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Chinese University Students' Attitudes Toward Rape Myth Acceptance: The Role of Gender, Sexual Stereotypes, and Adversarial Sexual Beliefs

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Abstract

The present study constructs and tests models that examine the relations between variables of "gender," "sex role stereotyping," and "adversarial sexual beliefs" on rape myth acceptance. The sample is 975 Chinese university students from seven universities in China. Measures include Chinese Rape Myth Acceptance (CRMA), Sex Role Stereotyping (SRS) Scale, and Adversarial Sexual Beliefs (ASB). We use structural equation modeling to investigate whether gender directly affects the acceptance of rape myth, or that these influences are mediated by SRS and ASB, after controlling for several demographic characteristics. Results suggest that SRS and ASB have a direct effect on rape myth acceptance. Gender has no direct effect on rape myth acceptance in three out of the four models, but it significantly ($\beta = -.02$, $p < .05$) predicts the *acceptance of rape–violence myth*. We also discuss the implications and limitations of the study.

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Introduction

Rape Myth

As a severe crime, rape is relatively prevalent in Chinese society. It is estimated that 19.6% of heterosexual Chinese women experience sexual violence (Hu et al., 2019), and 32% of married urban Chinese women experience at least one marital rape through their lives (Parish et al., 2007). It reports that 4.2% of the university students who participated in a recent study have experienced at least one kind of sexual violence, and 1.6% of the participants have experienced rape victimization in the past 12 months (Wang et al., 2015). Despite the prevalence, rape is still underreported in China, with an estimated 10% of rape incidents reported (Luo, 2000). A recent study shows that Chinese women survivors do not seek help because they do not know to whom they could turn for help, or hold the belief that the violence they experienced is not severe (Hu et al., 2020). Another reason that discourages victims from reporting rape incidents is rape-supporting beliefs, or "rape myths" (cited in Xue, Fang et al., 2019, p. 2). The term rape myth is first defined by Burt (1980) as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists in creating a climate hostile to rape victims" (p. 217). Examples of rape myths include "only bad girls get raped," "victims ask for it," or "rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). These stigmatizing rape-supportive beliefs blame the victims, trivialize rape crimes and justify the behaviors of perpetrators, and significantly contribute to rape and sexual assault in society (Bohner et al., 2013; Brownmiller, 2005; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

Rape Myth Studies in China

Although an abundance of research has informed our understanding of the nature and risk factors of rape myth endorsement in Western society, attitudes toward rape are rarely discussed as a social, health, and criminal problem in Chinese societies. One study provides the first psychometric measure to assess attitudes toward rape in China by translating the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Payne et al., 1999) into Chinese (Xue, Fang, et al., 2019). Most of the existing knowledge about perceptions of rape is from studies conducted in Western society. Differences in legal, social, and cultural beliefs

about sexual assault and intimate partner violence (IPV) exist between Chinese and Western societies (Xue, Cui, et al., 2019), which warrants a separate case study. Rape is defined and its punishment prescribed in the Criminal Law in China as

> whoever, by violence, coercion or other means, rapes a woman is to be sentenced to not less than three years and not more than ten years of fixed-term imprisonment. Whoever has sexual relations with a girl under the age of 14 is to be deemed to have committed rape and is to be given a heavier punishment. (Article 236, Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, 1997, revision)[1]

Culturally, rape is widely perceived in China as a sexual activity against a woman's will through the use of threats, force, or violence (Sang, 2003), which constructs rape as a violation of women's human rights by male perpetrators. Although rape is condemned, it is also a taboo subject in conversations and discourses. The taboo nature of rape as a topic is conducive to the prevalently existing rape-supportive beliefs in Chinese society, which blame rape on the victims' provocation and justify the perpetrators' violent and coercive acts (Luo, 2000; Xue, Fang et al., 2019). The link between rape as a taboo and its shaping effects on rape myth acceptance is empirically supported by a study finding that endorsing the concept of "face" (*mianzi*),[2] a unique Chinese cultural factor, reduces the rate of reporting sexual assault and rape incidents and prevents victims seek help from social services. Considering the lack of empirical evidence on the correlational mechanism of Chinese Rape Myth Acceptance (CRMA), this study investigates the demographic and attitudinal factors that contribute to the endorsement of various rape myths among Chinese university students.

