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Updated Illinois rape myth acceptance scale: an item response theory analysis

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ABSTRACT

Many reasons have been proposed to explain why few sexual assaults are reported, including victim blaming attitudes. These attitudes are called Rape Myths and are used to move the blame from the perpetrators to the victim. The uIRMA is the most established rape myth acceptance measure. While the psychometric properties of the uIRMA are excellent, no studies have assessed the latent structure of the scale through Item Response Theory. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge on the psychometric properties of the uIRMA with non-binary individuals. Analyses were conducted on a sample of 1636 participants, composed of men, women and non-binary individuals. The uIRMA is discriminating adequately across genders and items. Furthermore, the difficulty level of corresponding items was lower for men than women and non-binary individuals, with men endorsing more Rape Myths at all levels. However, analyses revealed psychometric concerns with the use of the uIRMA among non-binary participants.

PRACTICE IMPACT STATEMENT

While recognising and addressing false beliefs about rape is central to the development of effective prevention and education strategies, the existing scales need to be updated to follow social changes. Moving toward the use of gender-neutral phrasings and measuring the different forms of sexual violence should help to encompass the complex nature of sexual violence and improve the psychometric properties of Rape Myths acceptance scales.

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Rape myths; item response theory; victim blaming attitudes; sexual violence; gender differences; non-binary individuals

Sexual violence: a dimensional construct

Sexual violence is defined as " any sexual act, attempt, unwanted comments, or advances directed against a person's sexuality using coercion by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting" (Beckett & Longpré, 2024). This over-arching theme encompasses a variety of unwanted sexual behaviours, ranging from sexual coaxing to sexual harassment, to sexual coercion, to rape, to sadistic rape to sexual homicide (Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020).

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Recent findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales reveal that approximately 2.3% of adults (3.3% of Women; 1.2% of Men) have been victims of sexual assault (including attempts) in the previous 12 months (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Furthermore, it is estimated that 16.6% of adults aged over 16 years old have experienced sexual assault (including attempts) since the age of 16 years, with 7.7% of women and .2% of men being victims of rape. The consequences of sexual violence are severe, leading to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Brown et al., 2009). Victims can also experience prolonged psychopathology, which can increase the risk of suicide attempts (McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Trottier et al., 2021).

As such, sexual violence has been the focal point of public discussion and research (Beckett & Longpré, 2024), with significant interest in more severe and extreme forms of sexual violence such as sadistic rape (e.g. Longpré et al., 2018) or sexual homicide (e.g. Stefanska et al., 2020). Despite separating the different forms of sexual violence into distinct legal entities, research supports that they are part of a single continuum of sexual violence, named the Agonistic Continuum by Knight, Longpré and colleagues (Knight, 2010; Knight et al., 2013; Longpré et al., 2020; Longpré et al., 2020; Longpré & Knight, 2025). Several studies, beyond the Agonistic Continuum terminology, have supported the presence of this continuum of sexual violence across populations and genders (e.g. Balcioglu et al., 2023; Trottier et al., 2021).

Rape myths

In recent years, the number of sexual offences reported has tripled in the UK, with 63,136 reported cases of sexual assault via penetration (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Similar increases are observed worldwide (e.g. France and Canada). Despite increasing reports of assaults, sexual violence remains highly underreported globally. In the UK, it is estimated that only 16% of adults who experienced rape or sexual assault by penetration report it to the police (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Victims have disclosed their reasoning behind not reporting assaults, including being accused of lying, stereotyped, and blamed (de Roos & Jones, 2022; Trottier et al., 2021).

Victim-blaming attitudes that minimise the severity of the sexual assault and shift responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim are defined as Rape Myths (RM; Bonneville & Trottier, 2022). Examples of RM include believing the victim is to blame if they were out late at night, flirting, wearing revealing clothing, or being intoxicated. Rape myth acceptance (RMA) has been linked with hookup culture (Reling et al., 2021), objectification of women (Seabrook et al., 2019), more lenient perceptions of harassment (Saravia et al., 2023), paraphilias (Snow & Longpré, 2025), and a greater likelihood of committing sexually violent behaviours (Beckett & Longpré, 2024; Bonneville & Trottier, 2022). RMA has also been linked to higher levels of victims' blaming and lower levels of perpetrators' blaming (Ostermann & Watson, 2024). The endorsement of RM is a form of cognitive distortion (Yapp & Quayle, 2018), which includes excuses, justifications, minimisation, rationalisations, denial, and stereotypes about rape. Cognitive distortion, or some of its components, has been associated with an increased risk of sexually violent behaviours (Knight & Sims-Knight, 2003; Malamuth et al., 2021), is a dynamic risk factor (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022), and is a central component of most developmental models of sexual violence (Longpré et al., 2020a).

