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That's Not Funny: The Effect of Exposure to Sexist or Feminist Humor on Rape Myth

Acceptance

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Abstract

This study examined the role humor plays on the acceptance of rape myths in college students. This study sought to determine if the type of joke (sexist, feminist or neutral) and the reception method (reading or listening) had an impact on how much an individual accepts rape myths. Participants either read or listened to five jokes from one of three joke categories: sexist, feminist, or neutral. The participants then answered questions regarding joke hilarity and took a rape myth acceptance measure. Type of joke and reception method did not affect rape myth acceptance although participants did find the neutral jokes to be funnier than sexist and feminist jokes. Results imply that short term exposure to different types of jokes does not affect attitudes about rape and sexual assault.

That's Not Funny: The Effect of Exposure to Sexist or Feminist Humor on Rape Myth

Acceptance

College women ages 18-24 are three times more likely than women ages 12-17 and 25 and older to experience rape or sexual assault (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). Rape culture occurs when societal beliefs and values that support violence towards women normalize sexual aggression to the point that rape is seen as an inevitable part of life. Rape culture includes jokes, TV, music, advertising, laws, words and imagery, that make violence against women and sexual coercion seem normal that people believe that rape is inevitable ("What is Rape Culture? WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre", 2018). Often times college campuses are places where rape culture thrives. In turn, these beliefs create an environment that tolerates rape and sexual violence. Rape culture is sustained through contempt for female qualities, assumptions of male aggression, female weakness, rape myths, and ambiguities about what defines rape, consent, and harassment (Thomae & Viki, 2013). Rape culture perpetuates sexual violence through jokes, TV, advertising, and more. The trivialization of sexual violence can be so pervasive that rape and sexual assault seem to become normal aspects of life.

A source as well as a byproduct of rape culture is sexism. Many aspects of a culture can convey sexism, and humor is a common example. Humor can convey a multitude of values, beliefs, and attitudes. Humor is a medium through which sexist views can permeate society and be highly tolerated. Joking allows for less restriction on inappropriate attitudes or feelings (Case & Lippard, 2009). Sexist humor reaffirms and normalizes rape culture. In contrast feminist humor points out the absurdity of rape culture and has the potential to combat the normalization of sexual violence and harassment rape culture promotes. All genres of humor that address rape

culture have the ability to influence general acceptance of rape myths and what people understand about rape. Understanding how both sexist and feminist humor influence the perception of rape and rape myths can be used to reduce or change acceptance of rape myths. Ultimately, the goal is to change the current culture to one that does not condone rape myths.

Rape Myths

Rape myths are untrue beliefs about rape that are often shaped by sexism and prejudice (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Common rape myths include the belief that men cannot control their sexual desires, the way a woman dresses indicates that she is asking for sex or rape, and if the victim does not physically resist rape then it did not occur. Rape myth acceptance is the agreement that rape myths are not in fact myths but are true statements. Overt expressions of rape myth acceptance are increasingly being seen as socially unacceptable (Swim & Cohen, 1997). However, there are many ways to covertly and subtly express belief in rape myths. One example of subtle expression of rape myth acceptance is victim blaming. While victim blaming does not blatantly blame the victim for their assault, it does condone the idea that the victim is in some way responsible and at fault. Victim blaming by nature also perpetuates the notion that the perpetrator is not completely at fault for the rape. Another example of covert rape myth acceptance is the idea that in some situations rape is accidental, unintentional, or otherwise not completely the perpetrators fault. While rape myths are being expressed more covertly they are still present in the current culture.

There are a multitude of factors that can affect rape myth acceptance (RMA). For example, men tend to have higher rape myth acceptance scores than women (Basow & Minieri, 2011; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Populations of males show higher instances of

perpetrating sexual assaults. Those populations have also been shown to have attitudes supportive of rape. Male student athletes and fraternity members are two populations that tend to be supportive of rape myths and have group norms that support coercion of women (Boeringer, 1999; Foubert & Perry, 2007). Male athletes and fraternity men agreed significantly more with rape supportive statements than men not involved in athletics or greek life (Boeringer, 1999). Sexism also affects and can be correlated with rape myth acceptance. Multiple studies have shown that people high in sexist attitudes are also found to accept rape myths more readily (Abrams, Viki, Masser & Bohner, 2003; Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998; Thomae & Viki, 2013). Education about rape prevention and rape myths can help to reduce belief in the myths societal influence has allowed rape myths to continue being accepted (McMahon & Farmer, 2011).

Humor's relation to RMA. Rape culture is both sustained by and perpetuates rape myths. Belief in rape myths help to reinforce rape culture and vice versa. Rape myths are social messages that direct men and women to assume certain gender roles. It is important that the relationship between humor and rape myth acceptance is studied because humor is one of the ways that social messages are conveyed. Humor can reinforce social norms such as prescribed gender roles. However humor can also be used to subvert social norms. It has been established that sexism, including sexist jokes, increases rape myth acceptance (Abrams, Viki, Masser & Bohner, 2003; Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998; Thomae & Viki, 2013). However, there is a lack of research regarding feminist humor and rape myth acceptance. If subversive feminist humor can reduce rape myth acceptance then it has the potential to help change social norms that maintain rape culture.