Predictive Factors of Rape Myth

Gender. A variety of studies have identified gender as a consistent predictor of attitudes toward intimate and sexual violence. Men are more likely to hold beliefs supporting violence against women and perceive a narrower range of behaviors as violent (Flood & Pease, 2009). This gender gap is documented in studies among university students in the United States (Nabors & Jasinski, 2009; Yamawaki et al., 2012), South Korea (Lee et al., 2010), Romania (Knickrehm & Teske, 2000), and Lebanon (Obeid et al., 2010). In China's case, several studies (Jiang et al., 2006; Shen et al., 2012) support the gender asymmetry in attitudes toward IPV. In terms of rape myth acceptance, Xue and colleagues show that male students demonstrate a higher level of rape

myth endorsement than female students in China (Xue, Fang et al., 2019). However, other studies have found little gender difference when sex role ideologies are controlled for (e.g., Li et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2016).

Attitudes toward gender and sexuality. Previous studies have revealed the association between the endorsement of rape myth and gender/sexual beliefs. Studies on rape myth report that adversarial sexual beliefs (ASB; effect size [ES] = 0.80, $p < .01$; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) and traditional gender role beliefs (Torres-Pryor, 2003) are predictors of rape myth endorsement. Shechory and Idisis (2006) find a significant and positive association between rape myth acceptance and traditional sex role beliefs. Although ASB predict female rape myth, Chapleau and colleagues (2008) also find that ASB are not associated with rape myth acceptance in men. Thus, further research is warranted to explore whether gender mediates the relationship between attitudinal factors and rape myth endorsement, especially in Chinese society.

The Current Study

The present study constructs and tests a model that examines the causal relations between variables of "gender," "sex role stereotyping," and "adversarial sexual beliefs" on rape myth acceptance. In particular, we aim to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Does gender have a direct effect on the level of rape myth acceptance among Chinese university students?
Research Question 2: Does gender have an indirect effect on the level of rape myth acceptance via the mediation of attitudinal factors among Chinese university students?
Research Question 3: Does *sex role stereotyping* (SRS) have a direct effect on the level of rape myth acceptance among Chinese university students?
Research Question 4: Do adversarial sexual beliefs (*ASB*) have a direct effect on the level of rape myth acceptance among Chinese university students?

Method

Sample

The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. The study recruited a total of 978 Chinese university students from introductory

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables ($N = 975$).

Demographic variables	Values	n	%
Gender	Male	337	34.6
	Female	632	64.8
	Missing	6	.6
Home of residence	Rural/suburban	363	37.2
	Urban	610	62.69
	Missing	2	.2
Household income	Lower class	186	19.1
	Xiaokang (lower middle class)	364	37.3
	Middle class	299	30.7
	Upper middle class or higher	117	12
	Missing	9	.9

psychology courses at seven universities in China. Three participants have more than 25% missing data and, therefore, are removed from the sample. The final data set includes 975 Chinese university students. The sample consists of 64.8% ($n = 632$) female students, 34.6% ($n = 337$) male students, and 0.6% ($n = 6$) students who identified as transgender. The mean age of the students is 20 years ($SD = 1.55$ years). Fifty-six percent of the participants are first-year university students, 20% are sophomores, 18% are junior or senior students, and only 5% are graduate students. More than half of the students are from urban areas. There are 54.7% ($n = 533$) of the sample who are the only child at home. The sample comprises more students 63% ($n = 610$) from urban areas than students from rural or suburban areas (37%, $n = 363$). Only 12% of the participants are from the upper-middle-class or higher, about 57% are from the middle class or lower middle class, and 19% are from the lower class.

Only 14.8% ($n = 144$) of participants report that they have had sexual experience, which is much lower than 83% of their peers in the United States (Lewis et al., 2012). Less than 10% of the participants (9.3%) report having been raped.

Procedure

The course instructors from the introductory psychology course distribute the questionnaires to students with a variety of majors during regularly scheduled classes. The questionnaire package includes a 7-point Likert-type

CRMA Scale, SRS Scale, and ASB scale. The definitions of rape are not provided in the questionnaire. The administrators tell the participants that their participation is voluntary, and their names are not collected. Extra credit is given to each participant for their participation.