RMA and their normalisation in society have negatively shaped responses of individuals, systems, and policies to sexual violence as well as victims' disclosure and have arguably impeded prevention efforts (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). For example, several accounts of sexual assault being covered up or downplayed by the Greater London Metropolitan Police, with leaked messages revealing that some officers were praising rapists and displaying RMA in WhatsApp groups. Such reports negatively impact victims' disclosure, increasing the Dark Figure of sexual violence and public distrust of the Criminal Justice System.

RM can also be internalised by victims, resulting in self-blame for the attack (Kennedy & Prock, 2018), which is predictive of long-term psychological distress, PTSD, and overall poor mental health outcomes. Previous studies have found gender differences in RMA, with men showing greater acceptance (Beckett & Longpré, 2024; Bonneville & Trottier, 2022). Research indicates that men are more likely to blame victims of sexual violence and be suspicious of disclosures (de Roos & Jones, 2022). This lack of victims' empathy and denial has been linked to an increased risk of committing sexually violent behaviours (Trottier et al., 2021). Furthermore, men who score higher on RMA are more likely to acquit rape defendants at trial (Lilley et al., 2023). Women also endorse RM (Trottier et al., 2021), however, it tends to be influenced by the presence of dark personality traits, such as psychopathic traits (Brewer et al., 2021; Willmott et al., 2024) and sadistic traits (Saravia et al., 2023). RMA among non-binary individuals is largely understudied, with participants excluded from sampling or analysis due to sample size (Trottier et al., 2021). However, preliminary research suggests that non-binary individuals present lower RMA than men (Olszewska et al., 2023).

Measures of rape myth acceptance

Burt (1980) created the first measure of RMA, the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS). Although widely used, the RMAS was criticised for using items that focused on the victims rather than perpetrators (e.g. "any healthy woman can resist a rapist if she really wanted to"; Payne et al., 1999). As the RMAS aged, the terminology and slang used, such as "petting" and "necking", became outdated, leading researchers to develop a new measure, the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA; Payne et al., 1999). The IRMA offered an improvement in psychometric properties over the RMAS (Thelan & Meadows, 2022) and showed predictive validity with men's rape proclivity and hostile sexism toward women (Chapleau et al., 2007). However, the IRMA also faced criticism, with some items making it apparent what it was intended to measure, increasing the effect of social desirability (Thelan & Meadows, 2022). As such, effort was directed into developing measures of RMA that would reduce this important measurement issue. For example, Gerger et al. (2007) and Courtois et al. (2021) developed and validated the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression Scale to improve the measurement of RMA.

The updated Illinois Rape Myth Scale (uIRMA; McMahon & Farmer, 2011) attempted to address some of the issues of the IRMA scale. The uIRMA employed modern slang used by university students. For some items, the word "rape" was replaced in favour of more subtle phrasing such as "sexual assault" and "nonconsensual sex". These changes were introduced to reduce the likelihood of participants reporting a lower endorsement of

RM than they held to appear socially desirable (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). In the original conceptualisation of the uIRMA, a 5-factor solution was proposed, with a separate factor measuring intoxication. However, most subsequent studies (e.g. Snow & Longpré, 2025) have used a 4-factor solution, which was supported by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Kazmi et al., 2024), with the three items measuring "intoxication" being merged with the items measuring the factor "He didn't mean to". This has led to some inconsistencies in the factorial structure and scoring used across studies.

Classical test theory vs. item response theory

Classical Test Theory (CTT) was developed to improve the psychometric properties of scales and tests. The psychometric properties of a scale are assessed by its validity and reliability, including indicators such as item-total and intra-item correlations and Cronbach's alpha. The psychometric properties of the uIRMA are overall well-known and include Cronbach's alpha ranging from very good to excellent, presenting good item-total and intra-item correlations and reporting excellent validity and reliability, across studies, samples, countries and genders (e.g. Bonneville & Trottier, 2022; Longpré et al., 2025; McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Saravia et al., 2023). In the original study, three items were found to be problematic (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). However, this was not found in other studies (e.g. Beckett & Longpré, 2024; Saravia et al., 2023), indicating this issue might be sample-related.