Humor and Social Norms

Humor in any context can be used as a way to reinforce social norms. It can act as a shield for those who hold socially undesirable beliefs to hide behind while still expressing opinions and sentiments. If the joke teller is called out on their disparaging sentiment they can easily hide behind the “it was just a joke” defense or the “you don’t have a sense of humor” excuse. Jokes are ambiguous and therefore have the ability to communicate two meanings at the same time (Strain, Martens & Saucier, 2016). The literal meaning of the words is one message conveyed by the joke. The other message is inferred from the joke by the listener. The inferred meaning of a joke is often inconsistent with the literal message. Humor can be used to suppress out-groups as well as create bonding within an in-group. Research has shown that belittlement of an outgroup through humor can serve to boost the disposition and cohesion of the in-group while simultaneously creating malignant perceptions of the out-group (Thomae & Pina, 2015). If there are enough people in the in-group, for example half the population, this derogatory humor can become a norm and lead to acceptance and perpetuation of the inferiority of the out-group.

In contrast, humor also has the ability to change social norms though the same ability to reinforce them. Subversive humor, is humor which challenges the status quo. To be effective, subversive humor must do three things; challenge the oppressive group, reduce distress of the persecuted group, and redefine phrases from the group in power to convey a point (Strain et al., 2016). An example of subversive humor occurred in Toronto Canada in 2011, a police officer Michael Sanguinetti stated “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (“What Is SlutWalk?”, 2017). In response his statement created a protest, known as the SlutWalk; women, some dressed provocatively, marching on the streets to dispel the attitude

that the way you dress is an invitation to rape ("What Is SlutWalk?", 2017). The seemingly absurd response from the people of Toronto has prompted individuals all over the world to start SlutWalks in over 200 different cities. This demonstration led to the confrontation of the individual in power by using his own words against him. When a group uses the disparaging humor directed at them to point out the absurdity of the acceptance of discrimination against them, they are able to subtly challenge individual's acceptance of the belittlement of the outgroup. Thus, humor can work as a tool to increasing society's collective awareness of social problems.

Sexist (Disparaging) Humor

Disparaging humor is humor which makes a marginalized group seem ridiculous or invalidates them. Examples of disparaging humor include sexist humor and racist humor. Sexist humor can be established as "humor that denigrates, demeans, stereotypes, oppresses, or objectifies women" (Mallett, Ford, & Woodzicka, 2016). By treating sexism as unimportant, sexist humor then belittles and plays down women's importance and status in society. Humor establishes that its meaning is not to be taken seriously. Sexist humor provides a way to put down women without having to confront moral inspection. When sexist humor is accepted and tolerated it increases what can be considered appropriate behavior and changes social norms.

A growing body of work has shown sexist humor is not kind hearted. Sexist humor is a form of sexism that allows for individuals to express their superiority and create a culture of acceptance and tolerance around the belittlement of women (Ford, 2000; Ford, Wentzel & Lorion, 2001; Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998; Thomae & Viki, 2013). Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) established amusement as a result of sexist humor was associated

with increased rape myth acceptance, likelihood of forcing sex, and aggression. Even a small interaction with sexist jokes can increase tolerance of sexism. Ford et al. (2001) claimed people who tell sexist jokes often have negative attitudes toward the outgroup. The researchers also asserted listening to sexist jokes can lead to increased acceptance of sexist incidents. Sexist humor can be correlated with rape myth acceptance. It is important to continue research on this topic and expand upon previous research by including different genres of humor. Examining whether other types of humor such as feminist humor have an impact on rape myth acceptance can aid in a deeper understanding of how humor on a broader level is related to rape myth acceptance.

Feminist Humor

Feminist humor is “humor that reveals and ridicules the absurdity of gender stereotypes and gender based inequalities” (Shifman & Lemish, 2010). Traditionally, comedy has been a male dominated profession and also male dominated in general with males making the jokes and women laughing at the punchline. Due to male influence, popular comedy and humor have perpetuated a male agenda. Historically, men have had control over what type of humor is acceptable (Case & Lippard, 2009). Recently, there has been an upsurge in feminist humor as feminism has become more popular. While feminist humor may have the ability to counteract some of the negative effects seen as a result of sexist humor there are still drawbacks. Feminist humor has the potential to be considered disparaging. Humor that uplifts women by degrading and demeaning men is sometimes labeled feminist humor. This type of humor is still disparaging because it is trivializing men. Although jokes that belittle men can have the same effect as traditionally sexist jokes, they also have the potential to establish a sense of solidarity among

