

The Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance

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Abstract

The current study investigated the relationship between purity culture, rape myth acceptance, and intrinsic religiosity in the Christian population. Specifically, this study explored if purity culture endorsement would be associated with increased rape myth acceptance and increased likelihood of incorrectly labeling rape. It was also examined whether intrinsic religiosity would ameliorate the relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance. Ninety-nine Christian men and women participated in this study. Results demonstrated that endorsement of purity culture was related to increased endorsement of rape myths and increased likelihood of labeling marital rape and acquaintance rape as consensual sex. Intrinsic religiosity was also found to be a significant moderator of the relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance. Overall, these findings have important implications for how purity culture is taught and understood, and how these teachings relate to the Christian population's involvement in the cultural dialogue surrounding sexual assault.

Keywords

gender issues, human sexuality

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, in the United States alone, one in five women will experience completed or attempted rape in her lifetime, and 43.6% of women have experienced sexual violence of some form (Smith et al., 2018).¹ The aforementioned statistics regarding sexual assault elucidate how commonly this crime occurs within society. The prevalence of sexual assault ties into the fact that females have become desensitized to its nature and unable to accurately label sexual violence when it is experienced, implying that the aforementioned statistics could underestimate its prevalence (Hlavka, 2014). Females conceptualize sexual

1. In our review of studies, we will use the term “victim” or “survivor” based on the term used in the referenced study.

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violence as normative behavior for males (Hlavka, 2014). It also appears that past victimization, whether that be sexual assault that occurred during childhood or adulthood, is one of the only risk factors for future victimization (Gidycz et al., 1995). Otherwise, there is no discernible difference in risk factors between the females who become sexual assault victims and those who remain non-victims (Koss & Dinero, 1989). The pervasiveness of sexual assault has led to a discussion of rape myths, which are impacted by internal beliefs and attitudes, demographics, and socialization, and may find an insidious stronghold in Christianity's construction of purity culture. The present study was designed to examine the relationship between endorsement of purity culture and rape myth acceptance. Participants from the general population were surveyed regarding their attitudes toward rape myths, purity culture, and religiousness. In the following section, the literature on rape myths, religiosity, and purity culture will be reviewed.

Rape Myths

Burt (1980) proposed the concept of rape myths to explain the pervasiveness of sexual assault in modern society. Burt defined rape myths as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists," and gave examples of rape myths such as "only bad girls get raped" and "rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both" (p. 217). Burt found that 50% of Americans believed that women lie about being raped. However, the percentage of false sexual assault reports consistently falls between 2.1% and 10.9% (Lisak et al., 2010). In 1994, Lonsway and Fitzgerald increased the specificity of the definition of rape myths to be "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" (p. 134).

Edwards et al. (2011) found that rape myths arise from a patriarchal system, are widely endorsed, and permeate various social settings. For example, depictions of forced sexual acts are commonplace within pornographic material, perpetuating the myth that women enjoy being raped. Endorsement of rape myths has also been associated with an increased likelihood of incorrectly defining rape, as well as a decreased likelihood of intervening as a bystander when witnessing a potential sexual assault scenario (Hust et al., 2013; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Regarding their function, rape myths serve to socially oppress women, preserve the idea that bad things only happen to those that who deserve them, and blame the victim, saving society from facing the true extent of the reality of rape (R. M. Hayes et al., 2013; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Research to date has identified factors that influence the acceptance of rape myths, finding that it is associated with ambivalent sexism, sex role stereotyping, distrust of the other sex, low feminist identity, hostility toward females, and acceptance of interpersonal violence (K. B. Anderson et al., 1997; Burt, 1980; Giovannelli & Jackson, 2013; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Increased rape myth acceptance has also been associated with increased racism, classism, ageism, authoritarianism, general intolerant attitudes, and conservative political beliefs (Giovannelli & Jackson, 2013; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Males and ethnic minorities have been found to typically endorse rape myths more strongly than others, though the finding regarding ethnic minorities is inconsistent in the literature (K. B. Anderson et al., 1997; Barnett et al., 2018; Feild, 1978; Giovannelli & Jackson, 2013; R. M. Hayes et al., 2013; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). We turn now to the influence of religious factors on rape myth acceptance.