However, CTT has its limitations. All items are considered equals, with no item providing unique or specific information. The focus is either on the total score (i.e. the sum of all items) or the sub-factor scores. Furthermore, CTT does not provide any information on participants or the interaction between items and participants. Item Response Theory (IRT) was developed to assess item discrimination and difficulty and create sample-free measures (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). IRT models assume that an examined latent trait, called theta (θ), is unidimensional. In IRT modelling, a response to an item is influenced by both the qualities of the participant and the properties of the item. Thus, IRT models are less sensitive to the overall performance of the sample (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022; de Ayala, 2009). Furthermore, IRT models offer unique information for each item and participant. Essential to examining the structure of a scale using IRT is the establishment of its most important assumption, the unidimensionality of the latent trait (de Ayala, 2009).

Aims

To our knowledge, studies have yet to look at the uIRMA through IRT modelling, and little is known about each item's unique contribution. While each of the four subscale measures an independent area of RMA, factor and latent class analyses have supported that these subscales are part of a higher-order latent construct, namely RMA (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Thus, the uIRMA is considered a unidimensional measure and is suitable for IRT modelling. Furthermore, few studies have looked at RMA among non-binary, and no study has looked at the latent structure of the uIRMA among non-binary individuals through the lens of IRT.

Therefore, this study aims to conduct Two-Parameter Item Response Theory (2PL IRT) on the uIRMA. Based on previous studies, it is hypothesised that:

H1: The uIRMA will cover a wide array of difficulty levels, and discrimination parameters will be within the recommended thresholds.

H2: Overall, the difficulty level of corresponding items will be lower for men than women and non-binary, with men endorsing with more ease RM at all levels.

H3: Overall, the distribution of items on the difficulty parameter will be similar across genders, with items less endorsed by women and non-binary individuals also less endorsed by men.

Methods

Participants

This study's design and its analysis were not preregistered. The sample comprised $N = 1636$ participants, recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), professional social media platforms (i.e. LinkedIn & Twitter), and university through the SONA system. Participants were recruited from Canada, the USA, and the United Kingdom.

The sample was composed of women ($n = 896$, 54.8%), men ($n = 460$, 28.1%) and non-binary participants ($n = 280$; 17.1%). The mean age of participants was 30.10 years old (SD = 10.77; Ranges 18-85). Participants were predominantly Caucasian ($n = 1176$; 71.9%), heterosexual ($n = 1262$, 77.1%), in a relationship ($n = 953$, 58.3%), and had obtained at least an undergraduate degree (n = 898; 54.9%).

Procedure

This study received ethical approval from a university in South-West London. The distribution of the survey occurred in two waves. First, a pilot was conducted through social media, which did not offer participants monetary compensation. This pilot was conducted to ensure that the instructions were clear, to identify potential weaknesses in the survey, to examine participants' willingness to take part and to conduct preliminary analyses to identify unexpected problems. Following the pilot, the second wave of recruitment was conducted on MTurk, a crowdsourcing website where researchers can advertise research and find participants online in exchange for financial compensation, and SONA, a cloud-based participant management software which allows researchers to recruit participants in exchange for credits or monetary compensation. This tri-modal sampling method was used to have better representativeness of the general population and ensure a good sample size.

The consent form, socio-demographic questions, scales, and debrief form were added to Qualtrics and shared through a URL link. This allowed for complete anonymity, as respondents and researchers were never in contact. Participants received a consent form detailing the sensitive nature of questions and, upon completion, were provided with a full debrief with signposting to appropriate supports. Participants recruited from MTurk received monetary compensation (4 US$), while those recruited from SONA received 1.5 SONA credits.

Updated Illinois rape myth acceptance scale (McMahon & Farmer, 2011)

Derived from the 45-item IRMA scale, the uIRMA is a 22-item scale that measures harmful beliefs about rape that transfer blame from the perpetrator to the victim. This scale has four subscales, which depict the four overarching themes of RM: (1) She asked for it, (2) He didn't mean to, (3) It wasn't really rape, and (4) She lied. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert-style scale (1 – Strongly Agree, 2 – Agree, 3 – Neither, 4 – Disagree, 5 – Strongly Disagree). For the purpose of the analyses, items were recoded, with 1 becoming 5, and 5 becoming 1; a higher score meaning a higher endorsement of an item that should be more difficult to be endorsed. Example of items include "If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand".

Analysis

Two-parameter (2PL) Item Response Theory (IRT) analyses were conducted. Two-parameter IRT allows for items to vary in their locations (i.e. difficulty parameter) on the latent trait and in their ability to differentiate (i.e. discrimination parameter) between persons located at different points on the continuum (de Ayala, 2009). The visual representation of the relation between the ability score of a person and the probability that this person will endorse the item is called the item characteristic curve (ICC) and takes the form of an S-shape curve.