women. Sexist humor has been found to help facilitate male bonding similar to how 'feminist' jokes that degrade men facilitate female bonding (Thomae & Viki, 2013). Bing (2004) suggested disparaging feminist jokes may allow women to be more tolerant of their situation because the jokes reinforce social stereotypes and 'normal' conduct for both men and women. Inclusive feminist humor makes women, not men, the center of attention and does not assume that most men are malicious or have intent to oppress women (Bing, 2004). This type of humor allows men to become open to the underlying ideas because they are not having to defend themselves. When the opposing group becomes open to the underlying ideas it provides an opportunity for them to identify with the other group and hopefully internalize the ideas. When the opposing group, in this case men, become defensive the chance they will listen and empathise with the plight of women lessens. Inclusive feminist humor is important because it has the ability to transmit ideas to both men and women equally.

Humor is a great way to create social change. For all the reasons sexist humor creates such negative effects, inclusive feminist humor has the potential to create positive effects. No matter what category of humor the joke falls under (sexist joke, feminist joke, blonde joke, dad joke), humor has the ability to alter beliefs. Whether the effect of the joke is good for society depends on the type of joke. In the past, vulnerable populations have succeeded in using humor to introduce novel ideas to others who may be afraid of entertaining new beliefs. Humor is not meant to be taken sincerely which allows messages one might resist to be introduced (Bing, 2004). Jokes can be a successful way to dispute the norm because they introduce disagreeable ideas in a non-threatening way. Using humor to inform people about rape culture has the potential to challenge preconceived norms regarding sexual assault. Despite the perceived

potential of feminist humor, little research has examined the interactions between feminist jokes and rape myth acceptance. Addressing the lack of research would allow for an increased understanding of the way exposure to different types of humor affects rape myth acceptance.

Reception Method: Visual Versus Auditory

The way a stimulus is presented and received can have an effect on comprehension of the information. Not only are there individual differences in the way information is perceived, but the different means by which information can be communicated have benefits and drawbacks. There are fundamental differences between reading and listening to information. The basic differences between reading and listening are the speed of input, the use of associated words and blending of sounds (Brown, 2011). When reading, the person can control the speed of information by reading either slower or faster. When listening to information, the person is forced to comprehend the information in real time. Associated words or cognates may be more helpful when reading because the words may look visually similar; however, the way they are pronounced may be disparate making them less useful when listening. The way a speaker pronounces and enunciates words can affect the clarity of the information being perceived. When a person reads they do not have to worry about accents or pronunciations interfering with understanding the information being presented. Lastly, spoken language relies partially on body language to be fully understood (Brown, 2011).

There are varying theories concerning information processing and auditory-visual stimuli. The unitary processing perspective dictates comprehension of oral or visual information is the same basic process (Diakidoy, Stylianou, Karefillidou, & Papageorgiou, 2005). In a natural setting this may be the case. However, in a laboratory setting where the auditory information is

prerecorded there are less cues for the participant to pick up on. For example, the listener cannot use body language or conversational context cues to help them comprehend the information. On the other hand the dual processing perspective theorizes auditory and visual information are processed differently because of the increased involvement associated with listening to oral information (Diakidoy et. al, 2005). In the case of dual processing, comprehension of information can differ depending on the method of reception. Sticht, Beck, Hauke, Kleinman, and James (1974) found on average after seventh grade reading comprehension ability was better than listening comprehension. This finding supports the dual process theory because significant differences in comprehension should not be possible if there is one comprehension method. While the process of understanding auditory and visual information may be related they are separate.

As far as jokes go, humor relies on incongruity and ambiguity to establish meaning (Bing, 2004). If one cannot recognize the ambiguity, then the meaning of the joke changes significantly. Being able to effectively comprehend a joke can make the difference between recognizing its intended meaning and not 'getting it'. Because comprehension of information can differ depending on the method of reception it is important to determine if reception method alters the understanding of a joke. Humor is present in many forms and people are exposed to it in a variety of ways. The better humor is comprehend the more of an impact it can have on an individual. There is the potential of finding an optimal way to present humor for comprehension. If this is the case, being able to present humor in the most effective way can aid in the use of humor to create social change.

The Present Research

The present research set out to establish a connection between different genres of humor, reception methods, and rape myth acceptance. The goal of this study is to expand on previous research on humor and rape myth acceptance by including feminist humor (Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998; Strain et al., 2016; Thomae & Viki, 2013; Viki, Thomae, Cullen, & Fernandez, 2007). The present research also includes a new element, reception method, with hopes of establishing whether jokes are comprehended better when presented visually or orally. Overall, this study aims to determine whether type of humor and reception method have an effect on rape myth acceptance.

