

# Descriptive Versus Injunctive Norms in Reducing Rape Myths



LAUREN JAEGER

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING HONORS  
PROGRAM

# Introduction



- One-third of female college students will be the victim of a sexual assault by their senior year.
  - (Finley & Corty, 1993) 18.3
- 18.3% of adult women experience attempted rape, while 13% experience completed rape.
- Victims are left with physical and emotional injury.
  - Shock, anxiety, extreme fear, depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- Survivors of sexual assault are more likely to engage in risky behaviors post-assault than their peers.
  - Substance abuse, engaging in unsafe sexual behaviors, more likely to commit suicide

# Background



- Rape Myths: refers to beliefs and attitudes about sexual assault that are widely held and place blame on the victim rather than the perpetrator .
- Social Norms Theory: Providing individuals with corrective information about normative behavior may address these issues and rectify behavioral concerns.

# Presentation of Social Norms



## Descriptive Norms

- behaviors that individuals engage in
  - 12% of UW students agreed that women who go out wearing 'slutty' clothes are inviting rape.

## Injunctive Norms

- behaviors of which people generally approve or disapprove
  - The large majority of college males believed that sexual violence is simply not acceptable in society.



# Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale



- Four sub-scales of the IRMA
  - 1. She asked for it
    - ✦ When girls wear slutty clothes, they're asking for trouble.
  - 2. He didn't mean to
    - ✦ When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.
  - 3. It wasn't really rape
    - ✦ If a girl doesn't physically fight back, or say "No," it can't be rape.
  - 4. She lied
    - ✦ Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.

# Procedure



- Undergraduate students were screened for their levels of support of rape-related beliefs.
- Those who endorsed moderate to high levels were then invited to participate in the study.
- Participants were presented with either descriptive or descriptive and injunctive norms.
- Participants were then contacted for a one-week follow up to see if attitudinal changes were maintained over time.

# Results



- Both interventions were effective in reducing rape myth acceptance  $F(2, 88) = 14.3, p < .001$ . The reductions in rape myths were of medium effect size ( $d = .47$ ). This was true of the overall scale score as well as 3 of the 4 subscale scores.
- No difference between conditions
- Both interventions worked but not differentially

# Discussion



- This intervention appear to effectively target IRMA subscale 1, 2, and 4, but did not seem to alter the 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Additions/altercations are necessary to improve the subscale domain that didn't appear to be influenced by corrective normative info.
- Overall, providing college males with accurate information about the degree to which rape myths are disavowed by peers and with information about how their rape supportive beliefs are atypical appears to be helpful in reducing beliefs know to be associated with sexual assault perpetration.



# Questions

