“I shouldn’t have to worry about being raped”: Attitudes and Beliefs about Sexual Assault Among College Students

by

Adrienne Baldwin-White

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Jill Messing, Chair
Lela Ranking Williams
Nada Elias-Lambert

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ABSTRACT

One in five college women report being sexually assaulted (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015) with college being the time when men are more likely to commit a sexual assault (Burgess, 2007). Victimization detracts from their college experience, leading to poor academic performance or less institutional commitment. College women who are victims of sexual assault are also at a higher risk of participating in risky sexual behavior. To reduce the prevalence of sexual assault at universities, it is important to develop effective prevention programs that can target and change attitudes and beliefs that contribute to the continued perpetuation of sexual violence on college campuses. Although there are multiple studies that examine the perspectives of sexual assault among college students, specifically rape myths, the majority of that research is quantitative and does not provide an in depth understanding of their beliefs and the potential factors that contribute to those beliefs. The purpose of this study was to provide an in depth analysis of the attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault among college students.

Twenty-five female and 20 male college students participated in semi-structured focus groups or interviews. Open coding was used to gain an understanding of their beliefs concerning sexual assault. Results demonstrated that students possess multiple and often contradictory beliefs about sexual assault and issues that contribute to those beliefs that can be addressed and changed using sexual assault prevention. Three of those broad themes included barriers to talking about sexual assault, social and cultural norms that contribute to sexual assault and how college students communicate their sexual needs

and desires, including consent. This research reveals that researchers and advocates do not have a complete understanding of perspectives of sexual assault among college students. Prevention programs may have been developed based on incomplete information and assumptions about what college students believe. Therefore, this study provides information that can be used to develop intervention programs that specifically target the most relevant ideas about sexual assault that are most relevant to the experiences of college students.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault is a much more serious problem than is generally acknowledged (Adams, 2005) with the Department of Justice reporting an estimated 323,450 sexual assaults by victims age 12 and older in 2016 (Department of Justice, 2017). The prevalence rate for sexual assault is most likely an underestimate considering sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). Sexual assault is legally defined as any sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Behaviors considered sexual assault include activities such as forced sexual intercourse, fondling and attempted rape (Department of Justice, 2017).

Sexual assault has far-reaching implications for public and individual health, with long-term physical and mental health consequences (National Institute of Justice, 2007). Survivors report experiencing depression and anxiety (Yuan, Koss & Stone, 2011). Sexual assault victims are 13 times more likely to commit suicide than those who have never been victimized (National Institute of Justice, 2007). Survivors are also more likely to experience other psychological problems such as obsessive-compulsive behaviors, increased anger, and hostility (Resick, 1993) and increased likelihood of substance use problems (Resick, 1993; Cahill, 2001; Turchik & Hassija, 2014). Sexual assault may also lead to sexual dysfunction (Resick, 1993; Postma et al., 2013; Turchik & Hassija, 2014) and affect women's sexual health risk taking behaviors (Campbell & Wasco, 2005). Survivors also reported anxiety and fear after the incident (Resick, 1993); and a mistrust of people (Cahill, 20010029)

Sexual Assault on College Campuses

College-age women are more likely to be sexually assaulted than any other age group (National Institute of Justice, 2000) with one in five college women reporting being sexually assaulted while attending a university (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). The most vulnerable of college students are undergraduate female students (Raphael, 2013); 84% of college victims report being sexually assaulted during their first four semesters of college (Campus Sexual Assault Study, 2007). College is also the time when men have the greatest likelihood to commit sexual assault; 23% of college men reported committing acts that meet the definition of sexual assault and 35% reported some proclivity towards sexual assault if they could be assured they would not get caught (Burgess, 2007). Female college students are less likely to report a sexual assault compared to non-students and are also more likely to believe that a sexual assault is a personal matter and not serious enough to report (Department of Justice, 2014).

Victims on college campuses experience similar psychological effects as the broader population, including increased risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation (Change et al., 2015). However, sexual assault has a unique and profound impact on college women, including detracting from the quality of their college experience (Fisher et al, 2010). Victims may have difficulty resuming their regular daily activities. Research has demonstrated that college women who have experienced sexual assault perform poorly academically (Banyard et al, 2017) and may not be able to carry a full course load or contribute to the campus community (American Association of University Professors, 2012). They are more likely to drop classes, have lower academic efficacy, lower

institutional commitment, and higher stress (Banyard et al., 2017). College women who experience sexual assault are at an increased risk for engagement in risky health and sexual behaviors such as sleeping with multiple partners or inconsistent use of contraception (Turchik & Hassija, 2014). They are also more likely to develop an eating disorder or posttraumatic stress disorder (American Association of University Professors, 2012).

Current prevention methods may not be using effective strategies to prevent sexual assault; college women are just as likely to be sexually assaulted as they were 10 years ago (Department of Justice, 2014). It is important to make sure the most effective programs and approaches are being utilized to educate college students about sexual assault, how it can be prevented and encourage college students to participate in healthy non-violent sexual relationships. Effective prevention programming can be targeted to the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that lead to the continued perpetuation of sexual violence. Programs can seek to address barriers to discussing and preventing sexual assault, change the social and cultural norms that potentially influence beliefs about sexual violence and understand how college students communicate about sexual intimacy, including how they give and know they have received consent.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

Feminism is a progressive movement that challenges the idea that a woman's fate is determined by her gender (Hooks, 2000a), or archetypes and expectations imposed on her because of her gender. Therefore, feminism provides an excellent framework for

exploring and analyzing beliefs about sexual assault that may be based on gender normative expectations of behavior. Feminists coined the term "personal is political" to stress that women's lives are shaped by the political and social context in which they live. To understand women's experiences of discrimination, exploitation, or oppression, it is imperative to understand the systems that shape women's experiences (Hooks, 2000a); the systemic issues that influence how women experience their lives. Feminism seeks to end sexist oppression and the patriarchal structure that allows for the domination of women (Hooks, 2000a). This patriarchal structure has led to the development and enforcement of sexist beliefs and prescribed gender roles (Ward, 1995) that serve to restrict a woman's behavior. One of the ways men dominate women is through the threat and perpetration of violence, including sexual assault.

The issue of sexual assault cannot be discussed as an isolated, nonsystemic incident and cannot be eradicated by simply addressing individual deficiencies. The focus on individual deficiencies leads to the creation of certain misperceptions and stereotypes about the characteristics of perpetrators (e.g. they are psychopathic and sick) and survivors (e.g. they should immediately report the incident, have strong emotional reactions, and have physical scarring and bruising). Therefore, to reduce the prevalence of sexual assault, it is important to address the social constructs within the patriarchal system that contribute to its perpetration (Anderson, Beattie & Spencer, 2001). Women cannot have equality and equal opportunity until all the social rules and norms that restrict, oppress, and dominate women are eliminated.

Social mores create the perception that women can only be sexually fulfilled if they are passive and accept male domination (Friedan, 2010). This aspect of femininity leads to the acceptance of ideas that support the idea that women should be flattered and grateful a man wants them, and therefore enjoy sex in all circumstances, including assault. Women have been socialized to believe that their sexuality must be pursued for them to have value; and their existence is only validated through their ability to please a man (Friedan, 2010). Society also gives women mixed messages about their sexuality. Although a woman is supposed to be virtuous and passive, a woman must also be sexually available (De Beauvoir, 2010). These contradictory standards are detrimental to women. Being overtly sexual leaves women open to being sexually assaulted. But if a woman remains too pure and virtuous, she will not be able to get a man; and a woman's value depends solely on her relationship with men (Friedan, 2010). The standard of being mutually pure and sexually available contributes to the maintenance of rape supportive beliefs. Behavioral expectations are not about safety but rather control.

The behavioral expectations and standards by which women are supposed to abide support rape myths. Rape myths are prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists that create a climate that is hostile to rape victims (Burt, 1980). They are a complex set of cultural beliefs that perpetuate and support male violence against women (Aronowitz, Lambert & Davidoff, 2012) and maintain that it is acceptable for men to be sexually aggressive. Therefore, it is culturally acceptable for men to seek sex and gain it through any means necessary Women are supposed to have

sex with men even when they do not want to because women are primarily sexual objects (Hooks, 200b).