The first hypothesis examines the effect of reception method on comprehension of the jokes, funniness of the jokes, and rape myth acceptance. It is anticipated that reading the jokes will result in higher comprehension, funniness and rape myth acceptance than listening to the jokes. The second set of hypotheses concerns how the type of joke affects comprehension, funniness, and rape myth acceptance. It is hypothesized that sexist and neutral jokes will be perceived as equally funny but feminist jokes will be perceived as less funny than the other jokes. All jokes will be comprehended equally. It is predicted that exposure to sexist jokes will increase rape myth acceptance while exposure to feminist jokes will decrease rape myth acceptance. Exposure to neutral jokes will not significantly affect rape myth acceptance scores.

The third group of hypotheses involves the interaction of reception method and type of joke on comprehension, funniness, and rape myth acceptance. Reading sexist jokes will result in higher rape myth acceptance than listening to sexist jokes and either reading or listening to both feminist and neutral jokes. Reading allows for greater comprehension of the joke creating more

likelihood of an increased effect of the content of the joke (Sticht et al., 1974). Since sexist jokes are common, participants are used to understanding the hidden meaning in these jokes also increasing the likelihood that the sexism in these jokes will increase rape myth acceptance. Reading sexist jokes will result in higher funniness ratings than listening to sexist jokes. The other four conditions will be significantly less funny than both the reading sexist and listening sexist conditions. It is predicted that reading neutral jokes will be the next funniest condition with listening neutral, reading sexist and listening sexist following behind. It is predicted that an interaction between reception method and type of joke will result in highest comprehension for reading neutral jokes followed by reading sexist and reading feminist jokes. This interaction will also result in lowest comprehension for listening to feminist jokes with listening to sexist and listening to neutral resulting in higher comprehension respectively.

Method

Participants

Participants were 53 undergraduate students who attend a small liberal arts college. Nine (17%) participants were male and 44 (83%) were female. The average age was 20 ($SD = 1.97$). The sample self reported their ethnicities as follows; Caucasian 45 (85%), African American 3 (5.7%), American Indian or Alaska Native 1 (2%), Asian 2 (3.8%), and Other 2 (3.8%). Participants self reported their sexual orientation as follows; 52 (98%) heterosexual, 0 homosexual, 1 (2%) bisexual and 0 other. Participants also self reported their current participation in sports; 39 (73.6%) did not play a sport and 14 (26.4%) did currently play a sport. Of those 14 participants two play a collision style sport, seven play a limited contact sport, and five play a non-contact sport. Some participants were enrolled in general psychology classes and

were rewarded with course credit for their participation while others were recruited from sports teams and greek life. Participants not enrolled in general psychology courses at the time of the study did not receive extra credit. The participants were recruited using convenience sampling.

Materials

Participants had to sign an informed consent form to participate in the study (See Appendix A). Participants also filled out a demographics questionnaire (Appendix B).

Joke Manipulation. The jokes used in this experiment were adopted from several sources including the New Yorker (Harrington, 2017) and several research studies (Thomae & Viki, 2013; Thomas & Esses, 2004; Viki, et. al, 2007). Some were created by the researcher or suggested by friends. There was a sexist, feminist, and neutral joke condition. Each condition contained five jokes. For a detailed description of the jokes refer to Appendix C.

Reception Method Manipulation. The reception method was manipulated by randomly assigning participants to either read or listen to the jokes. For the visual condition participants read the jokes to themselves from a printed piece of paper. The auditory condition was adapted from the visual condition into a video (Appendix D). The auditory condition video is comprised of an audio track of the jokes and denotes to the participant which joke they are listening to through numbered slides.

Funniness and Comprehension Measure. To measure funniness participants rated each joke on a five point likert scale from not at all funny (1) to extremely funny (5). To assess comprehension participants answered one multiple choice question about the content of each joke (Appendix E). There is one correct answer for each question. Each correct multiple choice answer was coded as 1; participants can score from 0 to 5 on comprehension.

Rape Myth Acceptance Measure. To assess rape myth acceptance participants were asked to complete the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale or UIRMA (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). This measure is comprised of 22 questions in likert scale format from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) (Appendix F). Scores are totaled for a cumulative score with lower scores indicating a greater acceptance of rape myths. The UIRMA scale was found to be highly reliable (22 items, $\alpha = .87$). The researcher used an online list randomizer to arrange the list of questions into a random order for the study ("List Randomizer").

Procedure

Upon arrival to the computer lab participants were asked to fill out the informed consent form. Along with the consent form participants were given a questionnaire regarding demographic information. Using a 3(Type of Joke: Sexist, Feminist, Neutral) x 2(Reception Method: Auditory, Visual) factorial design the researcher manipulated the independent variables. Next participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions; sexist visual, feminist visual, neutral visual, sexist auditory, feminist auditory, neutral auditory. The independent variables of both joke type and reception method were manipulated by having the participants either read or listen to sexist, feminist, or neutral jokes. Dependent variables were funniness, comprehension, and rape myth acceptance. To measure funniness the participants rated each joke on how funny they thought it was after being exposed to the joke. To measure comprehension participants answered a multiple choice question about the content of the joke after exposure to each joke. Rape myth acceptance was measured with the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale after participants have been exposed to all the jokes in their condition. Debriefing occurred at the end of the study.