Rape Myths and Christianity

Navarro and Tewksbury (2018) found that increased religiosity was associated with increased rape myth acceptance, but not universally. Agnostics and atheists had the lowest religiosity levels and also the highest rejection of rape myths of any group, although the authors did not report whether

these differences were statistically significant. Identification as a Baptist or Presbyterian did not predict rape myth acceptance, whereas identification as a low or moderately religious Catholic predicted acceptance of rape myths, while identification as a highly religious Catholic predicted a decreased acceptance of rape myths. However, religiosity was not shown to be a significant indicator of rape myth acceptance when lifestyle characteristics and demographics were taken into account.

While religiosity was not as strong a predictor as personal beliefs and characteristics in the study by Navarro and Tewksbury (2018), other studies have found contradictory results. Barnett et al. (2018) demonstrated that Roman Catholics and Protestants had the highest rates of rape myth endorsement compared to groups that had no religious affiliation, such as atheists or agnostics. In addition, religious commitment was positively correlated with rape myth acceptance. The authors suggested that such findings can be explained because religious people may be exposed to a greater number of patriarchal teachings than people who do not engage with religious teachings. In addition, Prina and Schatz-Stevens (2020) found that religiosity was a strong predictor of rape myth acceptance in a sample composed primarily of Christians, atheists, and agnostics. Another study found that increased religious intolerance was associated with increased rape myth acceptance (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

Such findings regarding the relationship between religion and rape myth acceptance have led researchers to study the endorsement of rape myths by religious leaders. Sheldon and Parent (2002) studied clergy members and found that sexist views correlated positively with negative views toward rape victims. In addition, increased religious fundamentalism was associated with increased sexist views and increased negative attitudes toward rape victims. When exposed to a vignette detailing an acquaintance rape, there was a positive correlation between negative attitudes toward rape victims and blaming the victim. When exposed to vignettes describing marital, date, and acquaintance rapes and asked to speculate as to why the rape had occurred, common themes included inadequate self-defense, inability for the couple to effectively work together, the wife's improper understanding of her marital role, and the woman's poor decision-making. Overall, the more sexist and religiously fundamental a clergy member, the more likely he or she is to have negative attitudes toward a rape victim and blame her for facilitating her assault.

Purity culture

The research to date has identified a number of religious variables that are related to rape myth acceptance. In addition to these variables, religions may contribute to rape myth acceptance through the messages they communicate about women's sexuality, in the form of what has become known as "purity culture." While purity culture is a phrase that has been propagated in popular media, it has not been formally examined in the psychological literature. Here, we review the themes of purity culture from primarily popular culture sources and how such themes may tie into rape culture. D. E. Anderson (2013) published a popular culture blog explaining how purity culture, a movement primarily focused on preserving female virginity, rose in popularity within Christian communities as a response to the increasingly liberal societal movements in the 20th century, such as second-wave feminism and the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling. Here, we describe six themes that characterize purity culture: an emphasis on virginity, the prohibition of physical affection, the need for modesty, sexual gatekeeping, denial of female bodily autonomy, and a lack of education on sexual consent.

Virginity is idealized in purity culture. Contamination metaphors are commonplace, as unmarried women who engage in sexual activity are compared to half-eaten candy, tape covered in debris, and trampled flowers (Field, 2016). Beck (2006) demonstrates how psychologically difficult it is to loathe a behavior or deem an action as disgusting while simultaneously loving the person who behaves in that way, as Christians are called to do. Furthermore, some believe purity culture distorts God's word, adding extrabiblical rules to traditional sexual ethics, such as prohibitions against all physical affection, including hugging and kissing (Darnall, 2017). Purity culture has also been

criticized as proliferating a works-based theology, in which actions are what makes one pure in the eyes of God, insinuating that people can work their way into God's grace (Gregoire, 2016).

