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"It's Just 'Locker Room' Talk": The Impact of Gender and Political Partisanship on Agreement with Rape Myths Among US University Students

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ABSTRACT

Allegations of sexual assault against prominent politicians have led to highly partisan debates. Studies demonstrate that alongside gender, partisanship has become a powerful predictor of views on the #MeToo movement and sexual assault, but this empirical inquiry has not yet been assessed across the attitudes of rape myths among university students. The main research question in this study is, "To what extent is rape myth acceptance among university students a product of gender and political partisanship?" We surveyed around 1,000 university students and asked their level of agreement with two constructs of rape myths: that women are to blame for rape and that women lie about rape. Several findings stand out. First, Democratic and Republican men express statistically the same level of rape myth acceptance. Second, there exists a sizable partisan gap among women in levels of rape myth acceptance, with Democratic women conveying stronger disagreement with rape myths than Republican women. Third, the partisan gap in rape myth acceptance is driven by the difference between Democratic and Republican women, with Democratic women driving the gender gap.

KEYWORDS

Rape myth acceptance; rape myths; university students; political ideology

Introduction

Before his second successful election campaign in 2024, the President-elect of the United States, Donald J. Trump, had been found feloniously liable for falsifying financial payments, disguising them as legal services intended to conceal extramarital sexual encounters, and was also found liable for sexual assault in another civil case (*Carroll v Trump*, 2023; Chin, 2024). During his first successful election campaign, he was quoted on an infamous *Access Hollywood* tape indicating that he had committed sexual assault in the past. Specifically, "I moved on her like a bitch . . . I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. . . Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything."[1] The comments occurred in September 2005 when Trump talked to the show's host, Billy Bush. The Republican President of the United States nominee clearly stated that he engages in physical contact with women without their permission. In the aftermath of the tape release, survey results by Consult/Politico (2017)

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demonstrated that Republicans found sexual misconduct allegations toward Trump with less credibility than Democrats, with Democratic women finding them the most credible (67%), whereas Republican women finding them the least credible (31%). A similar partisan-gender pattern emerges for Republican Roy Moore, who was accused of inappropriate sexual behaviors, primarily toward minors. When the politician in question was Bill Clinton, a Democrat, the same proportion of the Democratic women identified the sexual misconduct accusations as credible (66%), resembling the proportion of Republican women (71%). In contrast, the partisan difference among men was about one percent. The partisan gap in credibility was smaller for Clinton (8%) versus the much larger gaps for Moore (26%) and Trump (36%), suggesting that Democrats were consistent in finding the accusations of sexual misconduct credible, regardless of the accused politician's party affiliation, unlike Republicans. This pattern by partisans was captured by Ortiz and Smith's (2022) survey of US adults, where Republicans showed more in-group favorability than Democrats. These events of sexual improprieties present intriguing hypotheses when using a sample of students versus adults, given that students typically possess less entrenched political views, exhibit less polarization, and may be more attuned to perceiving certain (ambiguous) sexual situations.

The literature on attitudes toward #MeToo, sexual assault, and rape myth acceptance firmly finds that there are gender differences. For instance, studies demonstrate that women are less likely to accept rape myths when compared to men (Beshers & DiVita, 2021; Davies et al., 2012; Deming et al., 2013; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Navarro & Ratajczak, 2022; Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017, 2018, 2019; Schulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Walfield, 2021). Recent research predicting a range of attitudes on traditionally gendered issues shows that the gender gaps are decreasing in importance as intersecting identities play an increasing role in attitude formation (Barnes & Cassese, 2017; Cassese & Barnes, 2018, 2019; Cassese & Holman, 2019; Hansen & Dolan, 2020, 2023; Hansen et al., 2022). Indeed, several studies find that political partisanship is increasingly an important predictor of attitudes toward #MeToo and sexual assault (Castle et al., 2020; Costa et al., 2020; Craig & Cossette, 2022; Gothreau et al., 2022; Hansen & Dolan, 2023; Ortiz & Smith, 2022).

In this study, we seek to understand the role that partisanship plays in accepting female-oriented rape myths (where the victim is portrayed as a woman and the perpetrator is identified as a man) for a segment of the population – university students – where conversations about sexual assault in higher education institutions have, in recent years, dynamically alternated in the political context. The competing political interests of institutional responses to campus sexual assault were prominently displayed through the remodeling of Title IX (a federal law that prohibits sex-based discrimination), where the 2014 revisions made under Obama's administration were subsequently altered by Betsy DeVos, who was appointed as the Secretary of Education by Trump in 2017 (Saul & Taylor, 2017). Here, the changes by a Democratic-held White House endorsed formal mechanisms via advocacy services and reporting processes, whereas a Republican-held White House focused on proportional fairness between the accused and accuser. Given the observed partisan differences in opinions on sexual assault, this study seeks to address the research question: "To what extent is rape myth acceptance among university students a product of gender and political partisanship?"

Acceptance of rape myths

Rape myths, or "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," has appreciated significant empirical attention across many decades (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). Interest in what is considered stereotypes regarding sexual assault behavior is important because rape myth attitudes are strongly linked to sexual coercion and victimization (Bohner et al., 2005; Payne et al., 1999). While recent studies identified that the acceptance of rape myths among undergraduates has decreased over time (Beshers & DiVita, 2021; Byrne et al., 2021), there have been calls to consider the diverse nature of today's student population by incorporating an intersectional dialogue of how these attitudes vary among sociodemographic groupings (Beshers & DiVita, 2021).

But first, what explains the acceptance of rape myths? Over the last 40 or so years, scholars have uncovered several relevant predictors of rape myth acceptance (Beshers & DiVita, 2021; Burt, 1980; Davies et al., 2012; Deming et al., 2013; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Navarro & Ratajczak, 2022; Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017, 2018, 2019; Schulze & Koon-Magnin, 2017; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Walfield, 2021). For instance, younger individuals are more likely to accept rape myths; conversely, better educated individuals are less likely to accept rape myths. One finding that consistently emerges across studies is that women are less likely than men to accept rape myths. Given this hyper-partisan era preoccupied with gender politics, what is less clear is the role of political party affiliation in rape myth acceptance, with at least one study demonstrating that there are partisan differences in rape myth attitudes among the public (Ortiz & Smith, 2022).

