assault can be changed pros-
cially. Whereas previous research adapting the ELM
to minimizing rape myth acceptance has focused
on personal relevance through group identity (i.e.,
all men at Colgate), the present study focuses on
personal relevance through specific individual
identity. Upon completion of the Illinois Rape Myth
Acceptance Scale (IRMA, Lonsway & Fitzgerald,
1994), participants were unknowingly given false
results, experimentally manipulating personal
relevance to each individual. This addressed per-
sonal responsibility, which is theoretically related to
direct changes in motivation and indirect changes
in attitude and behavior. It was hypothesized that,
by increasing personal relevance and identity
salience, men would be more likely to proactively
seek further information about sexual assault and
what they could do to help minimize its prevalence.
Through this intervention, men could perhaps
decrease their rape myth acceptance scores.

Predictions. It was hypothesized that the
false feedback paradigm that gives men personal
responsibility for sexual assault would increase
concern, and thus willingness to learn about
pro-social action. It was predicted that those given
more personal responsibility in the high rape myth
acceptance score (HS) condition would be signifi-
cantly more willing to engage in educational
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cantly more willing to engage in the educational
component, and therefore have a lower post-test
IRMA score as compared with those in the low rape
myth acceptance score (LS) condition and the
control condition. Additionally, those with higher

route attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to
successfully raise awareness about the problem of
sexual assault through the use of proactive imagery
in campaign posters. This technique increased will-
ingness to participate in actions aimed at reducing
sexual violence and resulted in long-term effects,
as participants at an in-person training session at
a later date had higher “action scale” scores after
viewing the campaign posters. Unfortunately, the
results were less effective for male than female
participants. Females were much more likely to
report seeing the posters in the first place, and
when compared to the males who did report see-
ing the posters, women had significantly higher
pre-contemplation and contemplation scale scores
than males. Also problematic was the fact that the
approach, although somewhat successful, was not
based on an experimental design, and thus limited
the ability to draw causal inferences. This further
promotes the need for a male-centered, experi-
mental approach at minimizing sexual assault and
associated attitudes.

A study by Gilbert, Heesacker, and Gannon
(1991) is among the few efforts to incorporate a
theoretical model in programming directed solely
at men. They leveraged the Elaboration Likelihood
Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) central-
route attitude change literature to experimentally
determine whether higher levels of motivation,
ability, and thought favorability could effectively
change male attitudes regarding sexual assault.
They found that the group of men receiving the
ELM-based intervention showed significantly more
attitude change than a control group. It is believed
that central-route attitude changes are longer-
lasting and exert more influence over behavior
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It has been suggested that rape myth accept-
cance can be successfully reduced through
educational interventions (Fonow, Richardson &
Wemmerus, 1992; Lee, 1987; Malamuth & Check,
personal responsibility would be more likely to rate the vignettes as dangerous situations, would be more likely to report intervening, and would be more likely to take the pamphlet at the conclusion of the trial.

Because all participants, regardless of condition, were given the educational packet, it was predicted that IRMA scores would decrease at post-test overall. However, because those in the HS condition had increased personal relevance and identity salience as compared to the LS and control conditions, their within-subject change from time 1 to time 2 was expected to be more drastic.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited from the Introductory Psychology course at Colgate University. Because the study focused on male attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual assault, the participant pool was comprised solely of men. A total of 49 men (Mage = 18.30, SD = 0.68, age range: 17-21 years) participated in the study. The sample was mostly White (75.5%) with limited ethnic diversity (12.2% Latino, 8.2% Asian, 4.1% Black). Of these participants, 97.9% reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual, while 2.1% reported their sexual orientation as “unsure.” Participants received one-hour credit as compensation.

**Materials and Procedure**

The present research was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Colgate University (protocol #FR-F10-04). Participants read and signed consent forms. A pencil-and-paper survey was employed for the majority of the study. First, participants completed a pre-test packet. This packet assessed baseline rape myth acceptance, as measured by the 45-item Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). This scale, which has been cross-validated for strong internal consistency and construct validity (Payne et al., 1999), includes 45 statements to be judged on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Of the 45 items, five are filler, creating a range of possible scores from 40 to 280.

Four weeks later, all participants returned to complete the study. The independent variable in this experiment was a false-feedback test score. The false-feedback manipulation, modeled after standardized test score sheets, was constructed using plausible subscale and total scores, together with a figure of a normal distribution. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions regarding pre-testing IRMA test results: high score (HS), low score (LS), or control. This manipulation used a between-groups design. The experimenter met with each participant one-on-one to administer and explain their “results” from the IRMA scale they completed four weeks prior. In the low condition, participants were told that they scored in the 8th percentile of rape myth acceptance, suggesting that they did not positively endorse rape myths. In the high condition, participants were told that they scored in the 97th percentile of rape myth acceptance, suggesting that they are likely to positively endorse rape myths. In the control condition, no results were given.