With respect to modesty, females are taught to be mindful of how they dress so as not to cause a male to stumble in lust, placing a burden of responsibility on her and inspiring shame over her body (Darnall, 2017). Females are also taught they must be sexual gatekeepers in charge of denying sex since men have an inherently reduced capacity for sexual self-control (Schell, 2014). Consequently, in situations of forced sex, the female may blame the assault on the way she dressed or a personal failure to be a good enough sexual gatekeeper. Relatedly, popular Christian dating books have been found to normalize sexual violence and fully attribute sexual assault to the way the woman dressed or behaved (Klement & Sagarin, 2017; Moon & Reger, 2014).

Purity culture also teaches that women do not have bodily autonomy, and Christian dating books have been found to dehumanize women by conceptualizing them as property (Klement & Sagarin, 2017; Moon & Reger, 2014). Purity culture purports the idea that a woman's body belongs to her future husband, and her worth lies in her ability to remain a virgin until marriage. This implies that females who have been raped have become impure and have lost a part of their inherent worth (Gregoire, 2016). D. E. Anderson (2013) states that purity culture is Christianity's unique version of rape culture, as both rest on the idea that a female's body is not her own.

Finally, purity culture can be seen as creating an environment conducive to rape myth acceptance as purity culture lacks education on sexual consent. Since females are taught to simply refuse sexual encounters, no education on consensual sexual encounters is provided. The difference between premarital and marital sex is made clear, but the same distinction is not offered between consensual sex and sexual assault (Collins, 2015; Driscoll & Driscoll, 2012; Ludy & Ludy, 2009). This lack of understanding of consent adds to the shame a female may experience when she is assaulted, as she fails to differentiate between saying yes and not saying no.

Intrinsic religiosity

The current study was also interested in examining a potential moderator of the relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance: intrinsic religiosity. First introduced by Allport and Ross in 1967, intrinsic religiosity refers to a religious orientation in which one is internally motivated to fully live in accordance with one's religious beliefs, which are viewed as the framework for one's life. This is opposed to extrinsic religiosity, which is characterized by a utilitarian view of religiousness in which one uses religion for personal gains such as comfort, strength, or protection (Allport & Ross, 1967). Intrinsic religiosity has been shown to reduce negative correlates of other constructs. For example, intrinsic religiosity has been found to reduce the impact of depression on cognitive functioning and the impact of stress on inflammation, as well as reduce intergroup hostility (Foong et al., 2018; Hansen & Ryder, 2016; Tavares et al., 2019). As such, it is plausible that religious internalization could reduce the impact of the victim-blaming attitudes associated with purity culture. There are many biblical precepts that would mitigate victim-blaming attitudes, foremost among these being the call to love others and consequently desire what is best for them. When religious tenets such as these are internalized, they may decrease the proposed negative effects of purity culture beliefs on attitudes toward rape victims.

The Present Study

There is reason to think that adherence to the ideology of purity culture may be related to rape myth acceptance. Rape myths are associated with an increase in victim-blaming attitudes, oppressive views toward females, reduced understanding of proper sexual consent, and an increase in traditional gender role beliefs (K. B. Anderson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald,

1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Popular sources claim that purity culture is associated with charging females with sole sexual gatekeeping responsibilities and lacking education on sexual consent (Collins, 2015; Darnall, 2017; Schell, 2014), while research indicates that purity culture can be found to normalize sexual violence, remove females' bodily autonomy, and endorse victim-blaming attitudes (Klement & Sagarin, 2017; Moon & Reger, 2014). The present study was designed to examine the relationship between endorsement of purity culture and rape myth acceptance. It was hypothesized that participants exhibiting higher endorsement of purity culture beliefs would exhibit stronger endorsement of rape myths and an increased likelihood of incorrectly labeling rape vignettes as consensual sex. In addition, it was hypothesized that intrinsic religiosity would demonstrate a moderating relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance, ameliorating the relationship.

Method

Participants and procedures

After obtaining ethical approval from the university's human subjects ethics committee, 142 participants from the general population were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). To ensure quality, participants were recruited from the United States, had a 95% approval rating, and had previously completed at least 100 tasks successfully on MTurk (Peer et al., 2013). Participants were excluded if they were younger than 18 years, did not self-identify as a Christian, failed an attention check question, or did not meet a minimum time requirement for completing the survey. Thirteen participants were removed for failure to self-identify as a Christian, 12 participants were removed for failing attention check questions, and 18 were removed for failure to meet the minimum time requirement. After removing these participants, data from 99 participants were included in the analyses. The participants were asked to complete various measures in a randomized order to control for order effects and were compensated monetarily for their participation.