Results

A 3(Type of Joke: Sexist, Feminist, Neutral) x 2(Reception Method: Auditory, Visual) factorial ANOVA was conducted analyze the relationship among type of joke, reception method, rape myth acceptance (RMA), and hilarity. This analysis provides regression analysis and analysis of variance for one dependent variable by one or more factors. A manipulation check was conducted to ensure participants were paying attention and understood the inferred meaning of the jokes. The manipulation check was built into the study as the comprehension measure. Across 5 jokes more than 80% of the time participants were accurate in their interpretations. The results of the manipulation check suggest that the majority of participants were reading and paying attention to the jokes.

It was hypothesized that reading jokes would result in higher rape myth acceptance (RMA) than listening to jokes and exposure to sexist jokes would have higher RMA while exposure to feminist jokes would have lower RMA. It was also hypothesized that reading sexist jokes would result in the highest levels of rape myth acceptance. For the dependent variable of RMA, the main effect of the joke type (sexist, neutral, feminist) was not significant, $F(2, 47) = .38, p = .69$. Individuals in the sexist joke condition ($M = 35.83, SD = 8.93$) did not have significantly higher RMA scores than individuals in the feminist ($M = 37.88, SD = 12.89$) or neutral ($M = 35, SD = 9.89$) conditions. The main effect of reception method was also not significant, $F(1, 47) = 1, p = .320$. Individuals who read the jokes ($M = 34.81, SD = 10.33$) did not have significantly higher RMA scores than those who listened to the jokes ($M = 37.65, SD = 10.71$). The interaction of joke type and reception method was not significant $F(2, 47) = .66, p =$

.52. See Table 1 for the descriptive statistics for the interaction of joke type and reception method on RMA.

It was hypothesized that reading jokes would result in higher hilarity scores than listening to jokes, both sexist and neutral jokes would be perceived as equally funny but feminist jokes would be perceived as less funny than the other jokes. It was also hypothesized that reading sexist or neutral jokes would result in the highest hilarity scores. For the dependent variable of hilarity, the main effect of the joke type was significant, $F(2, 47) = 5.7, p = .006$. Post hoc analyses suggested that neutral jokes ($M = 10.28, SD = 3$) were perceived as significantly more funny than the sexist ($M = 7.56, SD = 2.66$) or feminist ($M = 7.82, SD = 2.24$) jokes. The main effect of reception method was not significant, $F(1, 47) = .07, p = .79$. Individuals who read the jokes ($M = 8.44, SD = 2.6$) did not perceive them as significantly more funny than those who listened to the jokes ($M = 8.69, SD = 3.2$). The interaction of joke type and reception method was not significant, $F(2, 47) = 1.3, p = .28$. See Table 2 for the descriptive statistics for the interaction of joke type and reception method on hilarity.

Discussion

This study examined the effects of joke type (sexist, neutral, feminist) and reception method (reading, listening) on rape myth acceptance and hilarity. Participants' rape myth acceptance scores were not significantly affected by either the joke type, reception method, or interaction between them. Participants found the neutral jokes to be significantly more hilarious than sexist and feminist jokes. Hilarity scores were not significantly affected by the interaction between joke type and reception method. These findings are not consistent with past research on sexist humor and rape myth acceptance (Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998;

Strain et al., 2016; Thomae & Viki, 2013; Viki, Thomae, Cullen, & Fernandez, 2007).

Greenwood and Isbell (2002) found that participants, especially men with high sexism scores found sexist jokes to be more amusing and less offensive than participants with low sexism scores. Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) found that as enjoyment of sexist humor increases so does rape myth acceptance, acceptance on interpersonal violence, and self-reported likelihood of forcing sex. Although this study was based on the methodology of Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) there are differences that could account for the contradiction in results. For example, Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) had 399 participants, who rated 10 jokes and were measured on a variety of scales extending beyond RMA. The present study included only five jokes and measured a single construct; acceptance of rape myths.

The hypotheses regarding RMA were not supported; RMA was not significantly affected by joke type, reception method or the combination of both. The hypotheses about joke hilarity were partially supported; hilarity was significantly affected by joke type but not by reception method or a combination of joke type and reception method. Sexist jokes were expected to be more hilarious than either the neutral or feminist conditions but this was not fully supported. While neutral jokes were found to be more funny than feminist jokes, sexist jokes were not found to be significantly funnier than neutral jokes. This research suggests that joke type and reception method do not affect RMA. This could be for many different reasons. It may be that specific types of humor are not related to RMA. In addition, the way information is received (reception method) may not be related to RMA. The lack of effect could also be attributed to the limitations of the study.