Directly following the manipulation, participants were told to read an educational packet that merely offered real statistics concerning sexual assault, as well as suggestions for ways men can help. The educational component was comprised of information from The New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault (2008), The National College Women Sexual Victimization Study (Fisher et al., 2000), and the Ms. Magazine Study (Koss, 1988), and educated men by debunking common myths.

When the participant reported having completed the reading component, the experimenter administered the dependent measures. The following two vignettes were used as behavioral intention measures designed to assess the effectiveness of the manipulation in real-world situations. Every participant responded to both vignettes. Vignette A describes an encounter at a typical Colgate party at a downtown apartment.

Imagine that you are at The Jug. You see a male friend buying drinks for a woman who is already so drunk that she is slurring her words and can barely stand up. You...
Changing Male Attitudes and Behaviors Regarding SA

was executed at the conclusion of each trial to
a funnel debriefing (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000)
ten pamphlets remaining in the room). Lastly,
additional pamphlet (i.e., there were less than
it was recorded whether or not he obtained the
results. Once the participant left the laboratory,
concern that social pressure would confound the
each participant’s private lab cubicle, there was no
assault. Because the pamphlets were located in
where the participant completed the study there
information regarding SA, participants were given
to gauge their willingness to pro-actively seek further
ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. In order to
pants were then asked to complete a demographic
questionnaire, including such categories as race or
between these variables was significant,

Participants then completed the post-test
IRMA, the identical 45-item questionnaire as the
pre-test. A within-group design was employed for
the pre-test and post-test IRMA comparison. Partici-
ants were then asked to complete a demographic
questionnaire, including such categories as race or
ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. In order to
gauge their willingness to pro-actively seek further
information regarding SA, participants were given
the choice to obtain a pamphlet at the conclusion
of the study. This pamphlet contained the informa-
tion from the educational component. In the lab
where the participant completed the study there
was a stack of ten pamphlets. Participants were
told they could freely take a pamphlet to learn
more about what they could do to prevent sexual
assault. Because the pamphlets were located in
each participant’s private lab cubicle, there was no
concern that social pressure would confound the
results. Once the participant left the laboratory,
it was recorded whether or not he obtained the
additional pamphlet (i.e., there were less than
ten pamphlets remaining in the room). Lastly,
a funnel debriefing (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000)
was executed at the conclusion of each trial to
gauge any suspicion regarding the false feedback
manipulation and ensure to the participants that
the false results were in no way a reflection of their
true character or beliefs.

Results

Statistical analyses were conducted to determine
changes, if any, regarding attitudes. A mixed-design
ANOVA was used with an alpha level of .05 to test
whether the personal responsibility manipulation
had an effect on post-test IRMA scores. There was
a main effect of time, as IRMA scores decreased
across conditions from time 1 to time 2, \( F(1, 40) = 79.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .54 \). Pre-test IRMA scores (\( M = 93.43, SD = 26.52 \)) were dramatically higher than
post-test IRMA scores (\( M = 87.11, SD = 25.19 \)).
There was no main effect of experimental condi-
tion on post-test IRMA scores, \( F(2, 40) = 0.329,
p = .72 \). The main effect of time was qualified by an
interaction between time (pre-test/post-test) and
experimental condition. There was a statistically
significant difference between conditions in IRMA
reduction from time 1 to time 2, \( F(2, 40) = 12.16, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17 \). As shown in Figure 1, those in the
“low score” condition had a more drastic decrease
in rape myth acceptance at post-test than those
in the control group. Moreover, consistent with
expectations, those in the “high score” condition,
had the most extreme decrease in rape myth
acceptance at post-test.

A chi-square test of goodness of fit was
performed to examine the relation between exper-
imental condition and whether or not participants
took the informational pamphlet. The relation
between these variables was significant, \( \chi^2(2) = 8.41, p = .015, V = .42 \). Figure 2 reveals that those
in the high condition (61.50%) were significantly
more likely to take the pamphlet than those in the
control condition (28.60%) and low condition
(14.30%). Interestingly, those in the low condition
were even less willing to take the pamphlet than
those in the control group.

