

**Centennial Honors College  
Thomas E. Helm Undergraduate Research Day 2024**

**ABSTRACT**

Major: Psychology

Poster

Faculty Mentor(s): Kathy McGuire

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**The effect of gender and extralegal factors in sexual assault investigations.**

**Kit Denzler**

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The present study explores the effect of extralegal factors and a victim's gender on arrest decisions and perceptions of victim credibility in sexual assault cases. Previous literature applying the focal concerns theory to sexual assault investigations has found certain factors that are more influential than others, broadly categorized as legal and extralegal. Legal factors are aspects of the crime related to its legal definition whereas extralegal factors are rooted in societal beliefs (Venema 2019). This study investigates two extralegal factors: victim alcohol use and victim sex work occupation. This study also seeks to understand how perceptions of male and female victims interact with these extralegal factors. Additionally, differences in rape myth acceptance for male and female victims using the revised Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale by McMahon & Farmer (2011) are explored. This vignette study utilizes a 2 (Victim gender: male or female) x 3 (Extralegal factor: none, victim alcohol use, victim sex work occupation) between-subjects design. The results showed that there were no main effects or interactions for victim gender or extralegal factor but there was a negative correlation between rape myth acceptance and victim credibility. The implications of this study add to the literature on the effect extra-legal factors have on these investigations. Additionally, the findings add to the sparse literature on the perception of male victims of sexual assault, including rape myth acceptance towards this population.