Some have argued that the current epidemic of sexual assault on college campus is simply fiction created by those with a political agenda and is merely a social construction rather than an objective reality (Fisher et al., 2010). Rape myths reinforce this idea that sexual assault is over-reported, and incidents exaggerated. Because these myths insist it is socially acceptable and demanded that men demand sex and women oblige, by social gender norms and expectations, sexual assault does not happen often because a woman will always consent to sex with a man. These same gendered behavioral expectations also dictate how women should act in certain situations (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). These norms and standards ensure women will behave according to certain standards to prevent them from being assaulted. In a way, sexual assault is a form of punishment for a woman making choices that are not conducive to prescribed gender roles and situational expectations. If a sexual assault were to occur, these same myths determine how a woman should behave to be believed and receive adequate help. Rape myths represent a game women must play to receive justice and assistance from a system that is based on male perceptions and ideas.

According to theory, women are not expected to be bold, articulate, and assertive (Spence & Buckner, 1995); those traits are considered masculine and women should not act like men (Spence & Buckner, 1995; Friedan, 2010). Women should not do things socially ascribed to men like drinking in public or getting drunk. Women should not be open about their sexuality. Therefore, if women behave according to proper social norms,

they will not be sexually assaulted. Requiring that women behave according to trivial and needless standards perpetuates victim blaming by implying that criminals are simply responding to women's choices to act more like men and abandon their feminine role in society. Men can commit acts that degrade women without tarnishing their image as a man; degrading women is presented as an essential part of being a man. When men commit a sexual assault, they are excused for being men.

Attribution Theory

College students must navigate new experiences in college, including how to feel safe in the face of potential violence. For women, the threat of sexual violence may prevent them from taking risks and partaking in new experiences. Therefore, attribution theory suggests that, to thrive and not be dictated by the fear of sexual assault, students endorse rape myths. They serve the purpose of being psychologically protective. Rape myths provide a sense of certainty and the crime of sexual assault no longer seems random. They provide a sense of control by identifying the certain factors and variables that would lead to a sexual assault. Attribution Theory explains the need for this certainty and environmental control. Attribution Theory is a collection of ideas about the cognitive processes people rely on to make sense of the world. The Just World hypothesis is one conceptual framework of Attribution Theory and the most relevant to understanding the acceptance of rape myths (Ward, 1995). This theory is based on the idea that there is a need for individuals to perceive their environment as controllable. Therefore, the attribution of rape responsibility to situational and manipulated causes, even if they are

unstable, helps individuals gain a sense of command over their environment (Ward, 1995).

The basic assumption of the Just World Theory is that individuals get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Ward, 1995). Individuals feel less vulnerable and more in control of their own lives if they can generate explanations based on blameworthy behaviors and can distinguish themselves from the victim of rape (Ward, 1995). Women do not have to worry about being raped if they abide by certain standards; and men do not have to worry about being accused of rape if the sexually violent act occurred under certain circumstances. Women who do not abide by these social rules are to blame for the incident because they have left themselves vulnerable to assault by the choices they have made. The Just World Theory provides an explanation that is in line with feminist ideals; it takes into consideration the social and cultural influence that shapes attitudes and beliefs about rape. The Just World Theory offers a reason for the acceptance of those beliefs rooted in the context of individual experiences.

Feminism is essential in eliminating rape myths because it works to change the rape culture that sees sexual assault as a random act of violence; not a symptom of a society that teaches men to look at women as less than human (Valenti, 2007). Rape culture condones rape. Rape culture is a misogynistic set of cultural values and beliefs that provide an environment that is conducive to rape (Boswell & Spade, 1996) by supporting the objectification of, and violent sexual abuse of women (Burt, 1980; Shin, Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape culture blames women and does not treat rape like a social and cultural problem; ignoring all the issues, beliefs and attitudes that contribute to

the perpetration of rape. It is a culture of intimidation that keeps women afraid of being attacked and censors their behavior (Buchwald, 2005).

Adolescent Development: Decision-Making

Adolescent development must be considered when attempting to understand the attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault considering substantial brain development is still occurring when young people typically enter college (Blakemore & Choudry, 2006). Therefore, theories about adolescent development, particularly those pertaining to decision-making, can provide a framework for understanding the reasons why young adults may adhere to certain beliefs about sexual assault. Decision-making theories focus on the processes that people follow in order to maximize their well-being, considering their own beliefs and values (Furby & Beyth-Marom, 1992). There are multiple theories that examine how adolescents make decisions and the factors that influence the decisions they make, specifically why they participate in risky behavior (Furby & Beyth-Marom, 1992). Each of these theories is based on different assumptions, including the ideas that adolescents do not understand the risks associated with their behavior, are extremely susceptible to peer pressure despite having accurate and thorough information, or that risk taking is simply about choosing between alternatives (Furby & Beyth-Marom, 1992).

One way to understand decision making as it pertains to sexual assault is to look at it from the perspective of analyzing costs and benefits; specifically, to understand why men choose to perpetrate sexual assault. Previous research has demonstrated that perceived cost, compared to high benefit, may be more important in understanding a person's decision to participate in certain behaviors (Gordon, 1996). People will make the

choice that benefits them the most (Commendador, 2003). Therefore, young adults may see that men are not held responsible for perpetrating a sexual assault (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, 2015) and therefore choose to perpetrate violence because there is a low risk of any negative consequences or danger to themselves. For young men, the high benefit of sexual intimacy, a desire potentially dictated by social norms of what it means to be a man, and the low cost of being caught, reported to police or administrators (Department of Justice, 2013), could lead to the perpetration of sexual assault

Cognitive limitations may prevent adolescents from being able to accurately predict the costs and benefits of certain actions and take steps to gain the proper information in order to make less risky decisions (Bender, 2008). Decision-making may also be dictated by the knowledge a person has and their ability to draw upon that knowledge in a particular situation (Gordon, 1996). If college students have never been told what a sexual assault is, how to have healthy sexual relationships, how to identify a consensual sexual situation or identify the gender and social norms that dictate their behavior, they may be more likely to perpetuate or be victims of sexual violence. Also, their endorsement of certain rape myths could be the result of lacking accurate and factual knowledge to combat those false attitudes and beliefs that can lead to certain behaviors.

Perpetrators may commit sexual assault due to their egocentric focus during young adulthood. The personal fable refers to the story adolescents tell themselves about their own experiences compared to others. These fables typically include beliefs of being invulnerable or immortal (Gordon, 1996). This focus on the self could have two

implications when understanding sexual assault. First, their belief that they are invulnerable, along with the low cost of perpetrating sexual violence, may increase likelihood of committing a sexual assault because they do not believe they will be punished. Secondly, their personal fable may allow them to believe that sexual assault is not a problem on college campuses and they are not at risk of perpetrating or being victims of an assault.

Future expectations may also be related to their belief that a sexual assault will not happen to them. Adolescent behavior is often dictated by how much they expect an event to actually occur (Sipsma, Ickovics, Lin & Kershaw, 2015). Because a sexual assault may not have happened to them or disclosed by someone close to them, they may not believe that it is a pervasive issue. Expectation also relates to the previously mentioned low likelihood of being punished; men may perpetuate sexual assault because they do not expect to be reported to authorities and be punished for their actions.

Mature judgments require self-reliance and a healthy sense of autonomy. Adolescents do not possess these qualities and therefore, may be ill-quipped to make decisions. (Commendador, 2003). The lack of mature judgement is related to multiple aspects of the perpetuation of sexual violence. A lack of sound judgment could lead men to participate in sexually aggressive behavior, women to say yes to sex when they do not want to participate in sexual activity, or allow students to participate in other risky behaviors (i.e. substance use) that increase the risk of sexual violence.