It would be reasonable to expect that partisans would have similar attitudes toward accepting rape myths based on their partisan groupings. It is these within-group differences that are the primary focus of the current study, answering the call to understand better how the two gender groups come to accept rape myths through different processes (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). For instance, vignette research via focus groups among first- and fourth-year university women demonstrated that when shown depictions of incidences of rape, women utilized rape myths and established norms regarding rape myths based on their peer groups (Deming et al., 2013). In other words, based on this finding, the authors conclude that women take cues regarding rape myths from their social circle and the people they engage with regularly.

Gender and partisanship

Several studies demonstrate that gender has decreased in importance in terms of predicting attitudes on a range of gendered-based issues in the United States due to intersecting identities (Barnes & Cassese, 2017; Cassese & Barnes, 2018, 2019; Cassese & Holman, 2019; Castle et al., 2020; Gothreau et al., 2022; Hansen & Dolan, 2020, 2023; Hansen et al., 2022). Studies show that identities related to race and social class (Cassese & Barnes, 2018, 2019; Castle et al., 2020; Gothreau et al., 2022) and political partisanship (Castle et al., 2020; Hansen & Dolan, 2020, 2023; Hansen et al., 2022) sometimes play a greater role than gender in predicting attitudes toward traditionally gendered issues. In

terms of rape myth endorsement, political partisanship plays a crucial role among adults (Ortiz & Smith, 2022), but its effects among university students remain uncertain.

If individuals are likely to more readily believe allegations of sexual misconduct from celebrity accusers when they like them (Cohen et al., 2021), one could imagine that the same logic would apply when a politician is accused of sexual misconduct with which an individual has a partisan attachment. The individual could engage in cognitive bias and refuse to believe an accuser's claims if the claims are levied against a politician they view favorably (Ortiz & Smith, 2022). Alternatively, they could be more willing to forgive the misdeeds of a politician they find favorable, even when evidence of misconduct exists. In support of these ideas, Costa et al. (2020), through an experimental study, identified that partisanship plays an important role in attitudes toward punishment for sexual misconduct. The authors found that individuals are more likely to forgive a co-partisan legislator accused of sexual assault than they are to forgive a legislator of a competitor party.

Several high-profile scandals related to sexual assaults toward political leaders drive the motivation of the study's purpose (Gerhart & Rindler, 2018; Godfrey et al., 2018; The Associated Press, 2019). In particular, a survey performed following Christine Blasey Ford accusing President Donald J. Trump's United States Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh, of sexually assaulting her when she was 15 and he was 17, identified a difference in opinion among partisans toward the believability of Ford and Kavanaugh, with Democrat men and women more likely believing Ford, whereas Republican men and women more likely believing Kavanaugh (Montanaro, 2018). In support of these survey results are Hansen and Dolan's (2020) findings that public feelings toward Kavanaugh were a product of partisanship, with gender identity playing a minor role among survey respondents. Pollino (2020) points out that while some news stations emphasized the Ford-Kavanaugh event through a gendered lens and emphasized victims of sexual violence, other news stations presented the event through a completely partisan lens. The partisan lens stations solely presented the event as a man being a victim of a vengeful political party. AbiNader et al. (2021) argued that the news was more likely to emphasize the politics of the event, representing the increasing political polarization among the public and the depersonalization of the Kavanaugh accuser. Similarly, Blumell and Mulupi (2022) determined that traditional news media was much more likely to focus on how the accusations might impact Kavanaugh's political and personal reputation, as opposed to focusing on the victim or the broader narrative of sexual assault, wherein the focus on the victim was Trump's negative framing of Kavanaugh's accuser among some news sources. Generally, Republicans emphasized the rule of law and the possibility of false allegations (against Kavanaugh), but Democrats emphasized sexual violence awareness.

Partisan opinions toward sexual assault extend beyond these high-profile scandals. When asked about sexual harassment in other scenarios, Republican partisans are less likely to believe accusers and less likely to believe that sexual harassment is a societal problem (Craig & Cossette, 2022). Similarly, attitudes toward the #MeToo movement in the United States are significantly influenced by political partisanship, with partisan gaps being larger than gender gaps in predicting feelings toward the movement (Hansen & Dolan, 2023). That is, women were more polarized in their attitudes toward the #MeToo movement than men, with Republican women exhibiting cross-pressured identities. Where the #MeToo movement mobilized Democrat women, the movement did not mobilize Republican women (Castle et al., 2020).

Ortiz and Smith (2022) provide the only study exploring the impact of political partisanship on an adapted version of the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Scale, as 14 statements undergoing an alteration where the term "rape" was replaced with "sexual assault" to reflect sexual assault myths. Recently published after the completion of the current study's survey data collection of university students, the authors narrowly explore the impact of gender and partisanship on rape myth acceptance held by adults of varying ages. Findings show that Republican men had the highest rape myth acceptance, and Democratic women reported the lowest rape myth acceptance. Though these results were focused on attitudes among the general public, they provide evidence that political partisanship can play a (greater) role in determining attitudes and beliefs about gender-based issues than gender itself. We evaluate some of the findings in Ortiz and Smith (2022) by surveying university-aged adults who are less likely to have strong partisan attachments (Flaherty, 2020). We also control for other variables and explore gender differences to determine whether independent variables operate differently for women and men when predicting rape myth acceptance levels. If we find that partisanship significantly influences rape myth acceptance among survey respondents who typically exhibit weak partisan attachments (Flaherty, 2020), this would lend further empirical support to the findings of Ortiz and Smith (2022).

Hypotheses

H_1: Men have a greater level of agreement with rape myth statements that blame women for rape or that women lie about rape than women.

H_2: Republican partisans have a greater level of agreement with rape myth statements that blame women for rape or that women lie about rape than Democratic partisans.

H_3: The gap among Republican and Democrat partisans on the level of agreement with rape myth statements is a product of the gap between Republican and Democratic women.

Data

In line with most rape myth acceptance research, university students were recruited as potential respondents. Students were also an ideal sample, as political partisanship represents an affective orientation that strengthens with the length of affiliation (Campbell et al., 1960). In other words, if we find a relationship between partisanship and agreement with rape myths among this young population of voters, the result is even more compelling as they are in the nascency of establishing partisan attachments. The study received Institutional Review Board approval from Sam Houston State University, and all participants included in this study gave their informed consent.