Fifty participants (50.5%) identified as male and 49 participants (49.5%) identified as female. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70 years with a mean age of 40.34 years ($SD = 13.65$). Seventy-three participants (73.7%) identified as Caucasian American or European American, 18 (18.2%) as African American or Black, 6 (6.1%) as Hispanic or Latino, 1 (1.0%) as Asian or Asian American, and 1 (1.0%) as American Indian or Alaska Native. Sixty-two participants (62.6%) identified as Christian Protestant, 34 (34.3%) as Catholic, and 3 (3.0%) as Orthodox Christian. In regard to denomination within the Christian Protestant faith, 14 participants (34.1%) identified as Baptist, 10 (24.4%) as Non-denominational, 5 (12.2%) as Methodist, 4 (9.8%) as Protestant, 2 (4.9%) as Evangelical, 2 (4.9%) as Presbyterian, and 1 (1.0%) as each of the following denominations: Assembly of God, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and First Covenant.

Measures

Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. Participants were assessed for rape myth acceptance using the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form (IRMA-SF; Payne et al., 1999). The IRMA-SF consists of 20 items and uses a 7-point Likert-type scale with anchors of *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. The IRMA-SF consists of seven subscales: (a) "She asked for it," (b) "It wasn't really rape," (c) "He didn't mean to," (d) "She wanted it," (e) "She lied," (f) "Rape is a trivial event," and (g) "Rape is a deviant event." An example item from the "She asked for it" subscale is "If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control," and an example item from the "He didn't mean to" subscale is "Rape happens when a man's sex drive gets out of control." A higher total indicates a greater acceptance of rape myths. In the original sample, internal consistency was adequate, as represented by a Cronbach's alpha of

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Alphas for all Measures.

Measure	M	SD	α
Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form	0.62	0.06	.97
Marital rape vignette	1.67	0.47	N/A
Date rape vignette	1.60	0.49	N/A
Acquaintance rape vignette	1.82	0.39	N/A
PCBS total	2.40	0.96	.95
PCBS—Shame and Guilt subscale	2.43	0.11	.91
PCBS—Gender Roles subscale	1.36	0.03	.86
PCBS—Idealization subscale	2.75	0.11	.90
I/E-R—Intrinsic Religiosity subscale	3.60	0.08	.84

PCBS: Purity Culture Beliefs Scale; I/E-R: Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised scale.

.87. In the current sample, the alpha was .97. The alphas for all scales can be found in Table 1.

Rape vignettes. Participants were exposed to three vignettes to assess for victim-blaming attitudes associated with rape myth acceptance (Sheldon & Parent, 2002). All vignettes were constructed to describe a scenario that meets the legal definition of rape but differs with respect to the length and type of relationship between the victim and rapist. The vignettes described a marital rape, a date rape, and an acquaintance rape. The vignettes have been modeled after the scenarios used in a previous study, though modified to increase the specificity of the relationship between the victim and rapist per those researchers' suggestion. After reading the vignette, participants were asked whether they believed a rape occurred. Each vignette was used individually as a one-item measure, with a score of one indicating that a rape did not occur, and a score of two indicating that a rape did occur.

Purity Culture Beliefs Scale. Participants' beliefs in purity culture were assessed via the Purity Culture Beliefs Scale (PCBS; Ortiz, 2018). The scale consists of 24 items, and responses are given using a 5-point Likert-type scale with the anchors of *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. A higher score indicates an increased endorsement of purity culture. The scale represents components of purity culture including Shame and Guilt, Gender Roles, and Idealization. Sample items from the Shame and Guilt subscale include, "A woman who dresses immodestly causes her brothers to stumble" and "Sex outside of marriage will make you damaged goods." Sample items from the Gender Roles subscale include "It is the woman's fault if sexual boundaries are crossed in a dating relationship" and "Women are, by nature, more sexually pure than men." Sample items from the Idealization subscale include "You lose a piece of yourself every time you have sex with someone new" and "Purity is primarily about my virginity." In the original sample, as represented by Cronbach's alpha, internal consistency was adequate for the three subscales and overall scale, ranging between .83 and .90. In the present study, the alpha for the subscales ranged from .86 to .91, and the full-scale alpha was .95.

Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised. Orientation toward intrinsic or extrinsic religiosity was assessed using the Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised scale (I/E-R; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). The 14-item scale uses a 5-point Likert-type scale with anchors of *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. The scale consists of three subscales, which are the Intrinsic, Personally Extrinsic, and Socially Extrinsic subscales. Sample items from the Intrinsic subscale include "I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs" and "My whole approach to life is based on my religion." Sample items from the Personally Extrinsic subscale include "I pray mainly to gain relief and protection" and "What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and

Table 2. Correlations between PCBS and subscales, IRMA-SF, and Rape Vignettes.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. PCBS total score	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. PCBS: Shame and Guilt	.96*	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. PCBS: Gender Roles	.83*	.72*	–	–	–	–	–
4. PCBS: Idealization	.91*	.84*	.58*	–	–	–	–
5. IRMA-SF	.80*	.76*	.83*	.60*	–	–	–
6. Marital rape	–.35*	–.29*	–.48*	–.20	–.48*	–	–
7. Date rape	–.28	–.23	–.30*	–.24	–.27	.19	–
8. Acquaintance rape	–.44*	–.41*	–.51*	–.29*	–.56*	.34*	.20

PCBS: Purity Culture Beliefs Scale; IRMA-SF: Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form.

* $p < .003$.

sorrow.” Sample items from the Socially Extrinsic subscale include “I go to church mostly to spend time with my friends” and “I go to church mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know there.” The Intrinsic subscale has a reliability of .83, and the combined Personally Extrinsic and Socially Extrinsic subscale has a reliability of .65. In the present study, the Intrinsic subscale had an alpha of .84. The Extrinsic subscale was excluded from analyses in this study based on an unacceptably low alpha of .54.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Data were analyzed using SPSS. The original non-transformed means and standard deviations for all measures are shown in Table 1. All measures were assessed for normality and homoscedasticity. The IRMA-SF and the Gender Roles subscale of the PCBS were found to be positively skewed. A log transformation corrected the IRMA-SF. A square root transformation corrected the Gender Roles subscale of the PCBS. The transformed scores for these measures were utilized in all subsequent analyses, excluding the moderation analysis. As recommended by A. F. Hayes (2013), the non-transformed variables were entered into this model. The Extrinsic subscale of the I/E-R was excluded from analyses based on an unacceptably low alpha. One-tailed correlations were run between age and the other variables. A moderate positive correlation was found between age and intrinsic religiosity ($r = .32, p = .001$). Age was not correlated with purity culture beliefs, rape myth acceptance, or labeling the vignettes.

First hypothesis

It was hypothesized that participants exhibiting higher endorsement of purity culture beliefs would exhibit stronger endorsement of rape myths and an increased likelihood of incorrectly labeling the rape vignettes as consensual sex. This hypothesis was partially supported, and the correlations can be seen in Table 2. Sixteen correlations were run, and after applying a Bonferroni correction resulting in an alpha of .003, 12 of the correlations were found to be significant with one-tailed significance.

Second hypothesis

It was hypothesized that intrinsic religiosity would demonstrate a moderating relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance, ameliorating the relationship. The PROCESS

Table 3. The Moderating Effect of Intrinsic Religiosity on the Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance.

Criterion	Predictors	B	SE	t	p value	R ²	F (df)	p value
IR						.78	114.06 (3, 95)	.00
	PCBS	3.23	.35	9.13	.00			
	IR	0.46	.23	1.98	.05			
	PCBS × IR	-0.50	.10	-5.20	.00			

PCBS: Purity Culture Belief scale; IR: intrinsic religiosity.

macro for SPSS was used to estimate the regression coefficients and associated statistics for the moderation model, as well as the proportion of variance in the criterion variable uniquely attributable to the moderation effects (A. F. Hayes, 2013). Intrinsic religiosity was found to be a significant moderator of the relationship between purity culture beliefs and rape myth acceptance ($B = -0.50$, $p = .00$; see Table 3). This interaction was probed by testing the conditional effects of intrinsic religiosity at three levels of purity culture beliefs—one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean. Results showed that intrinsic religiosity was significantly related to rape myth acceptance when purity culture beliefs were one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean ($p = .00$; see Figure 1). In general, as acceptance of purity culture beliefs increased, so did acceptance of rape myths. However, this relationship was more pronounced at low levels of intrinsic religiosity (see Figure 1).