Self-efficacy may also play a part in adolescent decision-making. Self-efficacy theory states that the more confident someone is in their ability to enact a certain

behavior, the more likely they are to engage in that behavior. This confidence requires a level of self-awareness adolescents do not have (Mcdermott, 1998). Therefore, women may not feel empowered to give or not give consent due to their lack of confidence in their ability to convey their needs and desires. This lack of confidence could also prevent men and women from deviating from socially accepted expectations that dictate acting aggressively and accepting aggressive behavior as the norm, instead of participating in healthy sexual relationships that require what may be novel behavioral interactions.

A lack of formal reasoning may prevent an adolescent from understanding the effect of sexual assault on a victim. Formal reasoning allows an individual to understand how their actions lead to certain outcomes and consequences, and adopt the perspective of another person (Commendador, 2003). Therefore, men may not understand how their sexual aggressive behaviors could lead to violence and ultimately a victim experiencing negative mental health effects of trauma.

Men may also commit sexual assault due to unrealistic perspectives of the behaviors their peers participate in (Chein, Albert, O'Brien, Uckert & Steinberg, 2011). They may believe that their peers are engaging in sexually aggressive activity and therefore participate in the same behaviors to belong to that peer group. Women may also be participating in unwanted sexual activity due to the same misperceptions of their peers. They may believe that it is a typical part of the socialization process to engage in sexual activity, even if it is something that makes a woman feel uncomfortable. The mere presence or encouragement of activity by their peers could desensitize them to the potential negative consequences of their decisions (Chein, Albert, O'Brien, Uckert &

Steinberg, 2011). The testing of waters, pushing of boundaries and going outside of a person's comfort zone can be viewed as a part of growing up and therefore behavior they should be participating in to prove they are an adult.

Adolescence and young adulthood is also a time when developing intimate relationships is important (Paul & White, 1990). Their desire to develop intimate relationships may override any other factors that could deter them from participating in risky behavior (Gordon, 1996). Therefore, women may be willing to participate in intimate acts that are not consensual to maintain friendships or romantic relationships. The influence of a partner also plays an important role in decision making (Commendador, 2003). Women may believe that being in a romantic relationship obliges them to participate in sexual activity if it is something their partner wants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Rape Culture

Sexual assault is not simply an individual problem but rather a social problem (Chapleau & Oswald, 2014) and social and cultural norms contribute to the perpetration of sexual violence. It does not occur in social or cultural isolation; we live in a rape prone culture (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral, 2009). One way that society sustains rape culture is through the perpetuation of rape myths. Rape myths serve to support rape culture by providing mechanisms through which sexual assault can be excused, women can be blamed, and the traumatic effects of sexual assault minimized (Gavey, 2005). Rape myths may also serve a larger social purpose by providing a common-sense resource for making sense of sexual assault (Anderson & Doherty, 2008) by providing situational, environmental, and individual factors that could lead to a sexual assault (Gavey, 2005).

There are multiple rape myths about the act of sexual assault that support rape culture. Sexual assault is often not considered a serious problem (Orton, 2005). Rape is often misinterpreted as merely unwanted sex rather than a life-threatening traumatic event (Resick, 1993) and some individuals minimize the harm it imposes (Cahill, 2001). One myth is the prevailing belief in "real rape." "Real rape" is often described as a stranger raping a woman at night in a dark alley. The perpetrator uses a weapon and is extremely violent (Estrich, 1987). This stereotype does not correspond to the typical circumstances of a sexual assault, particularly for college students. This stereotype has many detrimental effects, including that studies have shown that women who are raped by acquaintances, or anyone they have had a prior relationship with, are more responsible

for the incident than those raped by a stranger. A stranger rape is seen as more serious and more psychologically distressful (Ward, 1995; Bieneck & Krahe, 2011).

In addition to myths about the act of sexual assault, there are also myths about victims of sexual assault. One type of rape myth is that women are to blame for their own victimization. The victim blaming narrative holds women responsible for men's behavior and (Ward, 1995) and presents sexual assault as a result of women deviating from social behavioral expectations (Haywood & Swank, 2008). When women disclose they have been sexually assaulted to someone they know, an administrator or the police, they are asked what they did to contribute to their own victimization or to provoke the incident (i.e. the way they dressed, drinking, etc.) instead of being shown compassion or empathy (Anderson & Doherty, 2008). Women are supposed to conform their behavior to certain patriarchal standards. Women who are judged to be acting outside of those standards or participating in careless behaviors, such as leaving a car unlocked or walking late at night alone, are more likely to be blamed for a rape (Ward, 1995).

Rape culture has led to the establishment of standards that indicate a credible victim. When a woman reports a sexual assault, her credibility is immediately questioned (Raphael, 2013), especially when alcohol is involved. One rape myth that has evolved from the interaction between sexual assault and alcohol is the double standard when alcohol is involved in a sexual assault depending on who was consuming alcohol. When a woman consumes alcohol and is sexually assaulted, she is deemed more responsible for the sexual assault. However, when a perpetrator has been drinking he is deemed less responsible. It is suggested that if it had not been for the alcohol, the individual would not

have perpetrated the assault and he was not aware of what he was doing (Baldwin-White & Elias-Lambert, 2016).

Another rape myth connected to the credibility of a victim is that she must report the assault (Estrich, 1987). Most sexual assault victims do not report a sexual assault (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). Those who do not report state that their reasons include not wanting family and friends to know, they lack proof, fear of bad treatment from police, uncertainty about reporting procedures and not being sure the incident was serious enough (Raphael, 2013). A credible victim must also be emotional when reporting the incident (Ward, 1995). Because of the skepticism they may experience if they wait or if they respond to trauma in a non-expected way, women may not report they have been sexually assaulted. Women are also less likely to report if they know or were in a relationship with the perpetrator (MacKinnon, 2001). A woman may blame herself for not recognizing what she would perceive to be signs that this person would hurt her. She may also believe that being in a relationship establishes a permanent consent and that consenting in the past implies that her partner has continued access to sex (MacKinnon, 2001).

Because victims are often criticized and blamed for an assault, perpetrators are not held responsible for their actions. This lack of accountability is connected to the social norm that men are expected to be sexually aggressive and violent (Byers, 1996). This particular rape myth supports the idea that it is rational for a man to give into his sexual desires (Pineau, 1989). Men are excused for their sexual aggressiveness because men are simply exhibiting masculine traits. However, this perspective is detrimental to

men by suggesting they are innately sexual aggressors who lack the human agency to control their behaviors. From this perspective, male sexual aggression is normal, and it is the responsibility of women to cope with it (Filipovic, 2008; Fisher et al., 2010).

Even though false rape claims are comparable to other crimes, critics have fabricated a social problem of false accusations (Ward, 1995; Raphael, 2013). The myth of an epidemic of false accusations leads to doubting women when they make an accusation of rape without iron clad evidence. The problem with this approach is that often there is not iron clad evidence (Raphael, 2013). Critics argue that these false accusations destroy the lives and reputations of innocent men without any repercussions for the women who make them (Raphael, 2013); innocent men need to be protected (Ward, 1995). There is a persistent image of the lying and deceitful woman who fantasizes about rape and then regrets participating in that fantasy. She then makes a false accusation (Estrich, 1987).

There is a connection between a belief in rape myths and the continued perpetration of sexual assault. Women who hold rape myths are less likely to report sexual assault (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Heath et al., 2013) as women may believe these myths apply to them (Buddie & Miller, 2001) or they will not be believed when reporting an incident of sexual assault by officials who endorse rape myths (Sable et al., 2006). Studies have also shown that rapists are more accepting of rape myths and less likely to perceive sexual assault as violent. Rapists were twice as likely to have victim blaming beliefs, discuss women's contributory behaviors and justify the brutality of the incident (Ward, 1995). The lack of reporting by victims due to shame and embarrassment

encourages the behavior of perpetrators, perhaps unintentionally condoning the behavior (Adams, 1993).