Measures

Demographic information. We ask the participants several demographic questions such as self-identified gender, age, graduating year, home of residence, and household income status. For this study, we only include gender, home of residence (urban–rural), and household income status in the analysis. We do not include age because all the participants are from a relatively narrow and concentrated age group (18–23 years). We include socioeconomic measures such as household income and place of origin because there is documented evidence linking these socioeconomic statuses and traditional gender role beliefs in China (e.g., Hu & Scott, 2016). Thus, it is reasonable to expect it may influence rape myth acceptance as well. The variable home of residence includes three categories "rural," "suburban," and "urban." The variable household income includes four categories of "lower class," "xiaokang (lower middle-class)," "middle-class," and "upper-middle-class or higher."

CRMA Scale. The 25-item CRMA Scale is used to examine the individual level of rape myth acceptance (Xue, Fang et al., 2019) among Chinese students. The CRMA comprises five subscales including Rape Victims Want to Be Raped (three items), Rape Allegations Are Often False (two items), Rape Must Involve Violence (six items), Victims Are Responsible for Being Raped (six items), and the Motivation to Rape Is Understandable (three items). The subscale "FI (filler item)" consists of five unscored items intended for inhibiting response sets and is thus not included in the data analysis. Cronbach's alphas for each subscale are .73, .59, .61, .76, and .38, respectively. Because of low interitem reliability, we do not include the last subscale in this study. Respondents' level of agreement to various rape myths is rated based on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Acceptance of rape myth is computed by summing the scores of all the items in the scale. High scores indicate greater endorsement of rape myth.

Because the five subscales of the CRMA conceptually represent distinct dimensions of rape myth acceptance and statistically do not load onto one common factor in exploratory factor analysis (Xue, Fang et al., 2019), we decide to treat these subscales as four exogenous variables in four separate structural equation models. This approach is consistent with Lee and colleagues' (2010) previous study among South Korean university students.

SRS. The nine-item SRS Scale (Burt, 1980) is used to assess students' acceptance of sexual stereotypes. Participants' level of agreement with statements is examined by using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Examples are "A wife should never contradict her husband in public," "A woman should be a virgin when she marries," and "It looks worse for a woman to be drunk than for a man to be drunk." Total scores range from 9 to 63. The overall mean of the responses is used in the analyses. The Cronbach's alpha for SRS is .8 (Burt, 1980).

ASB. Burt's (1980) nine-item ASB Scale is used to assess the ASB. Burt (1980) indicates that the ASB Scale is based on the notion that "sexual relationships are fundamentally exploitative, that each party is sly, cheating, opaque to each other's understanding, and not to be trusted . . . rape might seem the extreme on a continuum of exploitation" (p. 218). All items used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Examples included "A lot of men talk big, but when it comes down to it, they can't perform well sexually"; "Most women are sly and manipulating when they are out to attract a man"; and "Men are out for only one thing." Total scores range from 9 to 63. The overall mean of the responses is used in the analyses. The Cronbach's alpha is .802 (Burt, 1980).

Analysis

This study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate whether gender directly affects rape myth acceptance, or that these influences are mediated by SRS and ASB, after controlling for important demographic characteristics including gender, household income, and place of origin. SEM analyses were performed in Stata 15. Several goodness-of-fit indices, including chi-square value, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were calculated to assess model fit.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the percentage of responses for each item and the mean scores on the CRMA Scale with a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all agree* to *very much agree*. We collapse them into three categories of *any disagree, neutral*, and *any agree*. The overall mean response and standard deviation to rape myth statements are 3.36 ($SD = 0.37$),

Table 2. Percentage of Responses on the 20 Items (Excluding Filter Items), Including Disagree (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, and Partly Disagree), Neutral, and Agree (Strongly Agree, Agree, and Partly Agree).