Participant recruitment began with constructing a sampling frame of class offerings at one public university in the southern region during the Fall 2021 semester ($N = 4{,}016$), downloaded from the university's website. Class information included the class name, department of origin, class number, section number, credit hours allotted, the instructor on record, class site, enrollment count, and class attributes (e.g., core class, distance

learning). Only face-to-face lectures taught on the main campus that exceeded 11 undergraduates were retained for a sample of 1,367 classes.

The instructors of record were contacted via encrypted e-mail to gauge interest in the researchers administering the survey hosted on Qualtrics. Three options for participant recruitment were given to distribute the web survey, whereby the instructor prefers IT intervention in creating an assignment tab or announcement within their learning management software system for students to access, or they can directly e-mail students a survey link. Instructors were informed that they could discretionally award extra credit, with each respondent able to enter a raffle for a $50 Amazon electronic gift card upon survey completion. Potential respondents were informed that the survey would take roughly 25 min to complete, which contained 112–156 questions (dependent on responses to filter questions). Student participation within the selected classes was opt-in, with all items answered voluntarily, as participants were given the option to skip them.

The survey ran in two one-month waves from mid-October to mid-December 2021. Initial contact with instructors occurred one week before the survey was to start, with follow-up e-mails sent two days prior to the start of the survey. Each wave involved contact with 80 instructors. In the first wave, systematic random sampling drove the sampling procedure. The response rates by instructors and students were 13.75% and 44.30%, respectively. The second wave targeted undergraduate classes that exceeded 50 students. An instructor and student response rate of 38.75% and 37.58% was attained. A total of 1,350 students responded to the survey request – a 38.45% response rate, which is above the expected range for a web-based survey (Nulty, 2008) – with a final sample of 1,067 students. After excluding students who were ineligible, did not consent, had previously taken the survey, or did not fully complete the survey, 944 to 946 respondents were included in the multiple regression models.[2]

Dependent variables

The Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale can be viewed as a hierarchical scale as it synthesizes unidimensional and multidimensional models (McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999). The 22-item scale contains five subscales to gauge attitudes toward women, rape victims, and perpetrators: She Asked For It, He Didn't Mean To, "He Didn't Mean To – Intoxication Questions, It Wasn't Really Rape, and She Lied (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). The current study adapted two of the five rape myth constructs, She Asked For It[3] and She Lied, conceptualized as beliefs that women are partially to blame for and the fabrication of the rape, respectively.

We explore each item separately as a dependent variable to determine whether predictors vary across the two sets of rape myths. This approach is crucial because it reveals important nuances and differences that would be lost if we combined the items into latent variables using factor analysis. While factor analysis could summarize the items into two latent measures, it would obscure the specific variations in agreement across different questions, thereby diminishing the explanatory power of the results. By analyzing the items individually, we are able to uncover more detailed and meaningful differences in how predictors relate to the distinct rape myth items.

Table 1. Rape myth statements.

	Mean (SD)
BLAMING WOMEN	
1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.	−1.587 (0.920)
2. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.	−1.608 (0.888)
3. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.	−1.735 (0.712)
4. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.	−0.906 (1.277)
5. When girls are raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.	−0.875 (0.876)
6. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.	−0.858 (1.289)
7. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.	−1.414 (1.001)
WOMEN LIE	
8. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.	−0.668 (1.150)
9. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.	−0.480 (1.245)
10. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.	−0.897 (1.117)
11. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.	−1.323 (0.965)
12. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim that it was a rape.	−0.483 (1.190)

Rape myth statements were based on a five-point Likert scale (−2 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating a greater acceptance of rape myths.

Table 1 presents the survey questions representing these two sets of statements utilized as dependent variables explored in the analysis. The respondent was asked about their level of agreement (−2 = strongly disagree; −1 disagree; 0 = neither agree nor disagree; 1 = agree; 2 = strongly agree) with each of the 12 statements. In the column on the right, the table provides the mean level of response on the −2 to 2 Likert scale.

The top panel of Table 1 shows seven rape myth statements representing attitudes that women hold some blame for their actions in rape. The average mean level of agreement across the seven statements is −1.283, indicating that the average response leaned toward disagreement with the statements. However, there is quite a bit of variance in the responses, as the average standard deviation across the responses is around a whole point (0.995) on the five-point scale. On average, just under one-fifth (9.23%) of the sample selected "neither agree nor disagree" across these seven statements. Similarly, a slightly higher percentage (9.43%) of respondents indicated some level of agreement across the seven statements. The two statements within this set contained the largest variance related to a woman's promiscuity and initiation of physical contact. Specifically, 34.2% of the sample indicated that they either "agree" or "neither agree nor disagree" with the statement, "If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble." Similarly, the following statement demonstrated that around 36% of respondents indicated either "agree" or "neither agree nor disagree:" "If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex."

The bottom panel of Table 1 shows five rape myth statements representing attitudes that women lie about rape. The average mean level of agreement across the five statements is −0.770, indicating that the average response leaned toward disagreement with the statements. However, the strength of the disagreement is weaker, at over half a point lower, than the blaming women statements, likely driven by the slightly larger amount of variance in the responses for the women lie statements. The average standard deviation across the responses is just over a whole point (1.133) on the five-point scale. On average, 27.37% of respondents across the five statements indicated that they "neither agree nor disagree" with them. For example, over one-third (34.11%) of the sample selected neither agreement nor disagreement with the

statement, "Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim that it was a rape." There is also a higher level of agreement with the women lie statements when compared to the blame women statements. On average, 15.72% of respondents selected some level of agreement across the five statements. For instance, around a quarter (25.42%) of respondents agree with the statements, "rape accusations are often used as a way to get back at guys," and the cheating statement above. Overall, the descriptive statistics demonstrate an important variance in responses to both sets of questions that deserves further evaluation.[4]

Independent variables

It is necessary to ensure that the models are parsimonious to assess the impact of partisanship on agreement with rape myths. Many sociodemographic variables traditionally used in the related scholarship are inserted into the multiple regression models as control variables. We include the respondent's age, grade level (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), and race. Further, the gender of the respondent is included since there is the expectation that men and women will have differing views on the rape myth statements (see Appendix C).

The main variable of interest is the respondent's partisan identification. Here, the original seven-point partisan identification variable is collapsed into three categories, with "leaners" coded as partisans. The created three-category variable is utilized for two reasons: 1.) leaners tend to vote and act like partisans and 2.) there is stronger evidence for a partisan impact if partisan differences are found when including respondents that indicate they only "lean" toward one party.