Discussion

The current study sought to address the relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance, as purity culture has been previously associated with a lack of education on sexual consent and victim-blaming attitudes (D. E. Anderson, 2013; Collins, 2015; Darnall, 2017; Field, 2016; Schell, 2014). In addition, given that religiosity has been found to be related to tendencies to accept rape myths and that intrinsic religiosity has been shown to reduce harmful effects of various constructs, the construct of intrinsic religiosity was also examined as a potential moderator (Barnett et al., 2018; Foong et al., 2018; Hansen & Ryder, 2016; Prina & Schatz-Stevens, 2020; Tavares et al., 2019).

First hypothesis

Partially supporting the first hypothesis, a number of the correlations between purity culture beliefs, rape myth acceptance, and the labeling of rape vignettes were found to be significant. A significant positive relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance was demonstrated, as well as significant positive relationships between the three purity culture subscales and rape myth acceptance. This indicates that individuals who endorse purity culture beliefs are likely to have higher acceptance of rape myths. A significant negative relationship was found between purity culture beliefs and correct labeling of the marital rape and the acquaintance rape vignettes. This finding indicates that individuals who endorse purity culture beliefs are likely to incorrectly label marital rape and acquaintance rape as consensual sexual encounters. Such findings are novel, in that purity culture has never been formally studied in the psychological literature. However, these findings support previous assertions from popular blog posts that purity culture endorses victim-blaming attitudes (Darnall, 2017; Field, 2016; Schell, 2014).

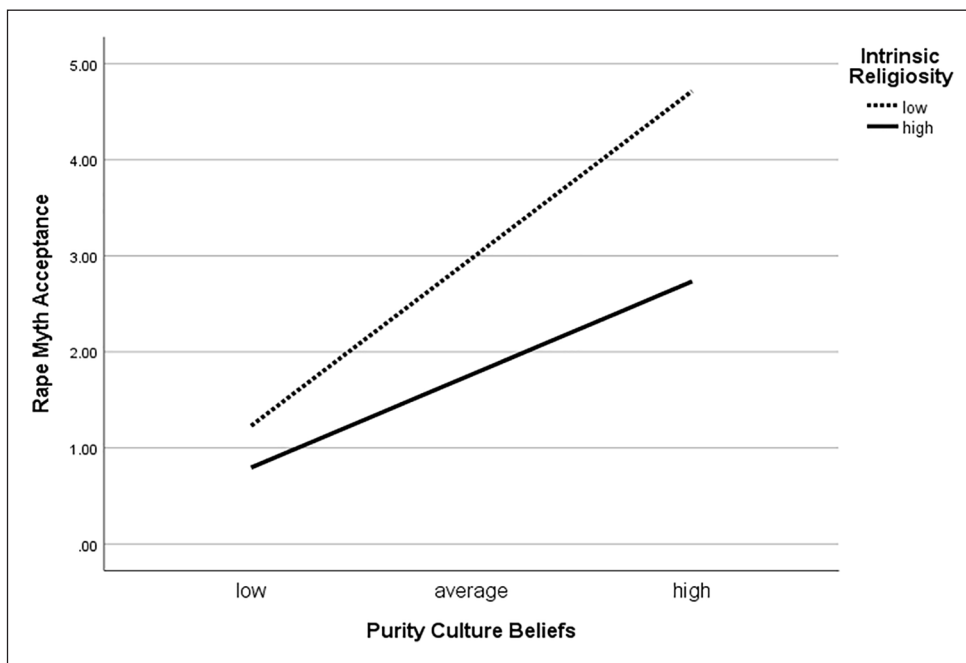


Figure 1. Lines representing the moderating effect of intrinsic religiosity on purity culture beliefs and rape myth acceptance.