An important limitation of this study was that rape myth acceptance is composed of a set of beliefs that have been shaped over time and is influenced by a multitude of factors. Beliefs are the culmination of years of experiences and are impacted by a variety of elements. Some beliefs are adopted from others, some are developed based on evidence or due to individual experiences. The way this study was conducted limited the amount of exposure the participants had to five jokes over the time span of a couple minutes. This short amount of exposure may not have been enough to impact a belief that has been shaped over the course of many years. While it could be that multiple exposures over months or years to certain types of jokes may gradually influence RMA, a one time brief exposure as in this study may not be salient enough to make a difference. Jokes are already ambiguous in the way they present their true meaning. Not only does the individual have to understand the inferred meaning, but that meaning then has to impact their beliefs. It can be seen that the limited exposure provided in this study is simply not enough to alter RMA. Future studies may want to attempt a longitudinal study where participants can experience repeated exposures to jokes.

This study did not control for education about rape myths. Many of the participants may have been exposed to prior teaching about rape myths. The school where this study was conducted has opportunities for students to be educated about rape and sexual assault prevention. Education on rape and sexual assault prevention can affect one's acceptance of rape myths since it may 'debunk' such myths and alter one's beliefs. Future research should control for previous rape/sexual assault prevention and title IX education especially since campus wide education programs regarding these topics are becoming more prevalent and mandatory. Since education about rape and sexual assault prevention is usually presented as facts and statistics, it may be

enough to significantly affect beliefs about rape myths. This is especially true if the education was recent since the information would likely be better remembered.

The sample size and demographic breakdown of the study is another important factor and limitation. Not only does a small sample make it difficult to generalize to the population, but it also affects the results. Having less than 10 participants in each condition decreases the chances of getting an accurate representation of the effect of both the type of joke and the reception method on rape myth acceptance. Another aspect of the sample that may have affected the results is that 83% of the sample was female. This is not representative of the population and probably contributed to the nonsignificant results. Previous research found that men find sexist humor funnier, more acceptable, and less offensive than women (Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). The over representation of females in the sample may account for the overall low joke hilarity especially in the sexist joke conditions. The hilarity of the jokes is another factor in itself that may have impacted the results. Most of the participants did not find the jokes funny. Even though the neutral category of jokes was found to be significantly funnier than the others, the mean was 10.28 out of a possible 50. The mean scores for hilarity show that none of the jokes were perceived as being especially humorous despite the neutral condition jokes being perceived as funnier in comparison to the other categories jokes. The jokes may not have had an effect on the participants if they did not find them funny. Despite the participants not finding the jokes funny, the majority of participants were paying attention and understood the inferred message each joke had.

Another limitation of this study is the effect of social desirability bias on RMA scores. Despite the researcher taking precautions, such as explicitly stating that responses are completely

confidential, social desirability bias can occur with any type of self report measure such as the UIRMA. The possible range of scores on the UIRMA is 22-110, the mean scores from all the conditions only varied from about 33 to 41. Social desirability could be the explanation for this small range in mean scores and be contributing to the non significance of the results. The means are all hovering around the lower end of the scale indicating that most participants do not accept rape myths. This is further evidence of social desirability bias. Rape is a sensitive topic and it is understandable that college students do not want to seem supportive of rape and sexual assault. With all self report measures social desirability bias is a factor the experimenter should try to combat. Future research should include a social desirability measure to account for this response bias.

These findings show that more research on a bigger scale is needed. A group of pilot participants should be used to ensure the jokes used in future studies are perceived as funny by the population being studied. The pilot group will help to ensure that the jokes in each condition will have a similar hilarity level reducing the chance for confounds. Having more participants will allow for a more accurate interpretation of the results and give the research more generalizability. Future research could explore if other factors like frequency or environment effect how jokes impact our behavior and thoughts. It would be informative to examine how participants interpret different kinds of humor (how offensive do they find the jokes and why). Researchers could also examine participants perceptions of the joke teller. Any additions of empirical research to this topic are important and needed.

Although this study did not find significance, the results of past research speak to the importance of examining the effects of jokes on social constructs such as rape myth acceptance,

rape proclivity, sexual aggression and interpersonal violence (Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998; Strain et al., 2016; Thomae & Viki, 2013; Viki, Thomae, Cullen, & Fernandez, 2007). Despite the jokes not having a significant effect on RMA, they can still be used as a tool for the discussion of sexual assault, rape, gender inequality and a number of other related issues. Sexist or even feminist humor offers the opportunity for discussion about rape myths, rape culture, the prevalence of rape, and gender inequality in our society. Future research could aim to apply humor to rape prevention education in order to create more participation dialogue and discussion. Humor can provide the means to draw attention to the severity and prevalence of rape and gender inequality in our society. Instead of dismissing these jokes, individuals should consider them an opportunity to start discussions about rape culture and the gender inequality that contributes to it.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Interactions of Joke Type and Reception Method on RMA

Condition	N	M	SD
Reading Sexist	9	33.44	6.71
Reading Neutral	9	35.89	11.56
Reading Feminist	9	35.11	12.84
Listening Sexist	9	38.22	10.56
Listening Neutral	9	34.11	8.51
Listening Feminist	8	41.00	13.05

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Interactions of Joke Type and Reception Method on Hilarity

Condition	N	M	SD
Reading Sexist	9	6.67	1.41
Reading Neutral	9	10.33	2.39
Reading Feminist	9	8.33	2.59
Listening Sexist	9	8.44	3.36
Listening Neutral	9	10.22	3.67
Listening Feminist	8	7.25	1.75

Appendix A

Informed Consent Agreement

Please read this consent agreement or listen carefully as it is read to you before you decide to participate in the research study. You are being given a copy of what you read or what is read to you – keep your copy.