	All			Male ($N = 337$)			Female ($N = 632$)			
Item	Any Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Any Agree (%)	Any Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Any Agree (%)	Any Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Any Agree (%)	χ^2
Although most women would not admit it, they generally find being physically forced into sex a real "turn-on."	36.9	34.3	28.6	22.6	38.6	38.3	44.8	32.0	23.2	54.966***
When men rape, it is because of their strong desire for sex.	23.7	15.6	60.5	27.9	10.7	61.4	21.4	18.2	60.1	13.417*
Women who are caught having an illicit affair sometimes claim that it was rape.	33.1	32.0	34.5	20.8	35.9	42.4	39.6	30.2	30.1	41.161***
Many so-called rape victims are actually women who had sex and "changed their minds" afterward.	22.8	37.7	39.4	19.3	32.0	48.4	24.8	40.7	34.5	21.725***
Many women secretly desire to be raped.	35.1	40.1	24.1	12.2	53.7	33.2	47.3	32.9	19.1	119.736***
Rape mainly occurs on the "bad" side of town.	20.5	11.9	67.3	21.7	13.6	64.4	19.9	10.6	69.1	11.240
If a woman does not physically fight back, you cannot really say that it was rape.	71.5	11.5	16.5	62.9	12.2	24.6	75.8	11.2	12.3	28.258***
Men from nice middle-class homes almost never rape.	66.7	25.3	7.9	57.0	28.2	14.8	71.8	23.7	4.3	41.240***
A rape probably did not happen if the woman has no bruises or marks.	71.8	16.9	10.8	60.8	20.2	18.7	77.4	15.3	6.6	43.893***
Many women find being forced to have sex very arousing.	34.9	42.8	22.4	20.5	47.8	31.8	42.7	40.2	17.1	58.047***
Rapists are usually sexually frustrated individuals.	32.7	24.4	42.8	29.1	22.6	48.4	34.7	25.5	39.7	7.468
If the rapist does not have a weapon, you really cannot call it a rape.	87.0	7.0	5.8	80.1	9.8	9.8	90.5	5.5	3.8	23.052***

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Item	All			Male ($N = 337$)			Female ($N = 632$)			
	Any Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Any Agree (%)	Any Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Any Agree (%)	Any Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Any Agree (%)	χ^2
Being raped is not as bad as being mugged and beaten.	59.5	12.5	27.2	52.2	14.5	31.8	63.1	11.4	25.0	14.900*
If a woman does not physically resist sex—even when protesting verbally—it really cannot be considered rape.	61.0	16.9	21.7	51.0	17.5	31.2	66.1	16.8	16.8	30.988***
Rape almost never happens in the woman's own home.	76.2	14.9	8.5	68.5	15.7	14.5	80.1	14.6	5.4	35.127***
A woman who "teases" men deserves anything that might happen.	60.2	10.6	29.1	49.0	12.5	38.6	66.0	9.5	24.4	30.694***
When women are raped, it is often because the way they said "no" was ambiguous.	58.4	14.6	26.4	49.3	17.2	32.9	63.1	13.3	22.8	19.390**
A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex.	57.6	14.8	26.8	43.6	19.6	35.9	65.2	12.3	21.7	44.415***
A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on the first date is implying that she wants to have sex.	57.7	18.6	23.3	47.5	20.8	31.2	63.1	17.4	19.1	24.936***
If a woman claims to have been raped but has no bruises or scrapes, she probably should not be taken too seriously.	80.1	11.9	7.7	68.0	17.2	14.2	86.4	9.2	4.3	52.515***
M of CRMA (*SD*)	3.36 (0.73)			3.77 (0.69)			3.13 (0.64)			$T = 14.1$***

Note. CRMA = Chinese Rape Myth Acceptance
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3. Correlational Matrix of All Variables ($N = 863$).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Rape victim myth	1.00								
2 Rape allegation myth	.37**	1.00							
3 Rape–violence myth	.23**	.21**	1.00						
4 Victim blaming	.32**	.26**	.53**	1.00					
5 Home residence	−.04	.08	−.07	−.08	1.00				
6 Gender	−.03	−.02	−.08	−.02	.05	1.00			
7 Household income	−.04	−.02	−.02	−.01	.06	.00	1.00		
8 Sex role stereotyping	.13**	.12*	.35**	.40**	−.18**	−.04	.00	1.00	
9 Adversarial sexual beliefs	.41**	.27**	.33**	.47**	−.03	−.01	−.07	.34**	1.00