The first parameter, known as the difficulty parameter or beta (b), is the location of the inflexion point on the ICC. The b parameter usually varies from −3 to +3, where items located below 0 are considered easier to endorse, and items above 0 are considered more difficult to endorse (de Ayala, 2009). With a 5-point structure of items, b_1 is determined by the level at which the ICC passes through the 50 percentile of responding at Level 2, b_2 is the threshold at which the respondent has a .50 chance of endorsing the item at Level 3, b_3 is the threshold at which the respondent has a .50 chance of endorsing the item at Level 4 and b_4 is the threshold at which the respondent has a .50 chance of endorsing the item at Level 5.

The second parameter, known as the discrimination parameter or alpha (α), is the degree to which the item has the power to discriminate between individuals who have or do not have the corresponding b level of the latent trait. The discrimination parameter is measured by the angle of the slope of the point of inflexion of the ICC. A value of .3 and above should be interpreted as good; and a value of .6 and above be interpreted as very good (de Ayala, 2009). Analyses were conducted on the three subsamples and items were rescaled (Theta M = 0, SD = 1). Analyses were conducted with Mplus version 8.9 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2023).

Results

Unidimensionality: exploratory factor analysis

IRT modelling allows detection of multidimensionality in case of multiple latent dimensions, indicated by unstable results and weak model fit (de Ayala, 2009). The internal consistency was excellent for the full sample and sub-samples. To test the unidimensionality assumption, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal axis factoring and

OBLIMIN rotation was conducted. The EFA revealed eight factors that accounted for 53.61% of the variance. Although sub-factors were found, the subgroups are better conceptualised as differing along a continuum rather than having natural boundaries (Longpré et al., 2020).

The larger the amount of variance explained by the first component, the better the chances that the construct is unidimensional (de Ayala, 2009). The first factor accounted for 20.19% of the variance, and the second factor for 5.02%, with subsequent factors ranging from 3.88% to 1.02% of explained variance, which is considered trivial. Therefore, the EFA suggests that the scale satisfies the unidimensionality assumption.

Models fit

There are no absolute criteria for model-fit data in IRT (de Ayala, 2009). However, a variety of analyses can be conducted to guide our judgement. For small item numbers, the traditional chi-square test of model fit can be used. The small chi-squares indicate that the four models probably fit the data. However, since chi-square can be influenced by sample size, we also considered the Akaike information criteria and the Bayesian information criteria. Both measures indicate a good fit between the data and the different models. Finally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were respectively .98, .98 and .98 [Men, Women, Non-binary samples], and the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) were respectively .98, .98 and .98. Both CIFs and TLIs were over the recommended .95 across the four models, indicating stable unidimensional models and corroborating the prior conclusion supporting unidimensionality from EFA.

Two-parameter item response theory – men

The difficulty parameters for B_1 ranged from −1.51 (*Item 15*) to −2.62 (*Item 5; Item 9; Item 19*); B_2 ranged from −.11 (*Item 15*) to −.96 (*Item 5*); B_3 ranged from −.29 (*Item 5*) to .30 (*Item 1*) with seven items considered easier to endorse; and B_4 ranged from .59 (*Item 5*) to .90 (*Item 9*) with no items over 1. For more details, see Table 1.

A closer inspection revealed that the difficulty parameters patterns were similar across B levels, with a majority of items being easier for men to agree with, and no items being highly difficult to strongly agree with. Elements of initiation, lack of violence, lack of explicit non-consent, and men's ability to control sexual urges were easier to endorse, even at B_3 level. Discrimination parameters ranged from .67 (*Item 6*) to .93 (*Item 13*), which is in line with the recommended ranges.

Two-parameter item response theory – women

The difficulty parameters for B_1 ranged from −1.25 (*Item 14; Item 15*) to −1.83 (*Item 8*); the B_2 ranged from −.17 (*Item 6*) to .94 (*Item 14*), with only 3 items being over 0; the B_3 ranged from .40 (*Item 6*) to 1.33 (*Item 14*) and B_4 ranged from 1.48 (*Item 6*) to 2.10 (*Item 1*). For more details, see Table 2.

A closer inspection of the analysis revealed that women find it much harder than men to agree or strongly agree to items. Difficulty parameters for B_2 differed from B_1, all items were harder to endorse for women, with only 3 beta scores falling below 0 (*Item 6; Item 7; Item 21*).