Methods and analysis

As an initial analysis, the mean level of agreement with the seven and five rape myth statements for blaming women and women lying, respectively, are presented in Table 2 by partisan identification grouping. Bivariate analyses indicate that on all 12 rape myth statements, Democrats have a statistically significant lower level of agreement when compared to Republicans. In other words, Republicans are less likely than Democrats to disagree with the rape myth statements. On average, the partisan gap in the level of agreement with rape myth statements blaming women was just under half a point (0.473) on a five-point scale. Similarly, the average partisan gap in agreement with the statements indicating that women lie about rape was slightly higher at 0.562. The largest gaps between Democratic and Republican partisans were both within the blaming women myths, ranging from the highest gap at three-quarters of a point (0.783) for the statement regarding dressing slutty to the smallest gap at one-fifth of a point (0.195) for the indication that no was unclear.

To determine whether partisan gaps exist in the level of agreement with the two sets of rape myth statements, we employ OLS linear regression with sociodemographic controls. First, we estimate multiple regression models to predict the level of agreement with the statements blaming women for rape. Then, we plot predictions while holding all other independent variables at their median values to display partisan differences in the level of agreement. Second, we estimate multiple regression models to predict the level of agreement with the statements indicating that women lie about rape. Here, we also plot predictions to

Table 2. Mean agreement with rape myths by partisanship.

	Drunk	Slutty Clothes	Go w/ Alone	Acts Slutty	No Was Unclear	Initiate Blame	Must Say No
BLAMING WOMEN							
Democrat	−1.804	−1.818	−1.844	−1.313	−1.654	−1.138	−1.632
Republican	−1.283*	−1.290*	−1.583*	−0.530*	−1.459*	−0.551*	−1.196*
	Regret	Revenge	Leading On	Emotional Issues	Cheating		
WOMEN LIE							
Democrat	−0.919	−0.838	−1.206	−1.540	−0.754		
Republican	−0.358*	−0.150*	−0.616*	−1.081*	−0.240*		

Rape myth statements were based on a five-point Likert scale (−2 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating a greater acceptance of rape myths.
*Bivariate statistical significance at $p < .05$.

demonstrate partisan differences. Finally, all models are estimated for both sets of statements, with the samples split by gender and partisan differences (see Appendix A and B). Predictions are presented from these models to demonstrate how Democratic men and Republican men and Democratic women and Republican women differ in their agreement with rape myths.

Before we begin the discussion of our results, there are a few limitations to acknowledge in the present study. First, the study was not designed to explore the potential interactions between race, gender, and partisanship in predicting agreement with rape myths. Investigating these intersections requires a larger and more diverse dataset to adequately capture and analyze the complex relationships among these variables. Second, to more precisely estimate the moderating effect of gender on partisanship, a larger dataset is required. An alternative strategy for evaluating this moderating relationship involves including an interaction term in the models, which necessitates a sufficiently large sample size to achieve reliable and robust results. In this initial exploratory analysis, our findings were constrained by the available data size. Third, the study was conducted at a single university located in the southern United States, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other geographical regions. To assess potential regional variations in attitudes toward rape myths, future research should incorporate samples from universities located in other geographic regions across the country.

Results

Blaming women statements

Table 3 displays results from the seven regression models predicting the level of agreement with rape myths that blame women. First, the model output provides support for H_1. For all seven blame statements, women are statistically more likely to disagree with the statements when compared to men. In other words, women are less likely to blame women when sexual assault or rape occurs. The gender gap ranges from one-fifth of a point (−0.204) for the statement that indicates that women hold blame when they go with a man alone to three-fourths of a point (−0.731) for the statement indicating that women hold blame when they initiate physical contact such as kissing.

The model output in Table 3 also conveys support for H_2, which hypothesized that there would be partisan gaps in rape myth acceptance. Republican partisans have a statistically significant higher score of agreement with each of the seven rape myths indicating that women are to blame for their rape. The smallest gap between Republicans and Democrats

Table 3. Models predicting rape myths – blame women.

	Dependent variable:						
	Drunk	Slutty Clothes	Go w/ Alone	Acts Slutty	No Was Unclear	Initiate Blame	Must Say No
Constant	−1.428*	−1.613*	−1.813*	−1.054*	−1.345*	−1.314*	−1.009*
	(0.270)	(0.257)	(0.215)	(0.371)	(0.270)	(0.371)	(0.297)
Age	0.001	0.011	0.008	0.015	−0.008	0.036*	−0.007
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.015)
Woman	−0.407*	−0.465*	−0.204*	−0.643*	−0.232*	−0.721*	−0.444*
	(0.067)	(0.063)	(0.053)	(0.092)	(0.067)	(0.092)	(0.073)
Grade Level	−0.044	−0.025	−0.041	−0.024	0.025	−0.045	−0.061
	(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.025)	(0.044)	(0.032)	(0.044)	(0.035)
Race – Black	0.090	−0.006	0.133*	0.050	0.057	0.231*	−0.016
	(0.078)	(0.074)	(0.062)	(0.107)	(0.078)	(0.107)	(0.086)
Race – Other	−0.083	−0.062	−0.040	−0.006	−0.038	−0.012	−0.110
	(0.078)	(0.075)	(0.062)	(0.107)	(0.078)	(0.108)	(0.086)
Party ID – Independent	0.139*	0.121	0.100	0.277*	0.095	0.285*	0.255*
	(0.070)	(0.067)	(0.056)	(0.096)	(0.070)	(0.096)	(0.077)
Party ID – Republican	0.491*	0.421*	0.233*	0.648*	0.157*	0.558*	0.341*
	(0.074)	(0.070)	(0.059)	(0.101)	(0.074)	(0.101)	(0.081)
Observations	946	945	945	945	945	946	946
R^2	0.104	0.115	0.045	0.112	0.023	0.119	0.077
Adjusted R^2	0.097	0.109	0.038	0.105	0.016	0.112	0.070
Residual Std. Error	0.873	0.830	0.695	1.198	0.871	1.199	0.960

*indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses.

exists for the statement that indicates that when women go alone with men in a room, it is their fault if they are raped (0.233). There are two instances where there are quite large gaps of over half a point between Republicans and Democrats. These differences are substantively large on a five-point scale, as they account for over 10% of the variance in the scale of responses. Republicans have a higher level of agreement (0.648) with the statement that if a girl acts like a slut, eventually, she is going to get into trouble. Similarly, Republicans have a higher level of agreement (0.588) with the idea that women who initiate kissing or hooking up should not be surprised if a man assumes they want to have sex.