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

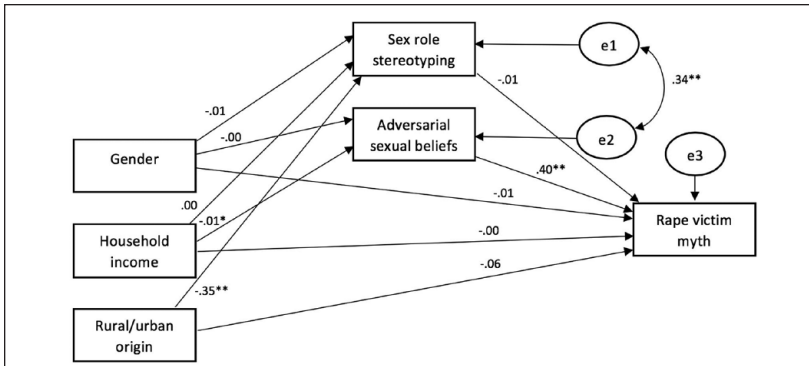
which falls between *partly disagree* and *neutral*. The mean score for male respondents (3.77 ± 0.69) is statistically higher than female respondents (3.13 ± 0.64, $t = 14.10$, $p < .001$). Sixteen out of 20 statements receive *any disagree* responses from more than one third (33%) of all respondents. Twelve out of 20 items receive *any disagree* responses from more than half of all respondents. Table 2 shows significant differences in levels of disagreement between male and female students.

Correlation Matrix

Table 3 shows the intercorrelations between variables including three demographic variables (place of origin, gender, and household income), two attitudinal factors (SRS and ASB), and five factors in the CRMA Scale ("rape victims want to be raped—rape victim myth," "rape allegations are often false—rape allegation myth," "rape must involve violence—rape-violence myth," "victims are responsible for being raped—victim blaming," and "the motivation to rape is understandable—rape motivation myth"). The results of the correlational matrix are presented in Table 3. As is demonstrated, all the endogenous variables are moderately correlated with SRS and ASB. The results suggest that multicollinearity will not be an issue as no strong correlations are found between the exogenous variables.

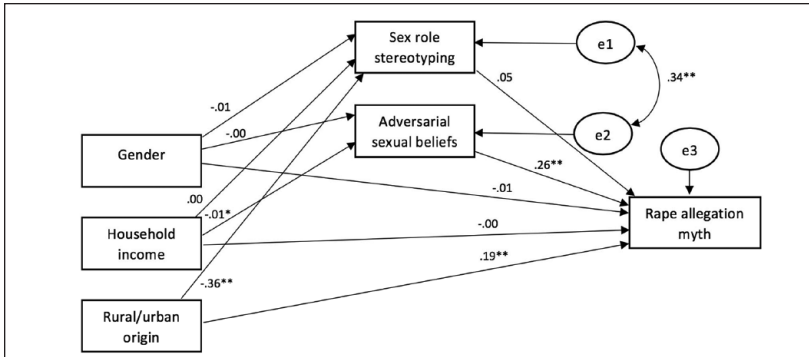
SEM Analyses Testing the Hypothesized Model

Figures 1 to 4 summarize the five structural models with coefficients for all paths, covariances, and the model fit indices. Rape myth acceptance is the endogenous variable. The exogenous demographic variables are gender, home of residence, and household income. The exogenous intervening variables are



Model Fit Indices	χ^2	*df*	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
	1.21	1	.27	1.00	.99	.02	.01

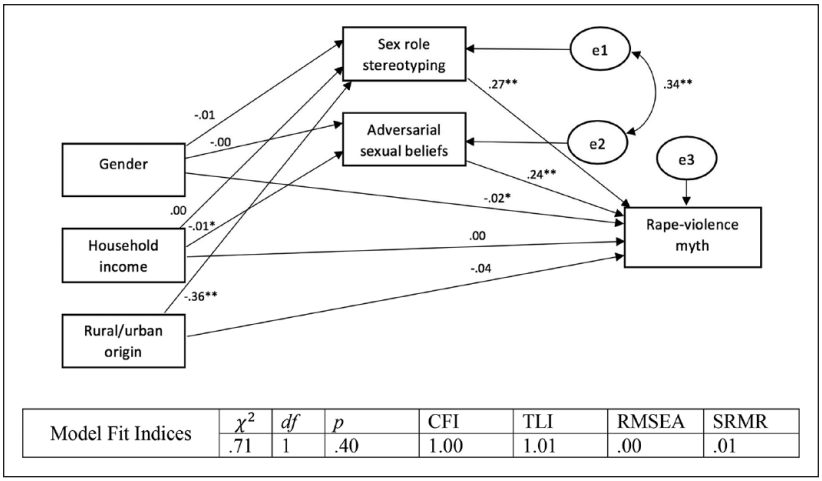
Figure 1. Rape victim myth model.