Project Title: The Effect of Humor and Reception Method on Rape Myth Acceptance

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to determine the effect of humor (sexist, feminist, or neutral) and reception method (visual or auditory) on rape myth acceptance. There is substantial research on the topic of sexist humor, but little to no research regarding the effects of feminist humor. Feminist humor (the opposite of sexist humor) is a fairly new phenomenon but is becoming more popular and mainstream. It is worthwhile to investigate its effects because there is the potential for exposure to feminist humor to have the opposite effect exposure to sexist humor has. If so, feminist humor may be able to decrease rape myth acceptance and rape proclivity.

Participation: You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate student at Lynchburg College who is at least 18 years old . This study will take place in the computer labs on campus. You will be asked to read or listen to jokes, answering measures of hostile and benevolent sexism as well as rape myth acceptance.

Time Required: Your participation is expected to take about 25 minutes.

Risks & Benefits: The potential benefits of the study are threefold. Direct benefits for the participants is the ability to gain extra credit if the student is taking an introductory psychology course. Indirect benefits include learning more about one's attitudes and beliefs. There is a potential benefit of stress relief if the participants finds the jokes they are reading to be humorous. Society benefits from this research because feminist humor has yet to be looked at in terms of its effect on rape myth acceptance. Any data on this topic can help us better understand how different kinds of humor affect our attitudes and beliefs.

The potential risks associated with this study are as follows. Reading sexist or feminist jokes as well as answering questions about rape myth acceptance and sexism may be uncomfortable for some participants. If you experience any feelings of discomfort you may end your participation at any time without penalty. Resources available to you include:

Health and Counseling Center: Terrace level of Hundley Hall, 434.544.8357

Spiritual Life Center: 500 Brevard St., 434.544.8348

Title IX Coordinator: Flynn Multicultural Center located in the Drysdale Student Center, 434.544.8482

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate and/or answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. You also have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. If you want to withdraw from the study please tell the researcher or a member of the research team who is present during your participation. The researcher has the right to end subject participation. Participation may be ended by the researcher if any participant is disruptive to the point of affecting the other participants. Examples include but are not limited too excessive joking, talking and or heckling. General psychology students may receive extra credit for participation in this study.

Confidentiality: Your individual privacy will be maintained throughout this study by members of the research team. To preserve the confidentiality of your responses, we have a safe location to store all data located at the office of Dr. Alishia Marciano under the care of Gina Romano and Dr. Alishia Marciano on the Lynchburg College campus.

Whom to Contact with Questions: If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact Gina Romano at romano_g@lynchburg.edu. You can also contact my faculty research sponsor, who is the Principal Investigator (PI) for this project and is supervising my work on the study, marciano.a@lynchburg.edu The Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. This IRB currently does not stamp approval on the informed consent/assent documents; however, an approval number is assigned to approved studies – the approval number for this study is _____. You may contact the IRB Director, Dr. Alisha Walker Marciano, through the Office of the Vice President and Dean for Academic Affairs at Lynchburg College at 434.544.8266 or irb-hs@lynchburg.edu with any questions or concerns related to this research study.

Agreement: I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation in this research study answered. By signing below I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study described above and verify I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Researcher _____

Appendix B
Demographic Questionnaire

1. What gender do you identify as?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Transgender: Male to Female
 - Transgender: Female to Male
 - Other: _____
 - Prefer not to answer
2. What is your sexual orientation?
 - Heterosexual or straight
 - Homosexual or Gay/ Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Other: _____
3. How old are you? _____
4. How would you describe yourself?
 - American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Other: _____
5. Do you currently play a sport?
 - Yes
 - No
6. If Yes how would you describe this sport?
 - Collision/Contact- athletes purposely hit or collide with each other or with inanimate objects (including the ground) with great force
 - Limited Contact- athletes routinely make contact with each other or inanimate objects but usually with less force than in collision sports
 - Noncontact- contact with other athletes or with inanimate objects is infrequent or inadvertent

Appendix C

Joke Manipulation

Feminist Joke Condition

- Knock, knock! Who's there? Impatient feminist. Impatient fem— WHY DON'T WE HAVE EQUAL PAY YET?
- Knock, knock! Who's there? Annie. Annie who? Annie thing you can do I can do for eighty-seven cents on the dollar.
- Knock, knock! Who's there? Ice cream! Ice cream who? Ice cream right now if I could but then you'd say I was being hysterical.
- Knock, knock! Who's there? Roe v. Wade. Roe v. Wade who? Get out of my joke, Paul Ryan.
- Knock, knock! Who's there? Irish. Irish who? Irish I didn't have to tell knock-knock jokes to get my point across.