Figure 1 displays the predicted level of agreement estimated for Republicans and Democrats for the seven blame women rape myths while holding all other variables at their median value. When accounting for control variables, there is no partisan difference for agreement with the statement indicating that when a woman is raped, it is because the no was unclear. There is a small partisan gap for the statement that it is a woman's fault if she gets raped if she goes alone in a room with a guy at a party. There are moderately sized partisan gaps for statements blaming women if they are drunk, wear slutty clothes, or do not verbally say no. In line with the model output, there are large partisan gaps in the level of agreement on the statements about women acting slutty and initiating physical contact. The results provide convincing support for H_2, which hypothesizes that Republicans would have a higher level of agreement with rape myths.

Women lie statements

The above patterns continue when predicting agreement with rape myth statements about women who lie about rape. In Table 4, the model output from the five statements is displayed. All five regression models support $H_{1,}$ women have a statistically significant

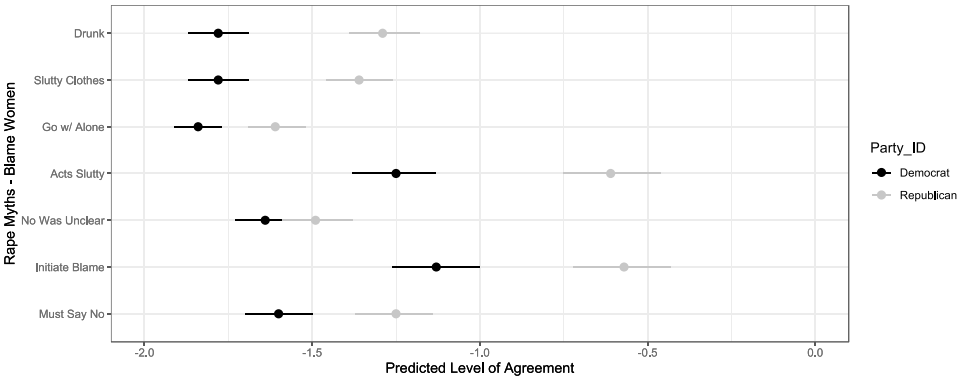

Figure 1. Predicted level of agreement with rape myths – blame women calculated with 95% confidence intervals.

lower level of agreement with the statements. The gender gaps are quite large, from the lowest at half a point to the largest at three-quarters of a point. The largest gap is that men have a substantially more likely agreement with the statement that rape accusations are often a way of getting back at guys.

Figure 2 shows that the partisan gap is substantively pronounced across each rape myth statement about women who lie about rape, with some of the gaps being as large as half of a point on the five-point scale. In support of H_2, Republicans have a statistically significant higher level of agreement with all five rape myth statements. Specifically, Republicans have a greater level of agreement that women lie about rape due to regret, for revenge, due to

Table 4. Models predicting rape myths – women lie.

	Dependent variable:				
	Regret	Revenge	Leading On	Emotional Issues	Cheating
Constant	−0.760*	−0.606	−1.000*	−1.377*	−0.391
	(0.339)	(0.353)	(0.323)	(0.283)	(0.349)
Age	0.016	0.018	0.014	0.015	0.005
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.017)
Woman	−0.572*	−0.754*	−0.579*	−0.494*	−0.565*
	(0.084)	(0.087)	(0.080)	(0.070)	(0.086)
Grade Level	−0.054	−0.106*	−0.074	−0.059	−0.059
	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.033)	(0.041)
Race – Black	0.109	0.397*	0.139	0.023	0.145
	(0.098)	(0.102)	(0.094)	(0.082)	(0.101)
Race – Other	0.204*	0.285*	0.264*	0.107	0.221*
	(0.098)	(0.102)	(0.094)	(0.082)	(0.101)
Party ID – Independent	0.206*	0.441*	0.391*	0.180*	0.379*
	(0.088)	(0.091)	(0.084)	(0.073)	(0.090)
Party ID – Republican	0.473*	0.641*	0.532*	0.372*	0.454*
	(0.093)	(0.096)	(0.088)	(0.077)	(0.095)
Observations	946	945	944	944	946
R^2	0.090	0.146	0.114	0.092	0.086
Adjusted R^2	0.083	0.140	0.107	0.085	0.079
Residual Std. Error	1.096	1.140	1.043	0.916	1.128

*indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses.

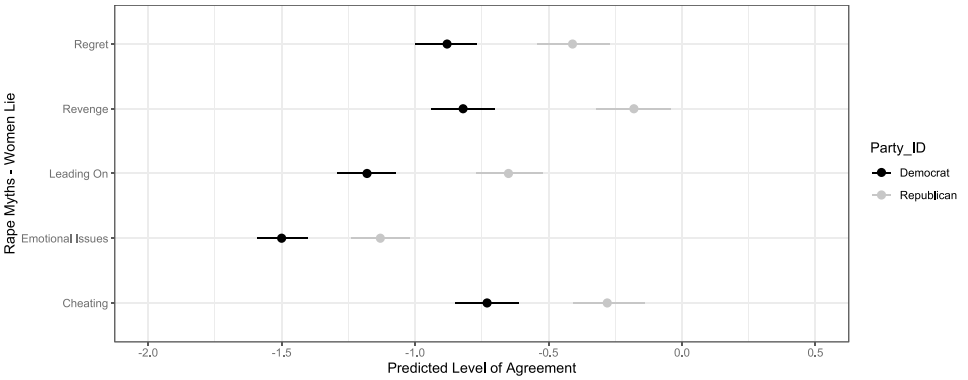

Figure 2. Predicted level of agreement with rape myths – women lie. Calculated with 95% confidence intervals.

regretting leading a guy on, because they have emotional problems, and because they were caught cheating.

Explaining the partisan gap in rape myth acceptance – the gap in women's attitudes

Due to the partisan and gender cross-pressures women face, we expect the partisan gap between Republican and Democratic women to be pronounced when predicting gender-based issues. Figures 3 and 4 show the predicted level of agreement with the two sets of rape myths with the samples split by gender. Both Figures support H_3, which hypothesizes that the attitudinal gap between Republican and Democratic women will largely drive the partisan gap in rape myth acceptance.