Articles in popular media have asserted that based on purity culture's teachings that males have no control over their sexual desires, rape is simply a male losing his fight against his sexual urges and a female acquiescing (Fahs, 2010). Content analyses of Christian dating books that espouse purity culture have found that these sources place the blame for a male's sexual urges on a woman's body and clothing choices, and suggest that women who engage in sexual activity should expect sexual violence (Klement & Sagarin, 2017; Moon & Reger, 2014). Such conceptualizations of rape within purity culture remove blame from the male and invalidate the female's experience. As such, the finding that purity culture is related to rape myth acceptance and an improper understanding of rape supports these prior claims.

Second hypothesis

It was hypothesized that intrinsic religiosity would moderate the relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance. This hypothesis was supported, as intrinsic religiosity was found to moderate the relationship between purity culture and rape myth acceptance. As noted in the first hypothesis, as acceptance of purity culture beliefs increased, so did acceptance of rape myths. However, intrinsic religiosity ameliorated this relationship in that this finding was particularly pronounced among individuals with lower levels of intrinsic religiosity. Previous findings suggest that religious intolerance, commitment, and fundamentalism are associated with increased victim-blaming attitudes (Barnett et al., 2018; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). However, all aspects of religiosity do not seem to uniformly be associated with the acceptance of rape myths. In contrast to these other religious variables, intrinsic religiosity focuses more on the motivation for one's religiosity. The current study demonstrated that the relationship between endorsement of purity culture beliefs and rape myths is weakened at higher levels of religious internalization. This effect could be due to the fact that those with high levels of religious internalization view religion as the framework for their

lives, regardless of social pressures, and as such, may be more likely to bring to bear other internalized religious messages that mitigate the victim blaming of rape myths, such as love of neighbor and compassion for those who suffer, reducing the impact of the victim-blaming attitudes that are related to purity culture. Due to the subtleties of discrete religious variables, this finding adds to the literature an increasingly nuanced understanding regarding the relationship between unique aspects of religiousness and rape myth acceptance.

Implications

These findings have important implications for understanding how purity culture relates to rape myth acceptance. Those who are tasked with educating Christian youth regarding sexuality may find it helpful to distinguish between biblical teachings regarding sexuality and some of the more destructive elements of purity culture to promote women's sexual safety. For example, the findings of this study indicate that the teachings of purity culture may predispose Christian youth to more readily blame survivors of sexual assault for their attacks, as well as increase their tendency to discredit the validity of an assault. As such, pastors and churches should eliminate purity culture teachings and promote instead biblical sexual ethics that are free of victim-blaming attitudes. Based on the current findings, Christian leaders should aim to promote internal religious motivation and encourage their youth to view religion as a framework for their entire lives, as this has been shown to lessen the victim-blaming attitudes born out of purity culture teachings. In addition, the church's conversation on sexuality should explicitly deny any teachings that promote sexist attitudes or harmful sex roles that endanger females' sexual safety. For example, commands to refrain from sexual immorality are prescribed to both males and females throughout the Bible. Furthermore, husband and wife are taught to become one flesh and engage in mutual submission in marriage. As such, it does not appear that the Bible teaches that females are more responsible for sexual boundaries than males. All of God's people are instructed to avoid sexual immorality. By refocusing the church's discussion on sexual ethics to what is explicitly taught in Scripture, with care given to avoid interpretations that are influenced more by cultural standards than by exegesis, many of the associations with sexism, victim blaming, and intolerance can be eliminated from this discourse.

The findings of this study also have implications for those who have survived a rape or sexual assault and the therapists who treat these survivors. If the survivor finds herself overwhelmed with shame, guilt, and self-loathing following her attack, any prior exposure to purity culture could contribute to her internalized victim-blaming attitudes. As these feelings of self-blame would likely impede the therapeutic journey to healing, therapists should also be educated regarding these findings that victim-blaming attitudes are related to the endorsement of purity culture. Exploring how a survivor has internalized messages from purity culture could help bring enlightenment and healing, as they begin to dismantle the shame and guilt taught by purity culture and understand where these messages originated.