Previous research has stated that, overall, college students do not possess or support rape myths and score low on rape myth acceptance scales (Baldwin-White & Elias-Lambert, 2016). Previous research would imply that college students would not endorse rape supportive beliefs. Better-educated individuals are more likely to have lower levels of rape myth acceptance (Haywood & Swank, 2008). College itself can be liberalizing (Haywood & Swank, 2008) and potentially promote feminist ideas. Higher levels of education are also associated with the rejection of the notion that a woman's behavior leads to a sexual assault and an acceptance of sexual assault as a violent act (Ward, 1995). Research has also shown that younger adults are more concerned with changing social attitudes and demonstrate a greater awareness of issues surrounding sexual assault. Younger adults are also more likely to see sexual assault as an act of violence (Ward, 1995). All these factors would indicate that college students, as a whole, would be a population least likely to believe rape myths.

However, further analysis has demonstrated that college students do endorse certain rape myths but are not overt in their acceptance of these rape supportive beliefs; for example, students would not directly blame a victim for an assault, but rather express the belief that women put themselves in bad situations, such as dressing a certain way, that may lead to a sexual assault (Deming et al., 2013). College students also indicated there were situations where men should not be held completely accountable for a sexual assault. For example, if the man was drinking alcohol or intoxicated (McMahon, 2010).

Because college students are at high risk of perpetrating or becoming victims of sexual assault, it is especially important to understand these rape myths and the factors influencing rape myth acceptance. Changing these beliefs may be an important step to reduce the perpetration of sexual assault.

Defining Sexual Assault

One of the possible barriers to properly addressing sexual assault is the possible differing ways that college students define, characterize, and describe sexual assault. College students may possess inconsistent and varying definitions that could be based on the legal definition, the experiences of their peers or whether a person feels they were sexually assaulted (Campbell, 2002). Prior research has demonstrated that the definition of sexual assault varies among women and can affect their willingness to report (Deming et al., 2013). Women may not know that what they have experienced is a sexual assault. Varying definitions also have the potential to encourage skepticism; if a victim's description of a sexual assault does not match an individual's definition, they may be less likely to believe the victim experienced a sexual assault. Misperceptions of the typical characteristics of a sexual assault can also lead to the continued perpetration of sexual violence on college campuses. Sexual assaults on college campuses typically involve single offenders the victim knows in private living areas, late at night and with alcohol or drugs present (Fisher et al., 2010). An inaccurate perspective of sexual assault may exist among college students and therefore prevent students from understanding how to identify a sexual assault, and the real scope of sexual assault and its effects.

Communicating About Sex

It is important to examine how students communicate about sex and give consent. Even though there is no single legal definition of consent, (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, 2018), it is important that college students have consistent characteristics they assign to consent to ensure they have received it. Often sexual assault prevention on college campuses emphasizes the need to wait for consent before proceeding with any sexual activity. However, if students possess different images of and associate different behaviors with consent, there is no way to ensure that two people in an intimate situation are conceiving of consent in the same manner. Therefore, a man may incorrectly believe he has been given consent when he has not.

The Department of Justice describes consent as a voluntary agreement to participate in sexual activity (2015). Consent cannot be given under duress (Department of Justice, 2015). For example, if a woman says yes because she fears non-consent would lead to an assault, that is coercion and coercion is sexual assault (Gavey, 2005). A person cannot be subjected to actions or behaviors that elicit emotional, psychological, physical, reputational, financial pressure, threat, intimidation, or fear (Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, 2018). Consent can also be revoked at any time (Department of Justice, 2015). It cannot be given if the person is incapacitated and should not assumed (Sexual Assault Prevention Awareness Center, 2018). If an individual gives consent to one sexual activity, it cannot be presumed that they consent to all sexual activities (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, 2018).

Multiple definitions of consent are also present in the research literature (Beres, 2007). Some describe consent as an explicit agreement whereas others characterize an implicit agreement between partners (Beres, 2007). Some believe that consent must be given freely (Beres, 2007) while others believe it is still consent if a woman says yes under duress (MacKinnon, 2001). Researchers often assume a common understanding of consent and do not explicitly define the term to establish a common understanding, leaving readers to base research findings on their own assumptions of what consent is and how it is gained (Beres, 2007). Therefore, inconsistent definitions of consent can possibly negatively influence future research on sexual assault prevention by not establishing clear standards by which people determine whether a sexual assault has occurred.

There are current attempts to clarify consent and make explicit those behaviors that indicate that consent has been given. There is currently a movement to require active consent. Active consent is not simply waiting for the woman to say no but requiring an enthusiastic yes; consent is no longer merely an absence of no (Millar, 2008; Bussel, 2008). Active consent requires men and women to proactively communicate about their sexual needs (Perry, 2008) and freely engage in sexual activity without feelings of duty or obligation (Corinna, 2008). Advocates are also educating individuals on continuous consent, an essential part of active consent. Continuous consent is the idea that with every progression in sexual intimacy, consent needs to be asked for and given (Antiviolence Project, 2018). Active and continuous consent may provide an adequate starting point to contextualizing consent in a way that is relevant to student's experiences and provides standards to easily identify a mutually desired sexual experience. It is vital that sexual

intent be communicated clearly to a partner because previous research has stated that sexual assaults may be the result of miscommunication or a misinterpretation of cues due to defining characteristics of typical sexual behavior (Fisher et al, 2010).

Sexual communication is complex and situational factors (e.g. intoxication or coercion) may prevent someone from expressing their willingness or unwillingness to participate in sexual activity (Schulhofer, 2016). A suitable definition of consent therefore need only make it clear that a person contemplating sexual activity is not entitled to assume the other person's willingness and that the person who initiates physical intimacy must take steps to ascertain whether mutual desire is present. The person initiating that act must look for positive indications of willingness, exercise common sense and take into account all the relevant circumstances (Schulhofer, 2016). It is important to acknowledge the flexible and contextual nature of consent (Schulhofer, 2016). However, it is also important to recognize a subjective characterization of consent can contribute to the perpetration of sexual assault and prevent victims from stepping forward because they do not recognize they experienced a sexual assault (Beres, 2007). It is particularly important to provide a comprehensive definition of consent for college students who rely heavily on nonverbal and understood permission when engaging in sexual activity (Hall, 1998).

Current Study

Qualitative research can provide insights into violence against women that cannot be achieved through quantitative methods (Campbell & Wasco, 2005). Research concerning violence against women has been primarily quantitative (Campbell & Wasco,

2005). Although quantitative research has been beneficial in helping to create effective models for describing the complicated relationships between multiple significant variables in understanding sexual assault (Campbell & Wasco, 2005), qualitative work may be more important in shedding light on complicated issues, such as beliefs and attitudes concerning sexual assault. This study seeks to understand college students' perceptions of sexual assault, survivors and perpetrators using a qualitative approach.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

A qualitative descriptive approach using a feminist framework was used to collect and analyze data. A qualitative study was needed to accomplish the depth needed to understand the multiple factors that influence thoughts and ideas related to sexual assault. Qualitative methods also allowed for the discovery and exploration of diverse and critical perspectives of college students and the specifics of how they conceive of sexual assault. The qualitative descriptive approach aims to produce a description of perspectives or experiences in the words of the participants and allowed for the collection and summary of rich data (Kim, Sefcik & Bradway, 2017). Qualitative description, although based on the idea of pure description of experiences and perceptions, also allowed for the interpretation of those experiences (Sandelowski, 2000).

Feminist Framework

Feminist methodology emphasizes allowing a researcher the freedom to use whatever methods best address the research question (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Traditional research methods emphasize objectivity, efficiency, separateness, and distance (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). However, feminist scholars suggest that feminist researchers should not over rely on quantitative methods (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Positivist methodologies that focus on experimental and "objective" research are studied in isolation without considering the context of social and gender roles (Anderson & Doherty, 2008) that may be important influences on the construction of beliefs and perceptions of sexual assault. Feminist methods allowed for the understanding of women's social realities and the complexities of their experiences (Filipovic, 2008).

Therefore, methods that focus on survey research alone may not provide the in depth critical reflection needed to have a comprehensive perspective of women's experiences. Also, feminist theory considers exploring and analyzing the influence of the patriarchal system on attitudes and beliefs as an essential aspect of research concerning violence against women. This influence led to a better understanding and in-depth exploration of attitudes and beliefs and those things that influence those attitudes and beliefs.