The top panel in Figure 3 demonstrates that there are almost no partisan gaps among men in the level of agreement with the blame women rape myths, as four out of five statements show the confidence bounds overlapping for Democratic and Republican men. The only exception is the substantially small difference across partisan men in that a drunk woman bears some responsibility. There are two reasons for these results. First, a smaller sample of men took the survey. Therefore, we expect slightly larger confidence bounds when exploring the men-only sample. However, the sample size only explains a small portion of the result. Second, there is a larger variance in responses among men regardless of partisanship. In other words, in comparison to women, a larger proportion of men fanned out in their level of agreement with rape myths, regardless of their partisan affiliation. These results indicate that men's agreement with rape myths related to blaming women is less likely related to their partisan grouping.

In comparison, the bottom panel in Figure 3 displays a different pattern for women's endorsement of rape myths related to blaming women. Here, there are clear gaps between Democratic and Republican women, with the only exception being that there is no gap between women partisans when asking about their agreement to whether "[w]hen girls are raped, it's often because the way they said 'no' was unclear." There is a small gap between Democratic and Republican women when asked about the agreement to the statement indicating that a woman is to blame if she goes with a guy alone, with Democratic women more likely to strongly disagree. There are moderate partisan

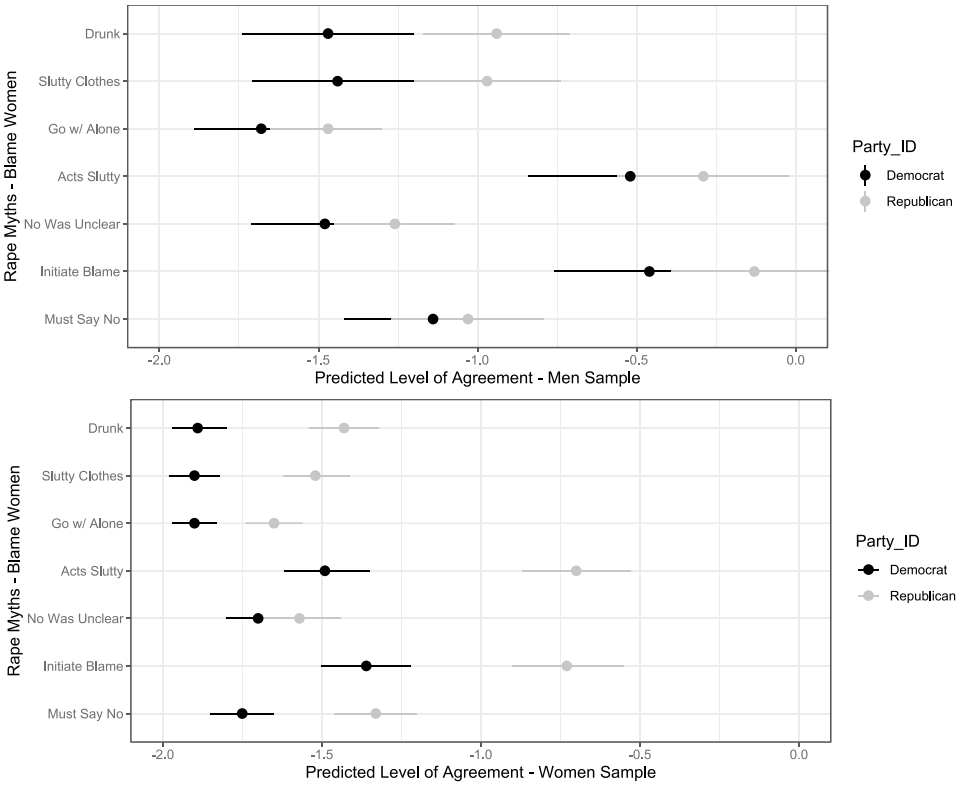

Figure 3. Predicted level of agreement with rape myths – blame women – sample split calculated with 95% confidence intervals.

gaps among women to statements about women being to blame if they are drunk, wear slutty clothes, or that they must say no to claim rape. Again, Democratic women are more likely to strongly disagree with these statements. Finally, there are large partisan gaps among women regarding a woman acting slutty or being to blame for initiating physical contact. For these latter two statements, the partisan gap in the level of agreement is around half a point, with Democratic women, again, providing stronger disagreement.

Figure 4 displays a similar result regarding partisan gaps by gender when asked about statements regarding women lying about rape. There is no partisan gap among men in the level of agreement for all five statements, with the confidence bounds overlapping for the predicted levels of agreement. In contrast, there are quite large partisan gaps among women. For all five statements, there is a gap of over a quarter of a point when comparing Democratic and Republican women, and in two instances, the gap is over half a point. In sum, Democratic women have a statistically higher level of disagreement with the women lie rape myth statements. The results are quite salient. On the one hand, when closely examining Figures 3 and 4, the result appears to be a consequence of Democratic women having a much larger level of disagreement with all rape myth statements when compared to all other respondents. On the other hand, the result could be driven by Republican women allowing their partisan identities to pull their views closer to men.

