# Examining Attitudes of High School Students toward Rape

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Studies show that at least one in four women will experience sexual assault during her time in school (through college)<sup>1</sup> and at least 80% of all acts of sexual assault are committed by someone the victim knows personally.<sup>2</sup> We wondered if this could be because attitudes that rape can be justified begin in high school. To investigate this, we chose to administer a survey regarding attitudes toward rape to students of Garfield High School. Additionally, we asked the students to indicate their gender, so that we could see if there were significant differences in the responses by gender.

To obtain a random sample of students, we used a systematic sampling method - we mapped a pathway through the school, randomly selected a starting point, and surveyed every fourth classroom from that point. We ended up administering 119 surveys, on paper. We wanted to survey this many students so that we could obtain statistically significant data about the student population, and we hoped there would be enough to have a significant representation of males and females too.

Since this survey regarded an upsetting topic, we told the students that they should not feel obligated to answer every question if any made them uncomfortable. We received every survey back, but not every question was responded to on every survey (we had about 115 - 118 responses to each question). When a question was not answered, we did not include that person in the data (if we gave a question to six people, and three answered yes, two answered no, and one did not respond, the proportion of people who responded "yes" would be recorded as three out of five). We also omitted a student's response if he/she circled more than one answer.

The following survey was administered:

Please respond to the following questions honestly and return this survey to your teacher by the end of the period.

Indicate your gender.

- Male
- Female
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Circle your responses to the following questions.

1. Do you think it is okay for Ryan to force Taylor (hypothetical names) to have sex with him/her if...

Taylor is wearing provocative clothing?	Yes	No
Taylor first said yes and then changed his/her mind?	Yes	No
Taylor is drunk or high?	Yes	No
Ryan has spent a lot of money on Taylor?	Yes	No
Ryan and Taylor have been dating for a long time?	Yes	No
Ryan and Taylor are in love?	Yes	No

2. How many rapes would you guess are falsely reported (the purported victim is lying about the rape)?

1	2	3	4	5
Very few	Less than half	About half	More than half	Most

## To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

3.	3. If Taylor is walking alone on the street at night and is raped, Taylor is partially to blame.				lly to blame.
	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.	If an alleged rape is b considered in the ve	prought to court rdict.	, the victim's clothing at	t the time of the	e crime should be
	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
E	If an allogod rang is h	arought to court	the victim's level of se	brioty (if bo/ch	owas drupk or high)

5. If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's level of sobriety (if he/she was drunk or high) at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

#### **Results:**

59 students checked "male," 59 checked "female," and one checked "other" (this equal number of males and females was coincidental). Because we did not have a significant number of students who checked "other," we did not record those statistics in a separate gender category, only including that student when tallying the total responses. In these results, we will show the number of females (F) who responded, the number of males (M) who responded, and the total number of respondents (A). Keep in mind that because there was an "other" gender category, A does not necessarily equal F+M.

We will show the percent of each category who responded to each answer for each question, rounded to the nearest integer (51.25% rounds to 51%).

We calculated a t confidence interval for only the A category in *one* part of question 1. All parts met the following conditions:

- the student responses were independent of each other,
- the students were selected with a (systematic) random sampling method,
- the sample size was less than 10% of the population (1900\*0.1 > 119), and
- there were at least 10 failures ("no" responses) for each question.

However, most did not have at least 10 successes ("yes" responses). Therefore, we only calculated a confidence interval for the one that did have at least 10 successes.

In the confidence interval (work shown in the footnotes), we rounded to the nearest tenth (51.25% rounds to 51.3%).

1. Do you think it is okay for Ryan to force Taylor (hypothetical names) to have sex with him/her if... *Taylor is wearing provocative clothing?* (F = 57, M = 56, A = 114) F: Yes = 0%, No = 100% M: Yes = 9%, No = 91% A: Yes = 4%, No = 96% Taylor first said yes and then changed his/her mind? (F = 59, M = 57, A = 117) F: Yes = 3%, No = 97% M: Yes = 7%, No = 93% A: Yes = 5%, No = 95% *Taylor is drunk or high?* (F = 59, M = 56, A = 116) F: Yes = 2%, No = 98% M: Yes = 7%, No = 93% A: Yes = 4%, No = 96% Ryan has spent a lot of money on Taylor? (F = 59, M = 56, A = 116) F: Yes = 0%, No = 100% M: Yes = 7%, No = 93% A: Yes = 3%, No = 97% *Ryan and Taylor have been dating for a long time?* (F = 58, M = 55, A = 114) M: Yes = 11%, No = 89% F: Yes = 5%, No = 95% A: Yes = 8%, No = 92% *Ryan and Taylor are in love?* (F = 58, M = 56, A = 115) F: Yes = 7%, No = 93% M: Yes = 13%, No = 87% A: Yes = 10%, No = 90%

We are 95% confident that between 9.5% and 10.5% of students at Garfield High School believe it is okay for a person to force their partner to have sex with them if they are in love.<sup>3</sup>

2. How many rapes would you guess are falsely reported (the purported victim is lying about the rape)?

1 (very few): F = 42%, M = 25%, A = 35%

- 2 (less than half): F = 25%, M = 40%, A = 32%
- 3 (about half): F = 24%, M = 24%, A = 23%
- 4 (more than half): F = 2%, M = 9%, A = 5%

5 (most): F = 7%, M = 2%, A = 4%

3. If Taylor is walking alone on the street at night and is raped, Taylor is partially to blame.

F = 59, M = 57, A = 117

1 (strongly disagree): F = 75%, M = 65%, A = 70%

2 (disagree): F = 14%, M = 19%, A = 16%
3 (neutral/unsure): F = 8%, M = 14%, A = 11%
4 (agree): F = 3%, M = 2%, A = 3%
5 (strongly agree): F = 0%, M = 0%, A = 0%

4. If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's clothing at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict.