A major tenet of feminist theory is that attitudes affect individual and institutional reactions to sexual assault. Therefore, it is vital to understand the attitudes and beliefs associated with sexual violence against women (Ward, 1995). Creating relevant and effective prevention methods may be more effective if they include components that are utilized to change attitudes and beliefs. In order to change problematic attitudes and beliefs, and potentially detrimental behavior, it requires comprehensive open-ended questions used in interviews or focus groups.

Recruitment and Sampling

College students at one university in a Southwestern state were recruited to participate in focus groups or interviews. They were first recruited through instructors and professors, informational emails, and snowball sampling. These initial methods of recruitment were not yielding enough participants. The researcher then decided to utilize a digital flier on a student portal. Using that method increased interest in the study. Anyone who wanted to complete the study completed an initial demographics survey. This led to a total of 716 individuals completing the demographics survey. After completing the questionnaire, participants went to a separate survey to indicate a day and

time they could participate in a focus group. On this survey, they provided their first name only and a good contact email address.

Initially, only undergraduate students were recruited for the study because college students ages 18 to 24 are the most vulnerable to sexual assault (Raphael, 2013). The focus groups were gendered to reduce the possibility of social desirability and ensure, as much as possible, that respondents answered honestly. Initial recruitment yielded enough female participants to meet the minimum desired sample size (n=20) however the initial phase of recruitment only yielded five male participants. The researcher then decided to expand the parameters of the study by allowing both undergraduate and graduate students if they were still within the prescribed age range; and focus groups were allowed to be done both online, using Google Hangout, and in person. Google Hangout is a technological medium that allows individuals to participate in video chat with the researcher and other participants. Not all students who participated online used the video option of the chat program. Due to technological issues, some were only able to be heard during the focus groups. Expanding the participant parameters of the study did increase the amount of interested male participants but only led to two graduate students to participate in the study.

Due to the possibility that participants would not show up during their scheduled time, researchers overbooked each focus group to make sure a minimum of two people were available at each session. However, this also meant that one focus group had more than seven participants because all respondents showed up during the scheduled time. Participants were given a $15 Target or Amazon gift card as an incentive to participate in

focus groups. Participants in in-person focus groups or interviews were also given snacks during the group. All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded. When schedule would allow, a research assistant of the same gender as the participants co-led focus groups to take notes. A notetaker was used to help male participants, in particular, feel more comfortable discussing sexual assault and ensure trustworthiness, which will be described in detail later in this section. The Institutional Review Board approved this study.

Procedure: Focus Groups or Interviews

Focus groups are an effective option for discussing social issues (Letendre & Williams, 2014). Because sexual assault is a social issue, focus groups were an effective method for assessing perceptions of and attitudes toward sexual assault. Although students were not asked about their own experiences surrounding the act of sexual assault, even discussions concerning attitudes and beliefs about rape can be a sensitive topic. Peer driven discussions promoted a comfortable environment that would allow participants to discuss their perspectives honestly (Letendre & Williams, 2014). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, researchers tried to ensure that groups stayed as small possible between four or five participants.

Before participating in focus groups, participants completed a demographics survey. Participants were informed that participating in the survey was providing consent. After completing the survey, students were then instructed to go to another survey to identify a day and time they could participate in a focus group. Participants who identified a day and time to participate in the second phase of data collection were a part

of semi-structured focus groups or interviews (Appendix A). All participants gave consent both prior to completing the online demographics survey and gave verbal consent before beginning the focus group or interview after reading the consent form. Forty-five undergraduate and graduate students, 20 male and 25 female, between the ages of 18 and 24 participated in focus groups or interviews. Participants were initially asked to participate in focus groups and were given the option to participate in individual interviews if they were not comfortable. Other students participated in individual interviews due to lack of participant involvement at their scheduled time. There were between 3 and 8 participants in each of the focus groups with female participants, with five total groups (group 1, n=4; group 2, n=3, group 3, n=8; group 4, n=5; group 5, n= 3). Two female participants completed individual interviews because other scheduled participants did not come during the agreed upon time. There were between two and four participants in each of the focus groups with male participants, with six total groups. (group 6, n=2; group 7, n=2, group 8, n=2; group 9, n=2; group 10, n= 4; group 11, n=4). The researcher had 4 male participants complete interviews because other scheduled participants did not come during the agreed upon time.

Focus groups lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. If the groups took place in-person, they were on the college campus in conference rooms. If participants participated in groups using Google Hangout, the participants and researchers were in a place of their choosing. The researcher made sure to be in a place without interruptions and isolated from other people.

To ensure trustworthiness, a notetaker of the same gender as the participants wrote field notes during focus groups, along with the researcher. If a notetaker was not present, the researcher wrote field notes. Field notes were used to take note of important themes, guide the conversation, write down probing questions, or interesting ideas or themes brought up by participants that could be used in future groups or interviews. A notetaker was present in four female focus groups and 2 male focus groups. This discrepancy in the number of focus groups based on gender was because 4 of the focus groups with men were completed online. Participants were given the incentive after they completed the focus groups. Researchers kept a record of the participants' first names and email addresses to have contact information to send reminders about scheduled focus groups, and to send Amazon gift cards. Although participants completed a demographics form prior to the focus groups or interviews, a human error in data collection led to the inability to distinguish the demographic information of those who only completed the demographics survey from those who completed the survey but not the focus groups. Therefore, a follow up email had to be sent to participants with a link to a separate demographics survey. Researchers were not able to contact 4 participants; therefore, there is only demographic data for 41 participants.

Measures

Demographics

Participants completed a demographics survey (See Appendix B) asking their age, ethnicity, education level, gender, major, if they are currently in a relationship, if he/she has had a sexual partner, if the student is an athlete, if the students belong to any student

or Greek organizations, if the student feels comfortable discussing issues related to sex and sexual relationships with peers, if they have an acquaintance, close friend or family member who has had a personal experience with sexual assault or rape, how often they participate in social events, and how often they consume alcohol (See Appendix C). The questionnaire was completed online by anyone who was interested in the study and a table was completed by the researcher with the all data responses (See Appendix D).

Interview Protocol

Each focus group or interview began with an introduction of the researcher, the motivations behind and purpose of the study. The researcher gave a brief description of the types of questions that would be asked and how the data gathered would be used in the future. The researcher also briefly went over confidentiality and asked they not repeat what is said during the groups. The researcher also tried to create a safe environment for students to express their true beliefs by asking they be respectful and nonjudgmental in their responses. Lastly, the participants were reminded of their right to stop participation at any time and would receive their incentive at the end of the focus group. The full introduction is below:

> *Good morning (afternoon). My name is Adrienne Baldwin-White and I am a doctoral candidate in the school of social work. Thank you for coming. I think that we make a lot of assumptions about what you all believe concerning sexual assault. I believe in order to develop better programs for prevention, we need to have a better understanding of your perspectives. And we need to gain that perspective through conversations with you. During this focus group/interview, I will ask you about your attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault. I will not be asking you about your own experiences of sexual assault but rather asking you to reflect on your beliefs and the beliefs of your peers. This information will be used primarily for my dissertation but also for publications. This focus group/interview is confidential. I will not use your name or any identifying information in the manuscripts and I ask that you not use your name during the discussion. I also ask that you not talk about*

anything that is said during the focus groups outside of this room. I want you to feel comfortable and be honest about your perspectives. There is no judgment about anything you can say. I also want you to respect each other's points of view. Also, you can leave anytime if you are uncomfortable and you will still receive the gift card. If you chose the Target gift card, you will receive it after the group today. If you chose the Amazon gift card, it will be emailed to you within 24 hours of completing this focus group. Do you have any questions?