Table 1. Men sample – item response theory item parameter estimates – rescaled item (Theta M = 0, SD = 1) – reverse coded.

	Items	α	b_1	b_2	b_3	b_4
IRMA 1	If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.	0.863	−2.223	−0.399	0.329	0.793
IRMA 2	When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.	0.888	−1.710	−0.329	0.226	0.734
IRMA 3	If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.	0.831	−2.225	−0.737	−0.175	0.601
IRMA 4	If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.	0.873	−1.757	−0.359	0.278	0.745
IRMA 5	When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.	0.721	−2.624	−0.956	−0.287	0.588
IRMA 6	If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex	0.674	−2.111	−0.922	−0.065	0.826
IRMA 7	When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.	0.751	−2.111	−0.842	−0.142	0.826
IRMA 8	Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.	0.766	−2.019	−0.737	0.011	0.811
IRMA 9	Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.	0.752	−2.624	−0.524	0.164	0.905
IRMA 10	If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.	0.841	−2.019	−0.356	0.120	0.681
IRMA 11	It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realise what he is doing.	0.845	−2.019	−0.512	0.153	0.737
IRMA 12	If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.	0.907	−1.874	−0.403	0.120	0.695
IRMA 13	If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape.	0.928	−1.813	−0.294	0.204	0.749
IRMA 14	If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.	0.912	−1.664	−0.193	0.249	0.664
IRMA 15	A rape probably didn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.	0.895	−1.512	−0.109	0.235	0.695
IRMA 16	If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.	0.816	−2.378	−0.627	−0.033	0.695
IRMA 17	If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.	0.804	−2.622	−0.919	−0.060	0.970
IRMA 18	A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agree to have sex and then regret it.	0.752	−2.223	−0.936	−0.060	0.854
IRMA 19	Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.	0.819	−2.624	−0.781	0.000	0.842
IRMA 20	A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.	0.761	−1.940	−0.637	0.137	0.988
IRMA 21	A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.	0.711	−2.378	−0.826	0.131	0.956
IRMA 22	Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.	0.723	−1.712	−0.299	0.098	0.709

The trend of increasing difficulty in endorsing items continued in B_3 and B_4. Among the women sample, items relating to intoxication (*Item 1*) and cheating (*Item 22*) were extremely difficult to endorse; while elements of initiation (*Item 6*) and men's ability to control sexual urges (*Item 8*) were easier (but still difficult) to endorse. Discrimination parameters ranged from .62 (*Item 6*) to .97 (*Item 14*), which is in line with the recommended ranges.

Two-parameter item response theory – non-binary

The difficulty parameters for B_1 for non-binary individuals ranged from −.37 (*Item 22*) to −1.28 (*Item 1*); B_2 ranged from −.20 (*Item 1*) to .98 (*Item 22*); B_3 ranged from .62 (*Item 8*) to

Table 2. Women sample – item response theory item parameter estimates – rescaled item (Theta M = 0, SD = 1) – Reverse Coded.

	Items	α	b_1	b_2	b_3	b_4
IRMA 1	If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.	0.938	−1.302	0.699	1.105	2.098
IRMA 2	When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.	0.939	−1.278	0.805	1.241	1.929
IRMA 3	If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.	0.784	−1.498	0.189	0.798	1.831
IRMA 4	If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.	0.931	−1.358	0.775	1.241	1.831
IRMA 5	When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.	0.712	−1.611	0.022	0.599	1.632
IRMA 6	If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex	0.622	−1.675	−0.166	0.400	1.481
IRMA 7	When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.	0.690	−1.723	−0.011	0.696	1.832
IRMA 8	Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.	0.625	−1.830	0.045	0.692	1.550
IRMA 9	Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.	0.713	−1.534	0.152	0.792	1.968
IRMA 10	If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.	0.896	−1.343	0.622	1.215	1.830
IRMA 11	It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realise what he is doing.	0.834	−1.415	0.435	1.026	1.893
IRMA 12	If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.	0.876	−1.331	0.732	1.172	1.803
IRMA 13	If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape.	0.959	−1.278	0.805	1.217	1.862
IRMA 14	If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.	0.968	−1.253	0.937	1.330	1.748
IRMA 15	A rape probably didn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.	0.956	−1.254	1.010	1.254	1.968
IRMA 16	If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.	0.834	−1.433	0.439	1.010	1.654
IRMA 17	If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.	0.800	−1.748	0.110	0.945	2.007
IRMA 18	A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agree to have sex and then regret it.	0.772	−1.674	0.000	0.788	1.861
IRMA 19	Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.	0.858	−1.631	0.287	1.149	1.862
IRMA 20	A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.	0.766	−1.553	0.214	0.956	1.553
IRMA 21	A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.	0.724	−1.651	−0.062	0.743	1.928
IRMA 22	Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.	0.772	−1.343	0.751	1.239	2.098

1.76 (*Item 22*); and a B_4 score was produced for only 6 of the 22 items. For more details, see Table 3.