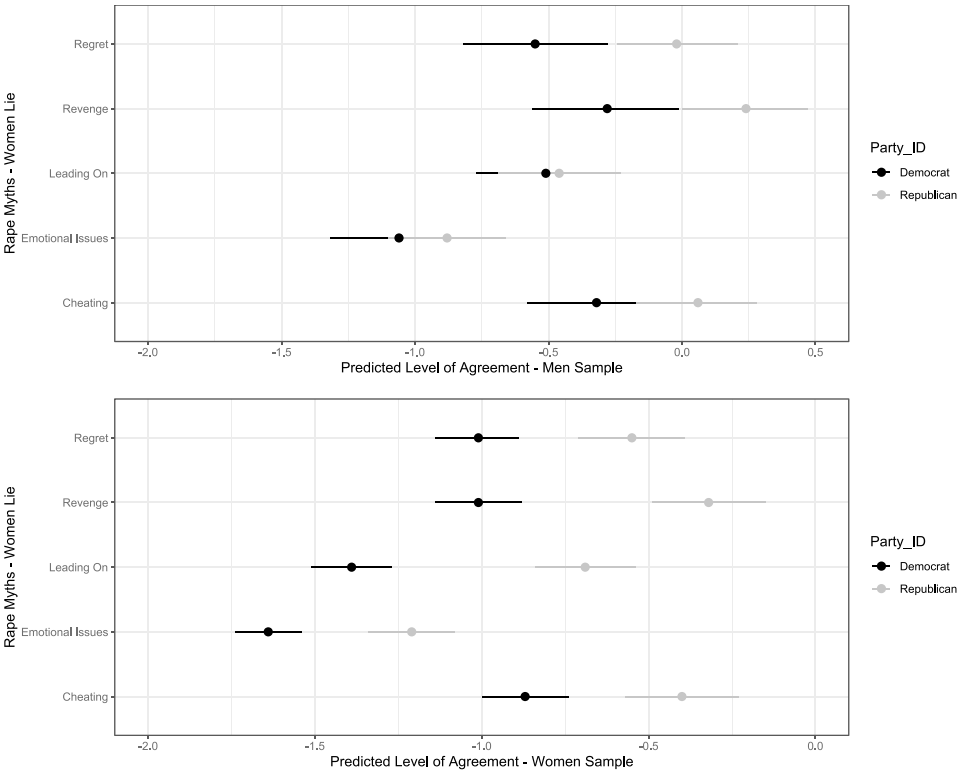

Figure 4. Predicted level of agreement with rape myths – women lie – samples split calculated with 95% confidence intervals.

Conclusion

The study sought to explore gender and political partisanship's impact on the acceptance of rape myths among university students. We asked to what extent is rape myth acceptance among university students a product of gender and political partisanship? To answer the research question, we surveyed around 1,000 university students at a large R2 institution in the southern United States. The survey respondents were provided with several rape myth statements representing two constructs of myths: 1.) that women are not without blame for rape, and 2.) that women lie about rape.

Controlling for other factors, we demonstrated three crucial findings. First, there are statistically significant and substantively meaningful gender and partisan gaps in the acceptance of rape myths. Second, the findings indicate no partisan gaps in rape myth acceptance among men. Democratic men and Republican men have a statistically similar predicted level of acceptance across all rape myth statements. Third, we find statistically significant and substantively large partisan gaps in rape myth acceptance among women. Democratic women had a statistically larger level of disagreement with an overwhelming majority of rape myth statements when compared to Republican women. Overall, Republican women had the same predicted level of rape myth acceptance as men on all statements. The results indicate that Republican women are more impacted by their partisan identities than by their gender identities. This finding aligns with recent research showing that on traditionally gendered

issues, Republican women increasingly take the position of men (Castle et al., 2020; Hansen & Dolan, 2020, 2023; Hansen et al., 2022; Ortiz & Smith, 2022).

The results are especially notable as younger individuals, who constitute our sample, tend to hold weaker political partisan attachments. Overall, the findings here can be situated within a recent broader public opinion and behavioral literature that goes beyond solely exploring gender-based issues. The first is that while Ortiz and Smith (2022) advanced the relationship between partisanship and myths about (rape and) sexual assault, their sample comprised adults who were less racially and ethnically diverse. The present study's sample of university students was 63% White, close to the national figures for undergraduate enrollment at postsecondary institutions (Fabina et al., 2023; Hussar & Bailey, 2018). The second finding, indicating more substantial partisan gaps in rape myth acceptance compared to gender, is particularly noteworthy given that these findings involve younger individuals with typically weaker political partisan affiliations (Flaherty, 2020), in line with previous work that suggested that sociodemographics like gender, race, and ethnicity play a lesser role on views toward sexual discrimination than partisanship (Cassese & Barnes, 2018, 2019; Castle et al., 2020; Gothreau et al., 2022; Hansen & Dolan, 2020, 2023; Hansen et al., 2022). Not only is it that adult Republican women would exhibit different mobilization patterns toward sexual harassment than Democratic women (Castle et al., 2020), but this too would occur at the university level. Further, enhancing the political engagement of these students may lead to increased efforts in mobilizing against sexual harassment. Finally, this study provides yet another example of where society is increasingly polarized. This broader research agenda establishes the ever-increasing predictability power of political partisanship on a range of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. For example, partisanship plays a key role as a predictor in studies that range from topics on support for policing and correctional reform (Hansen et al., 2021; Hansen & Navarro, 2021) to policy preferences and behaviors related to public health and the COVID-19 pandemic (Gadarian et al., 2020).

Notes

1. Donald Trump, interview by Billy Bush, *Access Hollywood*, The New York Times, October 6, 2016.
2. Two women respondents did not answer all the items, resulting in a different number of observations across models. As a robustness check, we conducted analyses excluding these respondents, and the results remained substantively the same.
3. The rape myth statement, "If a girl doesn't say 'no' she can't claim rape" equally cross-loaded on three rape myth constructs – She Asked For It, It Wasn't Really Rape, and She Lied – and couched within "She Asked For It" for its conceptual agreement.
4. The results from ANOVA tests revealed that both gender and partisan identification groupings had statistically significant differences in means for each item at the $p < .001$ level. The only exception was for the item assessing whether rape is a product of women's unclear "no," where the mean differences among partisan groupings were significant at the $p < .01$ level.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Models predicting rape myths – blame women – samples split by gender

Table A1. Models predicting rape myths – blame women – (men sample).

	Dependent variable:						
	Drunk	Slutty Clothes	Go w/Alone	Acts Slutty	No Was Unclear	Initiate Blame	Must Say No
Constant	−1.359*	−1.413*	−1.523*	−0.310	−1.491*	−0.782	−0.115
	(0.488)	(0.491)	(0.376)	(0.578)	(0.402)	(0.545)	(0.506)
Age	0.003	0.006	−0.007	−0.002	−0.004	0.026	−0.039
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.018)	(0.028)	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.025)
Grade Level	−0.124	−0.062	−0.014	−0.065	0.072	−0.139	−0.069
	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.058)	(0.090)	(0.063)	(0.085)	(0.079)
Race – Black	0.187	−0.159	0.134	−0.224	0.007	0.078	−0.251
	(0.195)	(0.196)	(0.150)	(0.233)	(0.161)	(0.218)	(0.202)
Race – Other	−0.036	−0.106	−0.084	−0.015	−0.202	−0.004	−0.160
	(0.209)	(0.210)	(0.161)	(0.247)	(0.172)	(0.233)	(0.216)
Party ID -	0.031	0.065	0.100	0.005	0.038	0.203	0.065
Independent	(0.188)	(0.189)	(0.144)	(0.223)	(0.155)	(0.210)	(0.194)
Party ID -	0.535*	0.470*	0.204	0.233	0.221	0.328	0.106
Republican	(0.189)	(0.190)	(0.145)	(0.223)	(0.155)	(0.210)	(0.195)
Observations	253	253	253	252	253	253	253
R^2	0.062	0.051	0.013	0.019	0.021	0.025	0.032
Adjusted R^2	0.040	0.028	−0.011	−0.005	−0.003	0.002	0.008
Residual Std. Error	1.130	1.135	0.869	1.336	0.930	1.261	1.169

*indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses.