1 (strongly disagree): F = 64%, M = 46%, A = 55% 2 (disagree): F = 9%, M = 18%, A = 13% 3 (neutral/unsure): F = 16%, M = 25%, A = 20% 4 (agree): F = 7%, M = 7%, A = 7%

5 (strongly agree): F = 5%, M = 5%, A = 5%

5. If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's level of sobriety (if he/she was drunk or high) at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict.

F = 57, M = 54, A = 112

- 1 (strongly disagree): F = 33%, M = 17%, A = 26%
- 2 (disagree): F = 23%, M = 19%, A = 21%
- 3 (neutral/unsure): F = 30%, M = 37%, A = 33%
- 4 (agree): F = 7%, M = 28%, A = 17%
- 5 (strongly agree): F = 7%, M = 0%, A = 4%

### School-Wide Results

Circle your responses to the following questions.

1. Do you think it is okay for Ryan to force Taylor (hypothetical names) to have sex with him/her if...

Taylor is wearing provocative clothing?	Yes: <b>4%</b>	No: <b>96%</b>
Taylor first said yes and then changed his/her mind?	Yes: <b>5%</b>	No: <b>95%</b>
Taylor is drunk or high?	Yes: <b>5%</b>	No: <b>95%</b>
Ryan has spent a lot of money on Taylor?	Yes: <b>3%</b>	No: <b>97%</b>
Ryan and Taylor have been dating for a long time?	Yes: <b>9%</b>	No: <b>91%</b>
Ryan and Taylor are in love?	Yes: <b>11%</b>	No: <b>89%</b>

2. How many rapes would you guess are falsely reported (the purported victim is lying about the rape)?

1	2	3	4	5
Very few	Less than half	About half	More than half	Most
34%	33%	23%	5%	5%

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	70%	16%	11%	3%	0%
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
3. If Taylor is walking alone on the street at night and is raped, Taylor is partially to blam					lly to blame.

4. If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's clothing at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
55%	13%	20%	7%	5%

5. If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's level of sobriety (if he/she was drunk or high) at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
28%	21%	31%	16%	3%



# Graphs showing actual numbers of respondents for questions 2 - 5:

"How many rapes do you think are falsely reported?" (Male response)



"How many rapes do you think are falsely reported?" (All responses)





\*If Taylor is walking alone on the street at night and is raped, Taylor is partially to blame.\* (Female response)



\*If Taylor is walking alone on the street at night and is raped, Taylor is partially to blame.\* (All responses)





"If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's clothing at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict." (Female response)

"If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's clothing at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict." (Male response)



"If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's dothing at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict." (All responses)





"If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's level of sobriety (if he/she was drunk or high) at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict." (Male response)



"If an alleged rape is brought to court, the victim's level of sobriety (if he/she was drunk or high) at the time of the crime should be considered in the verdict." (All responses)



#### Summary:

In general, this survey presented some worrying statistics about attitudes toward rape at Garfield High School. The results of question 1 are particularly concerning - the word "force" was clearly used in the title and the questions were clearly referring to an act of rape, yet as many as 10% of the respondents believed rape was acceptable in some cases. The results of question 2 also indicate a lack of knowledge about sexual violence - current studies show that only 2-8% of *reported* rapes are false,<sup>4</sup> and the number of false *accusations* are more than likely much smaller, given that it is estimated that only 36% of rapes are reported.<sup>5</sup> Though these estimates are difficult to obtain, the persistent belief that a large number of rape accusations are lies is almost certainly false, and creates a culture of accusing victims to be liars, making it very difficult for victims to obtain justice. It is evident that this false belief is present by the time students are highschool-aged, given that 33% of the students surveyed believed that half or more than half of rape accusations are lies. This leads us to believe that high schools need to implement mandatory programs educating students about sexual violence.

We are hesitant to draw conclusions about the responses to questions 4 and 5 of our survey because some confusion over the wording became evident as we administered them. Some students asked whether question 4 meant that the clothing would be considered for rips or DNA evidence, and some asked whether the hypothetical victim in question 5 had given consent while drunk or not. We intended question 4 to investigate whether students believed that a victim should be given less weight in court if her clothing was provocative, and in question 5, we assumed the victim had not given consent. However, it was too late to clarify these questions for everyone.

It also would have been helpful for us to block the survey by grade level. We did have students indicate their grade level, but we concluded that there were not enough students of each grade to calculate them separately. However, we did notice some clear trends in the responses among the grade levels. We had a high number of juniors in our sample, and our results may have turned out differently if we had equal numbers across the grades.

We would be interested to see a study like this conducted across schools state- or nation-wide, with better-worded questions that could investigate the questions of alcohol and attire. Seattle is a progressive state in general in terms of sex education, so we would hypothesize that the results nationwide would be even more worrying, and present an even clearer need for high school sexual assault education programs.

#### Footnotes

1: Hirsch, Kathleen (1990). "Fraternities of Fear: Gang Rape, Male Bonding, and the Silencing of Women." Ms., 1(2) 52-56.

2: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001.

3: n = 115; p = 0.1; x avg = np = 11.5; S = sqrt (0.1\*115(1-0.1)) = 3.217; t interval = (10.906, 12.094)

- 4: Washington Post, 2013.
- 5: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000.