A closer look at the analysis revealed that the majority of B_2 were over 0, suggesting that non-binary individuals found it harder to answer anything but strongly disagree to most items, and this trend continued for B_3. Furthermore, this endorsement was below the ranges of men and women for most items. The difficulty parameters for B_4 were obtained for only six items, and all betas were above 2, indicating that non-binary individuals found it significantly more difficult to strongly agree to any items. For all other items, not enough participants endorsed these items for Mplus to produce an output at B_4. Discrimination parameters ranged from .56 (*Item 6*) to .90 (*Item 13*) which is in line with the recommended ranges.

Table 3. Non-binary sample – item response theory item parameter estimates – rescaled item (Theta M = 0, SD = 1) – reverse coded.

	Items	α	b_1	b_2	b_3	b_4
IRMA 1	If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.	0.635	−1.282	−0.198	0.842	-
IRMA 2	When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.	0.828	−0.842	0.108	1.036	-
IRMA 3	If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.	0.820	−0.560	0.136	0.889	-
IRMA 4	If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.	0.825	−0.715	−0.009	0.862	2.447
IRMA 5	When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.	0.829	−0.484	0.272	1.068	-
IRMA 6	If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex	0.563	−0.867	−0.036	0.977	2.450
IRMA 7	When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.	0.751	−0.916	−0.063	1.063	-
IRMA 8	Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.	0.759	−0.862	−0.154	0.624	-
IRMA 9	Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.	0.734	−0.744	0.108	1.204	-
IRMA 10	If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.	0.795	−0.674	0.090	0.921	-
IRMA 11	It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realise what he is doing.	0.768	−0.581	0.209	1.002	-
IRMA 12	If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.	0.821	−0.587	0.366	1.168	2.450
IRMA 13	If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape.	0.896	−0.498	0.283	1.095	-
IRMA 14	If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.	0.869	−0.471	0.164	0.997	2.455
IRMA 15	A rape probably didn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.	0.850	−0.437	0.265	1.032	2.447
IRMA 16	If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.	0.783	−0.921	0.072	1.006	2.450
IRMA 17	If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.	0.706	−0.949	0.000	1.282	-
IRMA 18	A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agree to have sex and then regret it.	0.700	−1.277	0.045	1.095	-
IRMA 19	Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.	0.745	−1.032	0.081	1.319	-
IRMA 20	A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.	0.757	−1.036	0.018	0.977	-
IRMA 21	A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.	0.651	−1.168	0.000	1.368	-
IRMA 22	Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.	0.646	−0.366	0.977	1.756	-

Discussion

Overview

The present study aimed to conduct 2PL IRT on the uIRMA to further assess its psychometric properties. Analyses were conducted on a diverse sample composed of men, women and non-binary participants. Analyses revealed that while the uIRMA presents good psychometric properties and that no issues were found on the potentially problematic items (i.e. McMahon & Farmer, 2011), no items provide specific or unique information. This indicates that only the total score should be used. Furthermore, while the uIRMA is performing well among men and women sub-samples, results reveal that the

scale might not be suitable to be used with non-binary participants. These results have several implications and raise limitations in the use of the uIRMA among non-binary individuals.

Implications

Psychometric properties

As predicted, the overall psychometric properties of the uIRMA were overall very good. The discrimination parameter was excellent for each item, across men and women sub-samples, ranging from .62 to .97. However, while still within the recommended range, the discrimination parameters were lower in the non-binary sub-sample, with some alpha being close to .50. Furthermore, no items were problematic on the difficulty parameter across men and women sub-samples, but important issues were found in the non-binary sub-sample. These issues will be discussed below. Overall, these results support our hypothesis for the men and women sub-samples, but not for the non-binary sub-sample.

However, contrary to our hypothesis, the uIRMA does not cover a wide array of difficulty levels, with most items being relatively difficult to endorse at B_3 and B_4, especially among the women sub-sample, with no items reaching a B_4 over 1 in the men sub-sample, and three items reaching a B_4 over 2 in the women sub-sample. While previous studies have shown that the uIRMA presents strong psychometric properties, 2PL IRT analysis also revealed some limitations. No items in the uIRMA provide unique or specific information. As such, the uIRMA needs to be used as a total score scale instead of a Gutmann scale, where the endorsement of an item is not providing information on how the participant might respond to another item.