Table A2. Models predicting rape myths – blame women – (women sample).

	Dependent variable:						
	Drunk	Slutty Clothes	Go w/Alone	Acts Slutty	No Was Unclear	Initiate Blame	Must Say No
Constant	−1.873*	−2.210*	−2.333*	−2.234*	−1.452*	−2.405*	−2.230*
	(0.317)	(0.287)	(0.260)	(0.476)	(0.355)	(0.491)	(0.362)
Age	0.001	0.017	0.025	0.038	−0.014	0.052*	0.031
	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.025)	(0.019)	(0.026)	(0.019)
Grade Level	−0.013	−0.016	−0.063*	−0.036	0.012	−0.027	−0.092*
	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.051)	(0.038)	(0.053)	(0.039)
Race – Black	0.036	0.042	0.134*	0.135	0.086	0.270*	0.060
	(0.080)	(0.073)	(0.066)	(0.120)	(0.089)	(0.124)	(0.091)
Race – Other	−0.108	−0.053	−0.026	0.017	0.011	−0.006	−0.086
	(0.078)	(0.071)	(0.064)	(0.118)	(0.088)	(0.121)	(0.089)
Party ID -	0.177*	0.142*	0.104	0.347*	0.120	0.300*	0.314*
Independent	(0.070)	(0.063)	(0.057)	(0.105)	(0.078)	(0.108)	(0.080)
Party ID -	0.451*	0.388*	0.252*	0.785*	0.135	0.631*	0.419*
Republican	(0.075)	(0.068)	(0.062)	(0.113)	(0.085)	(0.117)	(0.086)
Observations	693	692	692	693	692	693	693
R^2	0.062	0.053	0.035	0.072	0.007	0.050	0.055
Adjusted R^2	0.054	0.045	0.027	0.064	−0.002	0.041	0.046
Residual Std. Error	0.760	0.689	0.623	1.143	0.850	1.177	0.869

*indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses.

Appendix B. Models predicting rape myths – women lie – samples split by gender

Table B1. Models predicting rape myths – women lie – (men sample).

	Dependent variable:				
	Regret	Revenge	Leading On	Emotional Issues	Cheating
Constant	−0.367	−0.521	−0.614	−0.981*	−0.220
	(0.481)	(0.492)	(0.481)	(0.462)	(0.475)
Age	0.002	0.021	0.022	0.005	0.004
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.023)
Grade Level	−0.132	−0.180*	−0.176*	−0.130	−0.113
	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.075)	(0.072)	(0.074)
Race – Black	−0.0003	0.278	−0.322	0.028	−0.089
	(0.192)	(0.197)	(0.194)	(0.185)	(0.190)
Race – Other	0.084	0.389	0.066	0.283	0.247
	(0.206)	(0.210)	(0.205)	(0.197)	(0.203)
Party ID – Independent	0.404*	0.621*	0.180	0.178	0.441*
	(0.185)	(0.190)	(0.185)	(0.178)	(0.183)
Party ID – Republican	0.530*	0.520*	0.043	0.184	0.375*
	(0.186)	(0.190)	(0.187)	(0.178)	(0.184)
Observations	253	252	252	253	253
R^2	0.060	0.088	0.042	0.032	0.052
Adjusted R^2	0.037	0.066	0.018	0.008	0.029
Residual Std. Error	1.112	1.137	1.112	1.068	1.099

*indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses.

Table B2. Models predicting rape myths – women lie – (women sample).

	Dependent variable:				
	Regret	Revenge	Leading On	Emotional Issues	Cheating
Constant	−1.664*	−1.347*	−1.629*	−2.192*	−1.005*
	(0.454)	(0.476)	(0.421)	(0.355)	(0.475)
Age	0.032	0.016	0.009	0.030	0.005
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.025)
Grade Level	−0.037	−0.081	−0.048	−0.046	−0.044
	(0.049)	(0.051)	(0.045)	(0.038)	(0.051)
Race – Black	0.141	0.435*	0.292*	0.004	0.226
	(0.115)	(0.120)	(0.107)	(0.090)	(0.120)
Race – Other	0.235*	0.262*	0.352*	0.059	0.220
	(0.112)	(0.118)	(0.104)	(0.088)	(0.117)
Party ID – Independent	0.145	0.370*	0.432*	0.170*	0.350*
	(0.100)	(0.105)	(0.093)	(0.078)	(0.105)
Party ID – Republican	0.463*	0.693*	0.698*	0.435*	0.479*
	(0.108)	(0.113)	(0.100)	(0.085)	(0.113)
Observations	693	693	692	691	693
R^2	0.031	0.062	0.078	0.045	0.033
Adjusted R^2	0.022	0.054	0.070	0.037	0.025
Residual Std. Error	1.090	1.141	1.011	0.852	1.140

*indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses.

Appendix C. Variable coding and additional descriptive statistics

Age – a continuous measure of the respondent's age at the time of the survey.
Woman – a binary measure, 0 = man; 1 = woman.
Grade Level – university grade level at the time of the survey, 0 = freshman; 1 = sophomore, 2 = junior, 3 = senior.
Race – 3 category nominal-level variable - white; black; or other race.
Party ID – 3 category nominal-level variable created from the 7 category party identification variable with leaners coded as partisans.
Rape Myth Statements – continuous measure of agreement with statements, -2 = strongly disagree; -1 disagree; 0 neither disagree nor agree; 1 = agree; 2 = strongly agree.

Table C1. Descriptive statistics – Independent variables.

	Min	**Median**	**Mean**	**Max**	**SD**
Age	18	20	20.41	52	2.60
Grade Level	0	2	1.55	3	1.05
	White	**Black**	**Other Race**		
Race	62.51%	19.59%	17.90%		
	Democrat	**Independent**	**Republican**		
Party ID	39.68%	29.92%	30.40%		
	Men	**Women**			
Gender	27.74%	72.26%			