Model Fit Indices	χ^2	*df*	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
	1.04	1	.31	1.00	1.00	.01	.01

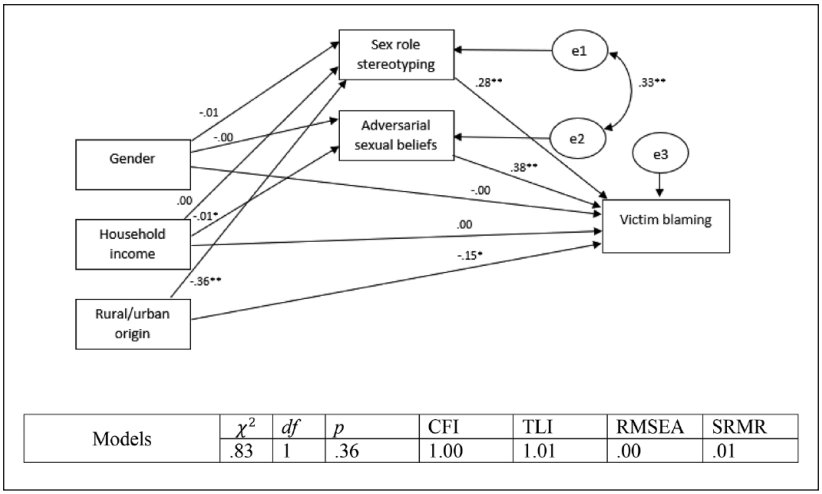
Figure 2. Rape allegation myth model.

SRS and ASB. SRS and ASB are *deliberately* specified to be correlated (indicated by the double-headed arrows), as they are moderately correlated, as shown in Table 3. Doing this allows the estimation of path coefficients to control for the covariance between SRS and ASB to produce unbiased results.



Model Fit Indices	χ^2	*df*	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
	.71	1	.40	1.00	1.01	.00	.01

Figure 3. Rape–violence myth model.



Models	χ^2	*df*	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
	.83	1	.36	1.00	1.01	.00	.01

Figure 4. Victim blaming model.

The model fit indices under each figure indicate that all the models are well fit. Given that the model exhibited robust goodness of fit, we proceed to examine individual paths and covariances in the models.

Figure 1 illustrates the rape victim myth model. In this model, gender has no direct effect on rape victim myth ($\beta = -.01$, $p > .05$), and gender does not have an indirect effect on rape victim myth via the mediation of SRS or ASB. The path between SRS and ASB is significant as expected ($\beta = .34$, $p < .01$), indicating a controlled correlation in the estimation process. Sexual adversarial beliefs are the only variable that has a significant and moderate ($\beta = .40$, $p < .01$) direct effect on rape victim myth, and household income has a weak and negative direct effect ($\beta = -.01$, $p < .05$) on adversarial sexual beliefs and a weak and negative indirect effect on rape victim myth (indirect effect $\beta = -.003$, $p < .05$).

Figure 2 presents the rape allegation myth model. Place of origin has a direct positive effect on rape myth acceptance ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$), and ASB has a direct effect on rape myth acceptance ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$). Gender ($\beta = .00$, $p > .05$), household income ($\beta = .00$, $p > .05$), and sex role beliefs ($\beta = .05$, $p > .05$) have no direct effect on rape myth. Household income significantly and negatively predicts ASB ($\beta = -.01$, $p < .05$), and ASB has a direct effect on rape allegation myth ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$). The indirect effect of household income on rape myth, however, is nonsignificant (indirect effect $\beta = .002$, $p > .05$).