Although there were significant changes in
attitudes, it seems that those attitude changes were
not necessarily consolidated yet into behavioral
changes. The men were asked to analyze somewhat
ambiguous sexual assault scenarios. A one-way,
between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to test
whether the personal responsibility manipulation
had an effect on participants’ ratings of their
likelihood to intervene in the situations. There
was not a statistically significant effect for either
vignette A, \( F(2, 45) = 0.129, p = .89 \), or vignette B,
A chi-square test of goodness of fit was used to assess a relationship between experimental condition and severity ratings for both vignette A and vignette B. The manipulation did not have a significant effect on severity ratings for either vignette, $\chi^2(4) = 5.51, p = .24$ and $\chi^2(4) = 1.22, p = .88$, respectively. Similarly, the relationship between experimental condition and blame attribution was not significant for vignette A, $\chi^2(6) = 4.82, p = .57$, or vignette B, $\chi^2(6) = 6.10, p = .41$. The chi-square goodness of fit measuring a relationship between experimental condition and response to the situation of vignette A was marginally significant, $\chi^2(4) = 8.88, p = .06, V = .43$. As seen in Figure 3, the more personal responsibility the participant was given, the more likely he was to report directly intervening: Men in the “low score” condition were more likely than those in the control condition to directly intervene, and men in the “high score” condition were the most likely to report an inclination for direct intervention in the situation. There was not, however, a statistically significant relationship between experimental condition and response to the situation of vignette B, $\chi^2(4) = 3.19, p = .53$.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the experiment was to determine if, and how, men’s attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual assault could be changed prosocially. As expected, the experimental approach replicated previous studies in the effectiveness of education on decreasing rape myth acceptance. Participants in the experimental conditions were impacted by the personalization as compared to those in the control group. Interestingly, this impact persisted even when personalization was of a positive nature. This suggests that any personalization bestows the individual with a sense of responsibility, thus increasing concern about and motivation for sexual assault prevention. In line with expectations, those in the HS condition had an especially drastic decrease in rape myth acceptance at post-test, and were more likely to obtain a pamphlet at the conclusion of the study. Men can easily shrug off rape prevalence figures by believing that they are not involved and therefore do not need to care, even when these alarming statistics are relevant to their own identity group (i.e., men at Colgate). However, presenting men with personalized results sheets intended to cue the information relevant to individual identity seems to enhance motivation for attitude change, particularly when the rape myth acceptance “results” were negative and thus blatantly expressed the need for education on the issue.

Consistent with the Elaboration Likelihood Model, several programs in rape prevention have included activities for reading and writing about potentially dangerous sexual situations. These exercises are included with the belief that rumination forces participants to process the information more actively, and perhaps induces empathy, enhancing attitude change (e.g., Linz, Fuson, & Donnerstein, 1990). Thus, all participants should have benefited from the inclusion of this measure, but those in the HS condition should have reacted most drastically. This was the case. The experimental condition interacted with time to affect rape myth reduction and likelihood to seek further information regarding SA in the form of a pamphlet.
While the manipulation had an effect on men’s attitudes (as determined by reduced rape myth acceptance and increased willingness to care about the issue by taking a pamphlet), it seems that these attitude changes were not yet consolidated into behavioral changes. The vignettes were used as behavioral intention measures designed to assess the effectiveness of the manipulation in real-world situations. Only the judgments for responding to the situation in vignette A were marginally significantly affected by the personal responsibility manipulation. Logically, the more personally responsible the participant felt for sexual assault, the more inclined he might be to directly intervene in a situation likely to lead to rape. However, severity ratings and blame attribution were not affected by the manipulation. In other words, it seems that even those men in the HS condition who achieved a drastic decrease in rape myth attitudes were no more likely than those in the low and control conditions to rate the scenarios as dangerous and no more likely than those in the low and control conditions to attribute the blame to the male perpetrator.

Limitations and Future Considerations
There were limitations to this study that should not be left unmentioned. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, and the majority of participants were first-year students. A larger sample size, and one more representative of all grade levels would be ideal. Secondly, there was no conscious effort to counterbalance the order of presentation of the two vignettes. Presenting the two scenarios in the same order to all participants could potentially be a confound, resulting in unwanted order effects.

An unfortunate drawback was the absence of a direct measure documenting whether participants actually read the educational packet. It was assumed that post-test IRMA scores and vignette responses would reflect if participants had been educated on the issue through the reading. A more direct measure of whether or not participants read the packet, rather than the indirect indicators, would improve the accuracy of the results.

Lastly, it would be useful to include a mood measure in a replication study. This would allow insight to the mechanisms at work in the personal responsibility manipulation. It is assumed that reporting personalized, negative results enhances motivation and willingness to care about the issue, but measuring mood (i.e., anger, guilt, fear, anxiety) would clarify the process by which the
manipulation lowers rape myth acceptance and increases willingness to seek further information on sexual assault.

**Conclusion**

The way intervention programs currently function (i.e., by targeting women) may be inadvertently perpetuating rape myths. By focusing on what women can do to prevent sexual assault, these approaches send the message that women are responsible for their own protection, thereby blaming the victim. Male-centered strategies, conversely, target potential perpetrators and work to dismantle rape myths and misinformation, as well as to problematize elements of rape culture.

While there are attempts at raising awareness about sexual assault on Colgate’s campus through events such as information sessions and discussions, the “typical” Colgate male is generally not in attendance. The use of a false-feedback paradigm successfully increased personal responsibility (and thus motivation) in men regarding sexual assault, as seen in their greater willingness to seek further information on the issue.

Although participants’ meta-theoretical attitudes decreased through the experiment, their intuitions about real-world situations remain engrained. This finding has great utility for future research and intervention programs. While attitudes can be changed through identity salience, new techniques must be devised to ensure that these changed attitudes have application to interactions with the environment. The results of this study add to the literature on sexual assault minimization by providing evidence that increasing personal responsibility, particularly as it relates to one individual, enhances motivation to care about the issue and willingly engage in prevention efforts.

**References**


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