This is an important limitation of the uIRMA, as technically not all items should measure the same level of severity. For example, the item "If both people are drunk, it can't be rape" measures a different level of severity than the item "If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped". However, 2PL IRT did not reveal important quantitative differences between items on the difficulty parameters. With all items being considered equivalent, it is the total score, or the score on each sub-scale, that provides the relevant information. Therefore, the number of items is not linked to the validity of the scale, or its ability to assess RM, and a short version of the uIRMA could be sufficient to assess RMA.

Gender differences: men and women

Analysis revealed that women found it more challenging to endorse items on the uIRMA, with men showing greater endorsement at all levels, confirming the second hypothesis. This gender discrepancy is consistent with the body of research, which has shown men to exhibit greater RMA (e.g. Beckett & Longpré, 2024; Bonneville & Trottier, 2022; Longpré et al., 2025; Saravia et al., 2023). Research has highlighted several factors which may contribute to this discrepancy, including the fear among men of being falsely accused of sexual misconduct, which has been amplified by media reporting on rare cases of false accusations (de Roos et al., 2024). Such reporting can skew public perception and inflate the perceived risk, influencing men's responses to sexual assault accusations in the #MeToo era (Beckett & Longpré, 2024). Qualitative studies suggest that this fear

stems from men's concerns about misinterpreting social cues or failing to notice changes in consent during sexual encounters (Metz et al., 2021) and the blurred lines between consensual and coercive encounters in sexual scripts, such as misinterpreting accepting a drink or a dance as consent. However, items relating to evident physical injuries or clear verbal rejections that are inconsistent with scenarios of false accusations or misunderstandings were harder for men to endorse.

There was a partial contradiction of the hypothesis that difficulty parameters will be similar across genders, as men and women differed in their endorsement of elements of the "she lied" subscale. The "she lied" subscale of the uIRMA resonates with emerging narratives from men, forming part of the "not all men" stance. In the current study, men found it easier to endorse the myth that "rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys". Men's ease of acceptance can be explored through social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this theory, individuals feel a stronger affinity to their social groups, such as gender, when these groups are perceived to be under threat, potentially leading to the derogation of the out-group to maintain a positive self-image. This dynamic might explain why men endorse more easily myths portraying victims as deceitful, viewing lies and accusations as a threat to their gender group. This theory could also explain why women in this study easily rejected myths where the woman victim was painted as explicitly deceitful (e.g. excusing infidelity); perceiving a threat from stereotypes that paint them as manipulative might result in women defending their group's integrity by rejecting myths that align with these harmful narratives. This is partially in line with Ostermann and Watson's (2024) findings.

However, a similar trend in the distribution of some items on difficulty parameters was also observed. Both men and women displayed a tendency to endorse more easily myths related to the victim initiating physical intimacy and uncontrollable sexual urges in perpetrators. Specifically, both men and women found it easier to agree with the statement "If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex". This endorsement may be attributed to the fact that the statement does not explicitly mention rape or coercive behaviours, thereby lessening its perceived severity, making it easier to endorse. Additionally, this item aligns with traditional sexual scripts, which dictate expected behaviours, and the progression of sexual encounters with less intimate physical contact, such as kissing, being perceived as an invitation to escalate to more intimate activities. Therefore, this item could be seen as more of a reflection of societal narratives around consensual sexual activity rather than the approval of sexual assault, making it easier for participants to rationalise agreement with the item without directly confronting the severe implications of assuming consent.

Additionally, both genders found it easier to endorse the myth that "when men rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex". The framing of this item does not focus on whether the rape occurred or the victim's actions and, instead, may provide for some individuals a reason – albeit a misguided one – for why the perpetrator committed the act. The use of the word "usually" adds a layer of ambiguity, implying that while strong sexual desire might often be a contributing factor, it is not the definitive cause of such actions. This non-deterministic language may make it easier for some participants to agree with the statement, as it acknowledges a possible rationale but does not completely excuse the behaviour. This perspective might be perceived as less offensive compared to statements like "If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape", which directly undermines

the concept of consent and places undue focus on the victim's actions. These findings among samples of men and women suggest that the uIRMA is performing well and is suitable for use in such samples, but a further reflection on how rephrasing some items could help to improve the discrimination between items and improve ambiguous items.