Figure 3 shows the rape–violence myth model. For the first time, gender exerts a significant yet weak negative effect ($\beta = -.02$, $p < .05$) on the rape–violence myth. ASB is a significant predictor ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$) of rape–violence myth. SRS significantly ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$) predicts acceptance of rape–violence myth. Household income and place of origin do not have any direct effect on rape–violence myth acceptance. However, there is an indirect effect via SRS: The place of origin significantly and negatively predicted SRS ($\beta = -.36$, $p < .01$), and SRS was a significant and moderate predictor of rape–violence myth model ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$). Household income had a significant yet weak indirect effect on rape–violence myth acceptance via ASB (indirect effect $\beta = -.09$, $p < .01$).

In the victim blaming model illustrated in Figure 4, gender and household income do not have a direct effect on victim blaming. Place of origin has a significant yet weak negative direct effect on victim blaming ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$). ASB ($\beta = .38$, $p < .01$) and SRS ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$) are the significant and moderate predictors of victim blaming acceptance. Household income significantly and negatively predicts ASB ($\beta = -.01$, $p < .05$), and ASB is a significant predictor of the rape–violence myth model ($\beta = .38$, $p < .01$), but household income does not have a significant indirect effect on victim blaming. In addition, urban origin directly and negatively predicts SRS ($\beta = -.36$, $p < .01$) and has a weak yet significant negative indirect effect on rape–violence myth acceptance via SRS (indirect effect $\beta = -.10$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

The present study is one of the first studies that explores people's attitudes toward rape in Chinese societies. The purpose of the study is to show whether gender, household income, place of origin, and attitudinal factors, including ASB and SRS, significantly predict the acceptance of rape myth. In addition, the study also provides insights regarding whether gender, household income, and place of origin have an indirect impact on rape myth acceptance via the mediation of the attitudinal factors. We use the CRMA Scale (Xue, Fang et al., 2019) to investigate the factors that influence the level of rape myth endorsement among a sample of 975 Chinese university students (64.8% female students). Descriptive analyses show that the mean score of CRMA among male students is higher than that of female students, which is consistent with results in Western society (McMahon, 2010).

Overall, the results from SEM reveal the weak effects of gender on rape myth acceptance among this sample of Chinese university students. Gender is not a significant direct or indirect predictor of "rape-victim myth acceptance," "rape-allegation myth acceptance," "victim-blaming myth acceptance," or "rape motivation myth acceptance." Although gender significantly predicts "rape-violence myth acceptance," the effect is weak.

Existing literature shows mixed results on the effect of gender on rape myth acceptance, although men are more likely to endorse rape myths than women (Burt, 1980). Some studies find that gender significantly affects people's attitudes toward rape in Western societies, including the United States (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011), United Kingdom (Gray, 2006), Canada (Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002), and Austria (Newcombe et al., 2008). Studies in the Asian population also find that gender is a significant main effect on people's perceptions of rape (Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002). However, several studies on university students specifically do not find a significant gender effect on rape myth acceptance in England (Davies & McCartney, 2003), Germany (Süssenbach & Bohner, 2011), Spain (Frese et al., 2004), and South Korea (Lee et al., 2010).

Previous studies explore and explain the mixed findings regarding the effect of gender on rape myth. Girard and Senn (2008) demonstrate that gender difference is likely shown in studies that do not have statistical control of attitudes. Süssenbach and Bohner (2011) explain that gender does not have a main effect, but gender identification significantly influences the acceptance of rape myth. For example, a higher gender identification for males increases the levels of rape myth acceptance. The current study does not find that gender has a significant direct effect on rape myth acceptance in four models, consistent with previous studies. However, we find that

gender has a weak effect only in the *rape–violence myth* model. This myth is the belief that rape must involve violence, cause physical harm, and that a woman must physically resist. The results in the current study suggest that men, more significantly than women, believe that rape must involve overt force, coercion, or violent behaviors. The legal definition and social perceptions of rape in China emphasizing the use of overt violence or threats may help explain the reasons why we find gender differences in endorsing the involvement of physical resistance or bruises in rape. Our study suggests that future studies should not only include gender in the statistical model but also complicate the measure of gender to reflect gender identification and add in gender-interacted factors (e.g., familiarity or intimacy between victims and abusers) for further investigation.