After the introduction was complete, participants gave verbal permission to be recorded. They were then given another copy of the consent form and asked to verbally give consent to participate in focus groups or interviews. After consent was given, the focus groups began. The researcher began by asking icebreaker questions to make the participants feel comfortable and ease into the conversation. Then students were asked a series of questions about their beliefs about sexual assault and potential factors that could influence their attitudes about sexual assault. The questions are below:

1. How would you describe your overall experience here at (University name)? Do you like going to school here?
    a. Is there anything you would like to change about your experience so far?
2. What has been your favorite class you have taken?
3. What do you like to do for fun on or off campus? How has your campus experience been overall? Do you belong to any groups on campus?
4. How would college students define sexual assault?
5. How would college students define rape? Do you think there is a difference between rape and sexual assault?
6. How serious is it to commit a rape or sexual assault?
    a. What type of punishment does a perpetrator deserve?
7. Do you feel that sexual assault is a problem on campus?
    a. If yes, why?
        i. If no, why not?
    b. Are there things in the campus culture that promote sexual assault?
8. What do you think of this idea that rape is just a mistake?
    a. Do college students understand what rape/sexual assault are?

    b. Is it possible for a person to commit a sexual assault/rape and not know that it is a rape/sexual assault?
9. Do college students think rape/sexual assault is a serious problem? Do they care?
    a. Why or why not?
10. Do college students know what to do if they are sexually assaulted?
11. Do college students talk about sexual assault?
    a. Are college students comfortable talking about sexual assault?
        i. Why or why not?
12. How are college women expected to act with men?
    a. How are men expected to act with women?
13. What perceptions do you think college students possess about rape?
    a. Why do you think that these perceptions exist?
14. What does the role of social media play in their perceptions of rape/sexual assault?
15. Imagine a person consenting to have sex with someone else. What does that look like?
    a. What does it mean to give consent?
    b. Describe a situation in which consent was achieved
    c. Is a verbal no required if you don't want to give consent?
        1. Is one no enough?
        2. What do you think of the idea of affirmative consent?
    d. Some people have said if you ask continuously, it ruins the romantic moment. If you ask can I kiss you, can I touch you etc., then it ruins it. Do you think college students believe that?
    e. [Example about indirect communication of no. If you ask me to dinner, and I say well I don't know if I can get a babysitter or I don't think I have the time, people understand the implication is no. Do you think college students understand when someone is implying no?
        i. Do they understand but use the inability to understand as an excuse to commit an assault?

16. Is it sexual assault if a women doesn't feel comfortable having sex but gives consent anyway?
    a. Is it socially appropriate for women to want to have sex?
    b. Are women taught by the culture to say yes to sex even if they don't want it?
17. What affects a woman's willingness to report?
    a. Are there things in the campus culture that discourage women from reporting a sexual assault?

b. Is a woman's reputation hurt if she is raped?
    i. Is a perpetrator's reputation hurt?
    ii. Whose reputation is hurt more?

18. Imagine a situation in which a rape would occur.
    a. How would college students describe what happens? What do you imagine when you think of rape? Imagine you are telling a story of rape, what would that story be?
    b. In what situations is a rape more likely to occur?
    c. How would college students describe the relationship between the victim and perpetrator?
19. Imagine a rape victim.
    a. How would college students describe the victim? Describe the victim's personality.
    b. What characteristics do you think college students would associate with victims/survivors?
        i. Do you think there is a difference between the two?
        ii. Do college students define them differently?
    c. Why do you think victims/survivors are not willing to come forward and report the assault?
    d. What type of person is more vulnerable to rape?
        i. What kinds of behaviors is the individual exhibiting?
            1. Imagine the woman has been drinking. A woman has been drinking. Is she more or less responsible for a sexual encounter if it occurs?
                a. What if she didn't want to have sex but was too drunk to refuse?
                b. What level of responsibility does the man have in this situation?
                    i. Should he be punished if she was drunk but said yes.
            2. A woman is dressed provocatively. Is she more or less responsible for a sexual assault?
                a. Do you think college students believe that if a woman is dressed a certain way, a man can treat her any way he wants.
            3. A woman goes back to a person's private living area. Is she more or less responsible for a sexual assault?
    e. What should a victim do after a rape?

f. What types of things do college students believe women should do in order to prevent a sexual assault?
g. What can a victim do that would prevent people from believing her?
    i. Waited to report?
    ii. Didn't have bruises/scars?
    iii. Emotional?
h. Visually describe a rape victim

20. Imagine a perpetrator of rape.
    a. How would college students describe a perpetrator? Describe this individual's personality
        i. How would college students describe his/her sentiments towards the opposite sex?
    b. What characteristics do college students have about perpetrators
    c. What type of person is more likely to commit a rape?
    d. What kinds of behaviors is a perpetrator most likely to be exhibiting?
        i. A man has been drinking. Is he more or less responsible for a sexual encounter if it occurs?
    e. What do college students think a perpetrator does after a rape?
        i. Does the perpetrator feel remorse?
        ii. Does the perpetrator feel like he/she has committed a crime?
    f. Visually describe a perpetrator

21. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what you think college students believe about rape that you think is important for me to know.

During focus groups and interviews, there were moments when participants' responses were vague and lacked clarity. Multiple probes were used to encourage further conversation and prompt students to be more detailed in their responses. Participants were asked to give examples or describe specific behaviors, depending on the question. They were also asked "like what" when the researcher wanted more specifics in their replies. When the researcher did not understand a participant's response, they were asked what they meant or to clarify. The researcher also decided to encourage all members to participate by specifically asked them their opinion by asking "what about you" or "what

do you think?" There were some responses that the researcher thought may be a common held belief so the researcher asked if anyone else had the same opinion or perspective.

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic, the researcher gave multiple nonverbal encouragement for participants to keep speaking, including nodding and leaning in when someone was speaking. When the researcher saw a participant was hesitating, the participant was reminded that the room was a safe space for them to be free to say what they want and that there was not a right or wrong answer to the questions. They were told the researcher simply wanted to know the truth about their beliefs and experiences. Sometimes when a question was asked, a participant was unsure about how to respond. Again, the researcher reassured them that it was okay to say "I don't know" and that there was no need to apologize if they were not able to or did not feel comfortable answering a question.

There were multiple times during discussion that the researcher had to provide clarifications. The researcher defined terms such as rape culture, token resistance, affirmative consent, active consent and implied consent. Sometimes the researcher had to give examples to make sure students understood what was being asked of them. For example, participants were given examples of campus culture and expectations of intimate behaviors between men and women. The interviewer did their best not to be leading when giving examples but rather to guide their responses so they could be certain they were answering the question.

After the focus group or interviews, participants gave feedback about their experience and how it could be improved for future participants. The men were asked if they had any

suggestions for encouraging men to participate. They were then given their gift cards and told to email the researcher if they had any questions. The researcher had a short discussion with the notetaker, if one was present, about memos, interesting responses, patterns in the data or if any questions needed to be modified for future focus groups or interviews. The researcher also debriefed with the notetaker to discuss emotional and psychological effects of the interview process. They also discussed if any changes need to be made to the interview protocol and questions to elicit accurate and honest responses reflective of participants' attitudes and beliefs.

Analysis

The qualitative data was transcribed by both the researcher and professional transcriptionists. Participants produced 19 transcripts and 602 pages of data to be organized into concepts and themes. First, the researcher read the data to become familiar with the content. Then the researcher summarized the responses from each question across all focus groups and interviews. The data was analyzed using the web-based software application program Dedoose that can be used to manage and analyze data. First, initial open coding was performed to identify patterns in the data of common topics, concepts and categories discussed by participants (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Charmaz, 2014). The broader purpose of this study was to understand the beliefs and attitudes of college students and discuss those perspectives in their own words. Therefore, the researcher did not code based on any expectations but only used those concepts that emerged from the data. Open coding revealed multiple issues that college students believe are relevant to sexual assault and preventing sexual violence. During the coding

process, the researcher wrote memos and identified the gender of the participant of each excerpt. Sixty-six codes were reviewed, and broad categories of issues were found, including those topics that could be included in prevention programming and have a positive effect on the prevalence of sexual assault. Three broad themes were identified that fit under the category of prevention topics. The researcher then identified the codes that were relevant to each of those themes and identified 7 subthemes. The most important themes were then utilized to develop a conceptual framework.