Neutral Joke Condition

- Psychiatrist: What's your problem? Patient: I think I'm a chicken. Psychiatrist: How long has this been going on? Patient: Ever since I was an egg!
- What do college students and deer have in common? They both stand in the middle of the road and stare at your headlights.
- Why did the hipster burn his tongue? Because he ate his food before it was cool?
- I have a few jokes about unemployed people; but none of them seem to work.
- Spring is here, I got so excited I wet my plants.

Sexist Joke Condition

- Why did the woman cross the road? Who cares? What was she doing out of the kitchen anyway?
- What do UFOs and smart men have in common? You keep hearing about them, but never see any.
- How many men does it take to clean a toilet? NONE-it's a woman's job.
- Is Google male or female? Female, because it doesn't let you finish a sentence before making a suggestion.
- What is the best thing about a blowjob? Ten minutes' silence.

Appendix D

URL for Videos: Auditory Condition

Feminist Joke manipulation: <https://youtu.be/FZtxYCfYLdc>

Neural Joke manipulation: https://youtu.be/_eJTOjDwaQM

Sexist Joke manipulation: <https://youtu.be/iLuV9um73yA>

Appendix E

Comprehension Questions Answer Key

Neutral

1. Psychiatrist: What's your problem? Patient: I think I'm a chicken. Psychiatrist: How long has this been going on? Patient: Ever since I was an egg!
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. **Mental illness**
 - b. Doctors
 - c. The importance of checkups
2. What do college students and deer have in common? They both stand in the middle of the road and stare at your headlights.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Deer
 - b. Headlights
 - c. **College student's attitudes about death**
3. Why did the hipster burn his tongue? Because he ate his food before it was cool?
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Tongues
 - b. **Hipsters being cool**
 - c. Food being hot
4. I have a few jokes about unemployed people; but none of them seem to work.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. **Unemployed people**
 - b. Jokes
 - c. Finding a job
5. Spring is here, I got so excited I wet my plants.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Wetting pants
 - b. **Watering plants from excitement**
 - c. The seasons

Feminist

1. Knock, knock! Who's there? Impatient feminist. Impatient fem— WHY DON'T WE HAVE EQUAL PAY YET?
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. **Women not having equal pay**
 - b. Interrupting
 - c. Knocking
2. Knock, knock! Who's there? Annie. Annie who? Annie thing you can do I can do for eighty-seven cents on the dollar.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Annie
 - b. Money
 - c. **Equal Pay**
3. Knock, knock! Who's there? Ice cream! Ice cream who? Ice cream right now if I could but then you'd say I was being hysterical.

- What is this joke about?
 - a. Ice cream
 - b. **Women being hysterical**
 - c. Screaming
- 4. Knock, knock! Who's there? Roe v. Wade. Roe v. Wade who? Get out of my joke, Paul Ryan.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Paul Ryan's stance on rowing
 - b. **Roe vs Wade**
 - c. Joking
- 5. Knock, knock! Who's there? Irish. Irish who? Irish I didn't have to tell knock-knock jokes to get my point across.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Knock-knock jokes
 - b. Irish
 - c. **Getting a point across**

Sexist

1. Why did the woman cross the road? Who cares? What was she doing out of the kitchen anyway?
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Usually chickens cross roads in jokes
 - b. **A woman's place is in the kitchen**
 - c. Highways
2. What do UFOs and smart men have in common? You keep hearing about them, but never see any.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. How smart aliens are
 - b. UFO sightings
 - c. **How dumb men are**
3. How many men does it take to clean a toilet? NONE-it's a woman's job.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. **Women are supposed to clean**
 - b. Household chores
 - c. Men don't know how to clean toilets
4. Is Google male or female? Female, because it doesn't let you finish a sentence before making a suggestion.
 - What is the point of this joke?
 - a. Google isn't gendered
 - b. Google suggests searches
 - c. **Women always interrupt**
5. What is the best thing about a blowjob? Ten minutes' silence.
 - What is this joke about?
 - a. Blowjobs are funny
 - b. **The best thing about blowjobs**
 - c. Ten minutes isn't a long time

Appendix F
Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.
2. When a girl gets raped, it's often because the way she said "no" was unclear.
3. If both people are drunk, it can't be considered rape.
4. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.
5. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.
6. Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.
7. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.
8. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.
9. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.
10. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she gets raped.
11. If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.
12. If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.
13. It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and doesn't realize what he was doing.
14. Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
15. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.
16. A rape probably doesn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.
17. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.
18. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.
19. If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape.
20. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often lead guys on and then had regrets.
21. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.
22. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.