Non-binary participants

Finally, as mentioned, 2PL IRT analyses revealed that the uIRMA might not be suitable with non-binary participants. While results on B_1 to B_3 followed a similar pattern to the women's sub-sample, with a slight trend toward a more difficult endorsement of each item and at each level, significant issues were observed on B_4. Analyses revealed that a B_4 score was produced for only 6 items. With a sample of $n = 280$ non-binary participants, the sample size was theoretically sufficient to lead to an endorsement of each level. For example, in Saravia et al. (2023), no issues were reported with sub-samples of $n = 69$ (woman) and $n = 97$ (men). Therefore, this psychometric issue is most probably not related to power issues, but with the use of the uIRMA with non-binary participants. While these results need to be replicated, since this study is the first to conduct 2PL IRT with a sample of non-binary participants, our study warrants that the uIRMA should not be used with non-binary individuals in its current form.

With all authors identifying as cisgender, further explanations could have potentially been impacted by unconscious gender bias. Therefore, early results were presented at two international conferences, and non-binary experts working in the field of sexual violence were asked to comment on the uIRMA. A consensus was that the uIRMA is gendered in its phrasing, with the use of words such as *girls* and *guys*, as well as the use of the pronouns *she* and *he*. Therefore, it is most probable that non-binary participants fail to see themselves as perpetrators or victims in the context covered by each item. Furthermore, social identity theory might also impact how non-binary participants react to the items. This is an important limitation and calls for more research involving non-binary researchers and participants. Similar to the previous work conducted to improve the RMAS, and later the IRMA, our results revealed that the uIRMA needs to be updated to follow social changes, and the use of gender-neutral phrasing might be needed. Sexual violence, while mostly committed by men toward women, is also present across all genders. Therefore, having gendered items is an important limitation.

Furthermore, in the UK, where an important proportion of the participants was gathered, rape is defined as a penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth of another person with a penis without consent. This definition only covers men who perpetrated sexual violence (and in some specific cases, female co-perpetrators) and ignores other forms of perpetration and victimisation. Previous studies have revealed that between 2.2% (official data) and 11.6% (self-report) of sexual offences are committed by women (Cortoni et al., 2017), between 5% and 10% of men have experienced some forms of sexual coercion from women (Beckett & Longpré, 2024), and gender minorities are reporting perpetration rates that are statistically equivalent to heterosexual men and victimisation rates that are equivalent to heterosexual women (Trottier et al., 2021). Therefore, moving away from the term *rape*, and using the term of *sexual violence*, as well as having gender-neutral items, should allow for covering the different forms of sexual violence and different perpetrators' and victims' genders, encompassing the complex nature of sexual violence. Future research should focus on the development of gender-neutral

items, allowing participants from all genders to self-identify with the items and the context depicted in each item, which in turn should improve the psychometric properties.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, the data were generated from self-reports, which are vulnerable to response biases, using an online survey with a self-selected sample. Although self-report provides access to more detailed information, responses may have been influenced by a need to appear socially desirable, leading to under endorsement of RM. Safeguards were used to protect against bias, including controlling for social desirability, voluntary participation, complete anonymity, analysing completion time, and excluding respondents who did not devote sufficient time to the survey, which has been shown to be effective in previous studies (e.g. Beckett & Longpré, 2024). Furthermore, our findings are consistent with previous literature, revealing good convergences across the study. However, future research should aim to replicate our findings using systematic and random sampling.

Secondly, while RMA increases the risk of being sexually violent or being a passive bystander, it is important to note that RMA does not automatically lead to sexual violence. Thus, results might differ if the analyses were conducted on a sample of individuals convicted of sexual violence. However, with less than 15% of rapes reported to the police, and an even smaller prevalence leading to conviction, sexually violent individuals are likely to be found in the general population. Therefore, our results should be interpreted accordingly and replicated.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to conduct 2PL IRT on the uIRMA. Analyses were conducted on a sample composed of men, women, and non-binary. Analyses revealed that while the uIRMA presents good psychometric properties, no items provide specific or unique information, and only the total score should be used. Furthermore, while the uIRMA is performing well among men and women sub-samples, results reveal that the scale might not be suitable to be used with non-binary participants.

This study is the first to conduct 2PL IRT on the uIRMA with a sample of non-binary participants, and these results need to be replicated. However, future research should focus on updating the uIRMA to incorporate social changes and develop gender-neutral items that encompass sexual violence rather than rape.

Open Scholarship

This article has earned the Center for Open Science badge for Open Materials. The materials are openly accessible at .

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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