The results of this study necessitate a discussion regarding the theological implications. Purity culture is commonly taught among Christian populations and is often connected to specific biblical beliefs. While the Bible teaches that individuals should aim to remain sexually pure until they are married, purity culture takes these traditional sexual ethics and adds extrabiblical rules. For example, purity culture typically prohibits all forms of physical affection, such as hugging or kissing, rules not found in the Bible (Darnall, 2017). Popular culture media have also criticized purity culture as teaching that actions are what determine one's purity in the eyes of God, which implies that people can earn God's grace. The Bible teaches that God's grace is freely given, while purity culture encourages individuals to rely on personal strength, rules, and external constraints to earn God's favor. This additionally creates a lack of reliance on God regarding one's convictions. In

addition, purity culture teaches that sex is to be feared, and this fear of sex can become detrimentally ingrained in young Christians' minds, even after they are married (Gregoire, 2016). Biblically, sex is taught as a gift from God to be fully embraced in a marital context; thus, entering marriage with an instilled fear of sexual activity can diminish this gift. Finally, the contamination metaphors commonly applied to sexually active unmarried women in purity culture are also problematic (Field, 2016). Christians are called to love one another, and it is psychologically difficult, if not impossible, to loathe a behavior while simultaneously loving the person who engages in that behavior (Beck, 2006). The current study is not exegetical in nature nor is the purpose to justify biblical positions. The results of this study are intended to promote dialogue surrounding the teachings of purity culture. As these results imply that purity culture is connected to victim-blaming attitudes, it is a worthwhile topic to explore, regardless of particular biblical positions.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the current study. First, this study solely surveyed individuals who self-identified as Christians. Although the Christian subculture represents the group that most frequently encounters purity culture, the religious homogeneity of this sample limits the generalizability of the findings to the Christian subculture, as opposed to other religious groups or the secular population, who may still encounter some messages of purity culture. In addition, 73.7% of the sample identified as Caucasian American or European American, and there may be nuances in the way constructs such as rape myths, purity culture, and religiosity are presented in religious contexts that are primarily White or primarily Black. However, the demographics of the current study limit the generalizability of the results to primarily the White Christian subculture, as opposed to the subcultures of Christianity of other ethnicities or the broader Christian population.

Furthermore, the recruiting approach may have led to a self-selection bias, as the recruitment materials explicitly stated that the survey was about gender, sexuality, and religion. As such, individuals who did not wish to engage with the topics of gender, sexuality, or religion may have chosen not to participate. This study also might have been limited by social desirability bias, as individuals may have responded to certain items in a way that they believed to be more socially acceptable than their true beliefs, particularly regarding inflammatory topics such as sexual assault. Relatedly, recent cultural movements toward acknowledging the prevalence of sexual assault and holding perpetrators accountable may have increased participants' exposure to sexual violence in the media and primed their responses.

Future research

Future research could build upon the present study in several ways. While this study contributed to the psychological literature by demonstrating that purity culture was associated with rape myth acceptance in general, future research could expand on these findings by exploring how the various attitudes associated with purity culture contribute to its relationship with rape myth acceptance. Specifically, possible constructs to be explored include sexism, traditional sex roles, shame, removal of female bodily autonomy, female as a sexual gatekeeper, and a lack of education surrounding sexual consent. In addition, the current study was limited to a sample of Christian males and females. While the Christian subculture represents the group that most frequently encounters the teachings of purity culture, it would be worth exploring how members of the general population, or members of other religious groups, compare to professing Christians in terms of their purity culture beliefs and victim-blaming attitudes.

In conclusion, this research adds to the literature by formally examining purity culture for the first time. It expands the current literature by addressing how purity culture beliefs are associated with rape myth acceptance and an incorrect labeling of rape as consensual sex. Furthermore, it

examines how intrinsic religiosity is related to the association between purity culture and rape myth acceptance. As such, this study highlights that the teachings of purity culture should be examined within Christian culture in hopes of facilitating growth and change as Christians engage with the cultural dialogue surrounding sexual assault.

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