The researcher used field notes to reflect on their own reactions to the focus groups to prevent those thoughts from interfering with the analysis process. The researcher used memos as a means to analyze the codes and think about the implications of the data. Memos were used to help the researcher think about the data, clarify, and direct coding, identify patterns, inform, and refine analyses, encourage the exploration of deeper meanings, and keep involved in the analytic process (Charmaz, 2014).

Methodological Rigor

Because of the different data collection methods used during this study, the researcher examined the data for thematic consistency across interviews and focus groups; and across interviews and focus groups that took place online and in person. The researcher identified each major theme, barriers to addressing sexual assault, social and cultural norms and communicating sexual intent, and then found quotes from participants in each of the four groups to demonstrate that the themes were present across all data collection methods. The assessment demonstrated consistency across all data collection methods (see Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5).

Research Questions

To gather information about college students' beliefs about rape and create a more comprehensive measure to assess beliefs about rape, a qualitative descriptive approach will be taken to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the barriers to talking about and addressing the prevention of sexual assault?
    a. How do college students characterize and describe the act of sexual assault?
    b. What situational circumstances do college students associate with sexual assault?
2. What cultural norms contribute to college students' beliefs about and perpetuation of sexual assault?
3. How would college students communicate their sexual intent?
    a. What are the indicators of healthy or unhealthy communications about sexual desire or needs?
    b. How do college students define/describe consensual sex?
    c. How would college students describe a circumstance in which consent was achieved?

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Participants

The average age of participants was 21 (n = 41%). The majority of participants self-identified as White (n = 17, 42%) and were senior undergraduates (n = 19, 46%). Fifty-one percent of participants were female (n = 21). The majority of participants were in a relationship (n = 22, 54%), were currently in or have ever been in a relationship (n = 37, 90%), and have had a sexual experience (n = 39, 95%). The clear majority of respondents reported that they were comfortable discussing issues related to sex and sexual relationships (n = 37, 90%), The majority of respondents also had an acquaintance or family member who has had an experience with sexual assault (n = 29, 71%). Only 2 participants were student athletes (5%) and only 2 were in Greek organizations (5%). The majority of respondents were in a student organization (n = 21, 51%). Most participants had lived on campus (n = 31, 76%) and participated in social events between once a month and 3 times a semester (n = 18, 44%). Most participants consumed alcohol between 2-3 times a week (n = 9, 22%) or 2-3 times a month (n = 9, 22%).

Barriers to Discussing Sexual Assault

Participants discussed many topics and issues pertaining to sexual assault. Despite gender neutral questions, participants discussed perpetrators using male pronouns and victims using female pronouns. College students imagined sexual assault as something perpetrated by men victimizing women. Therefore, the following results are gendered. The first research question sought to understand the barriers to having conversations about sexual assault among college students and specifically asked students how they defined sexual assault. Because possessing an inconsistent definition of sexual assault

may be a barrier among this population, the researcher also wanted to know how college students define and characterize the act of rape and sexual assault. When discussing sexual violence, participants used the terms rape and sexual assault interchangeably. Overall, college students discussed multiple barriers to discussing and addressing the issue of sexual assault. There were two other major barriers to confronting the issue of sexual assault, acknowledging the problem and comfort talking about the issue.

Defining and Characterizing Sexual Assault

When asked to describe a sexual assault, many participants expressed the difficulty of attempting to explain in detail what constitutes a sexual assault. Respondents described it as, "difficult to define nowadays and a "loose category" of behaviors. They said that sexual assault was no longer specific, with a male participant stating that it, "could include so many different actions that a man could violate a woman and not realize it." Female respondents said, "what is considered sexual assault could be different depending on each individual," and "the line to not cross isn't the same for everyone." Even when probed to give more details concerning the image of sexual assault they possess, students did not specify particular actions that could be described as sexual assault; with three female participants defining it as, "any physical stuff you wouldn't want happening to you," "anything aggressive that makes someone feel uncomfortable," or "not respecting another person's decisions about the sexual activity they want." Some students said that the definition of sexual assault was dependent on how each individual perceived what happened to them, with a female participant stating, "a sexual assault was anytime a person felt violated." This subjective perspective continued with four female

participants said sexual assault was characterized as, “taking advantage of you as a person,” “breaking the personal safety bubble of my body,” “[having] sex with someone and they are not into it,” and, “the act of harming another person.” Some descriptions of sexual assault were situationally specific. For example, female participants said it was “a husband taking advantage of his wife” or a guy, “taking advantage of a drunk girl and a bunch of dudes watching.” This subjectivity creates a definition of sexual assault that can vary person to person; one person may not feel violated after a particular act while another person may feel differently. The difficulty students expressed even attempting to define sexual assault could have a detrimental impact on their ability to discuss the issue and develop plans or programs to reduce the prevalence of sexual assault.

There were specific circumstances that students identified that could complicate someone’s ability to classify a specific situation as a sexual assault. Alcohol made identifying a situation as a sexual assault more difficult. For example, multiple students said they did not know if it was sexual assault if both people were drunk. According to one male student, their peers, “didn’t know if the person committed a crime if [they] had sex [with someone who was] drinking.” There was general confusion about how sexual assault was determined if one or more of the participants had been drinking and respondents were often not as certain or confident about how to decide if a sexual assault had occurred when alcohol was involved. For example, intoxication was not always considered a reason that a person could not give consent. Alcohol was described as a normal part of the sexual experience with male students saying, “I drank to enjoy a sexual experience,” and, “I was drinking and groping a person and didn’t see it as sexual

assault." Sex with an intoxicated person was also not considered sexual assault by both male and female students. For many students, how much the person was drinking determined if it was a sexual assault. Two respondents, female and male respectively, stated it was, "hard to draw the line between too drunk to give consent and drinking but still coherent enough to give consent," and, "if it is sexual assault depends on how drunk she is." Also, students expressed the concern that someone may not be visibly drunk, and therefore it would be difficult to call it a sexual assault, with a male participant stating, "if he didn't know she was drunk it is hard to say it is sexual assault." Students did not know if it was sexual assault if a woman was drunk but said yes to sexual activity. One male respondent also said it was borderline rape, "if trying to get someone drunk enough to say yes to sex."

The relationship status of the participants also affected whether students believed a situation was sexual assault. Students said it was hard to define a sexual assault if the perpetrator and victim were in a relationship. Students mentioned people would hesitate to call a sexual encounter without consent a sexual assault if the people had a prior sexual? relationship. One female participant stated her peers would think sexual assault "was not a big deal if they were in a relationship." Participants also stated perpetrators would not consider what they did a sexual assault if they knew the person. For respondents, miscommunication between partners and relationship status clouded their ability to clearly identify a nonconsensual sexual situation.

Identifying factors.

Even though they were often not clear concerning their definitions, there were concepts students identified as important to consider when trying to identify a sexual assault. Three of the concepts were consent, coercion, and intent. Multiple students mentioned the importance of consent in defining rape. Two female students specifically described sexual assault as a lack of consent, stating, "if someone said no and the person does not stop," and "when a guy made a sexual advance despite the woman saying no." Students also described sexual assault as coercing a partner into participating in sex. Three male participants described coercion as, "guilt tripping someone into having sex with you," "to keep pursuing someone after they have said no," or to, "push [someone's] comfort level." Male students continued to discuss coercion, acknowledging that, "an individual should not pressure someone into have sex with them" and "you should both want to do it together instead of one person coercing you." Others talked about coercion as a typical part of sexual interactions. Female students said some of their male peers would think, "oh I'm just persuading her. I'm not coercing her" and would see coercion as, "just a part of the process and that it isn't a big deal." Respondents also described situations in which a woman may feel coerced into having sex. For example, one male respondent said a woman may say yes because she, "wanted to make her boyfriend happy" or may feel that," if she does not agree to have sex, it will ruin the relationship." According to a female participant, women may, "feel pressured in a relationship [to have sex] in order to demonstrate they have a healthy relationship."