Our findings raise further observations about the associations between ASB, SRS, and rape myth acceptance. In the present study, ASB is a significant predictor of rape myth acceptance in all four models. ASB refers to the "expectation that sexual relationships are fundamentally exploitative that each party to them is manipulative, sly, cheating, opaque to the other's understanding, and not to be trusted" (Burt, 1980, 218). Instead of being defined as an unexpected incident, rape is considered to locate on a continuum of exploitation. Numerous rape myth studies conducted in the past 40 years reveal a significant relationship between ASB and the acceptance of rape myth. Our results are consistent with existing studies in Western societies (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995).

Emmers-Sommer and colleagues (2010) discuss that people who hold more ASB are more likely to accept the belief that men are using coercion or force to achieve sexual desires. In our study, SRS is a significant predictor in three models, including "Rape-violence myth," "Victim blaming myth," and "Rape motivation myth."

In addition to gender and gender-related beliefs, another important finding from this study is the significant direct and indirect effects of place of origin on several aspects of rape myth acceptance. The economic disparity and cultural difference between urban and rural areas in China explain the significant difference in gender role beliefs (Hu & Scott, 2016), with rural residents tending to accept traditional gender roles and male dominance values. This connection is also reflected in our findings, with urban origin significantly predicting lower sexual role stereotyping and lower rape myth endorsement.

However, we do not find that the relationships vary by gender in the present study, which is inconsistent with some existing studies (e.g., Emmers-Sommer, 2014). The results from the study suggest that male students are not more likely than female students to accept either ASB or traditional sex role beliefs. There is no evidence in the current study indicating that male students

are significantly more likely than female students to accept either ASB or traditional sex role beliefs. Given these findings, the present study suggests that future studies should further unpack such a gender symmetry of sex roles and ASB in China.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is that the study uses a convenience sampling method to recruit Chinese university participants. Although recruiting university students as a sample for rape myth studies is consistent with previous studies in Western societies as well as Asian societies (Lee et al., 2010; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Payne et al., 1999; Xue, Fang et al., 2019), a convenience sample limits the generalizability of the study findings to all university students in Chinese societies. The second limitation is the recall bias because the collected information is retrospective. Recalling information about a traumatic experience such as rape or sexual assault, maybe especially challenging (Du Mont et al., 2003). It might help explain an unexpectedly low rate of reported rape incidents.

Due to topic sensitivity, the third limitation of the study is that the retrospective self-report survey reports may be biased by social desirability. It may be difficult for victims to report rape and sexual assault (e.g., taboo) in a survey even after anonymity and confidentiality are assured. The last limitation that should be acknowledged is that the instruments should be updated in the digital age with the development of information technology (Xue, Fang et al., 2018), such as adding questions about social media–related rape myth scenario. Recent studies on intimate and sexual violence in China show that online activity affects women's victimization because social media influence people's perceptions of violence (Xue, Fang et al., 2019).

Implications

The study's findings address the literature gap by exploring predictive factors of rape myth acceptance among Chinese college students. These findings accentuate the importance of attitudinal beliefs in influencing the acceptance of rape myth, which has practical implications for clinical interventions on campuses in China, and among the large population of international students from China studying in the West. Due to the social stigma associated with rape in Chinese society and the increasing sensitiveness on this topic after the #metoo campaign in China, the present study provides valuable insights to facilitate the development of culture-specific programs for rape prevention and interventions across universities in China and abroad. For example, rather

than designing and implementing rape educational programs, the findings from this study suggest that educational programs should aim to change people's adherence to sex role stereotypes and traditional gender norms on campus because such attitudinal changes may result in substantive changes in the perceptions of rape (Lee et al., 2010).

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Notes

1. Whoever rapes a woman or has sexual relations with a girl involving one of the following circumstances is to be sentenced to not less than 10 years of fixed-term imprisonment, life imprisonment, or death: (a) Rape a woman or have sexual relations with a girl and when the circumstances are odious, (b) rape several women or have sexual relations with several girls, (c) rape a woman in a public place and in the public, (d) rape a woman in turn with another or more persons, (e) cause the victim serious injury, death, or other serious consequences.
2. *Mianzi* refers to an individual's social standing, dignity, and prestige recognized by others in society. It is an essential cultural characteristic in understanding Chinese interpersonal relationships and dynamics.

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