Respondents also said that the act of sexual assault was about intent; intent distinguished an assault from an "accident". It was, "difficult to have a true rape situation

without intent," said a male participant. For students, it was not the same if the person did not intend to do harm; according to two female participants, a person must, "want to victimize" someone and "commit a terrible act" in order for it to be a sexual assault. It was not a sexual assault, according to a male participant, "if you were really ignorant about what it is." A male respondent said the person, "who knows it is rape and still does it is more awful." Another male student said if, "someone makes the decision that I know this person doesn't necessarily want it or I know that I'm not necessarily in the right here but I'm going to do it anyways because I want to. That's where it becomes rape." It was worse to know you are about to commit a sexual assault and follow through anyway. For college students, the definition of sexual assault may not be black and white; but rather multiple factors, like intent, influence how they determine if a situation is a sexual assault.

Accidental assault.

Students said that it was possible for someone to commit a sexual assault by mistake. One female student mentioned a specific situation that could be considered a mistake:

> because for example when someone goes and touches your butt and you're like I didn't want that but maybe they didn't intend it to be creepy or inappropriate. Maybe they thought you would want it or like it like but maybe the girl considers it sexual assault but the guy didn't have that intention, got confused….

According to many students, if the person was confused and did not, "know he was violating her," it should not be called a sexual assault. Perhaps, as male participants stated,

it was, “more the result of miscommunication,” or they just, “made a mistake and couldn’t control themselves.” Most students believed that their peers do not intend to hurt anyone; they make a mistake and are simply unable to control their sexual urges. Perhaps, for college students, most sexual assaults are an unfortunate result of miscommunication or a misunderstanding rather than someone intending to cause harm. Sexual assault may also be a difficult act for college students to imagine with any concrete detail. Therefore, when addressing the problem of sexual assault, the term itself may not illicit similar images among college students; further complicating any attempts to reduce sexual assault through prevention education. The multiple perspectives and descriptions of sexual assault need to be considered when attempting to contextualize it and give college students a concrete definition. Also, students’ experiences with or disclosures concerning sexual assault may not be conducive to legal or official definitions; therefore, what students perceive is sexual assault may not be the same as traditional descriptions. Therefore, it should not be presumed that students know what sexual assault is and the multiple scenarios that can be described as a sexual assault.

Acknowledging Sexual Assault As A Problem

Students acknowledged knowing the current rate of sexual assault on college campuses. However, students demonstrated a denial that there was a problem on their campus, with male participants stating, “it is not prevalent in our eyes,” it’s, “not a big issue,” and they, “know the statistics but [don’t] think it applies to this campus.” As a female participant stated, only “a minority of people think it’s a big problem.” Respondents did not want to think about the possibility that a sexual assault could happen

to them or someone they know. Some were skeptical of the magnitude of the problem, with male participants saying they and their peers, "question if the statistics are accurate" and, "don't know if it is something blown way out of proportion." Students said their peers do not believe sexual assault is a problem because they have not experienced it themselves or have not had someone they know disclose; for them, as one female participant said, "since it hasn't happened to me, it doesn't exist." This potentially demonstrates a lack of empathy among this population concerning issues of sexual violence.

College students want to feel safe on campus, so they do not directly confront the issue of sexual assault; as two female participants put it, they, "always want to see the positive side of things" and it is, "easier to ignore it and pretend like it's not going on." When it is discussed, female students said their peers talk about in the hypothetical, "like it's not happening or going to happen," and "it was easy to turn a blind eye." The denial that sexual assault is a serious issue may be a survival mechanism. To leave class late at night alone or go to a fraternity party, students must feel that the campus is safe. Therefore, female students may find it easier to pretend that a sexual assault is not a real possibility rather than live a restricted life to remain safe.

When college students do accept that there is a problem with sexual assault on college campuses, participants reported that sexual assault is not taken seriously, with a female respondent stating "so we talk about it a lot but it's not even the appropriate attention and the appropriate seriousness that it should be, so it's more of a joke…" Throughout conversations with students, there was a consistent narrative that college

students as a group make light of the issue. For many college students, according to participants, it is not something they feel they should be concerned about; sexual assault, according to a female participant, "is not a hot subject we talk about." One male participant stated, "half of them are actually concerned about other world issues. The other half is just trying to have fun and party around." Participants said college students are not compelled to talk about sexual assault, particularly men, who may see sexual assault as a woman's problem.

Some of the lack of seriousness about the issue was more about the perception that rape itself is not a serious incident. For college students, as one female student verbalized, "sexual assault has been normalized," and become a potentially accepted risk of attending a university. One male participant stated that his peers believed sexual assault had become, "part of the college lifestyle" and an accepted part of the college experience. The normalization of sexual assault as a risk of being a college student is problematic. Some female participants said that one issue was, "it's not a guy type of thing to talk about sexual assault" among their peers. The classification of sexual assault as a woman's problem allows the onus to be put on women to prevent an assault rather than addressing the need to change men's behavior. One female student said perpetrators, "don't think it was that big of an overstep." When crime is discussed on campus, respondents stated that sexual assault is not mentioned as a potential crime that could occur. Therefore, sexual assault may not be considered a criminal act by college students and therefore, according to female participants, the violence of sexual assault is minimized as, "oh she's just playing" or "it's just sex so 20 minutes of a sexual assault

doesn't really matter." For college students, sexual assault may be "bad sex" and someone who commits an assault is just, as a male participant stated, "…human. Everyone's going to mess up. Some people that's just what they mess up with…"

Comfort Discussing Sexual Assault

College students expressed a general discomfort among their peers discussing the issue of sexual assault. However, there were various reasons why students were uncomfortable talking about sexual assault. Many students talked about the fact that much of their discomfort derives from the issue is not openly discussed on campus. One female respondent said, "but if you don't know about it and don't talk about it, then no you are not going to be comfortable with it." For their peers, the conversation is awkward, embarrassing, and, as one male respondent said, "even just talking about it [they] feel kind of you know, weird, sharing these opinions because it's something [they] never really talk about." Even some of the students present in the groups expressed a fear of saying the wrong thing, with female participants stating, "Oh, I might say something wrong so let's not talk about that," and "I am not too comfortable saying what I think because I don't know if this is the right answer."

There were other reasons mentioned by students that their peers may be uncomfortable talking about sexual assault. As previously mentioned, denial allows students to feel safe. Students may not be comfortable, as one female participant stated, "because it's scary to think you could be sexually assaulted or someone you know." One male participant stated that, for his peers, discussing sexual assault generally, "just makes everyone uncomfortable." Part of this discomfort stems from the difficulty of talking

about sex. Students often talked about sexual assault as if it were part of a discussion about sex rather than a discussion about power and violence. For men, their hesitation and discomfort may be a result of being made to feel like a bad guy or potential perpetrator; after attending a sexual assault prevention program, one male respondent discussed the reaction of his friends, "my guy friends were super depressed about it…we were all feeling terrible about ourselves – Oh Gosh, do girls think we're here to rape them? We're here to learn! We are not here to do terrible things to them."

Social and Cultural Norms

Two research questions focused on understanding the cultural and societal beliefs that contribute to college students' attitudes and perceptions of sexual assault, and to the continued perpetuation of sexual assault. Two main broad themes emerged from the data. Students directly discussed or referenced attitudes that could be described as perpetuating rape culture i.e. rape myths. Secondly, students discussed gender expectations, both in a broader social context and within intimate and sexual interactions with the opposite sex that could lead to a sexual assault. Research has discussed rape culture and how social and cultural beliefs about rape both perpetuate and are a result of that rape culture (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Results of this study demonstrate that college students have ideas that maintain rape culture and perhaps may not be aware that these perceptions are indicative of rape myths. College students also have gender expectations that may contribute to rape culture and the prevalence of sexual assault. However, these beliefs may not be the traditional gender norms that are typically discussed when looking at the accepted behavioral expectations of men and women. Lastly, college students did not

have distinct beliefs as a whole; meaning, participants often expressed disparate perspectives when discussing perspectives related to social and gender norms.

Rape Culture

When asked to describe what comes to mind when they heard the term rape culture, many of the students had not heard the expression; if they had heard the term, they had difficulty putting into words what rape culture was or how it related to the prevalence of sexual assault. For those who had not heard the term, rape culture was described to them by the researcher as a set of cultural norms that allow the continued pervasiveness of sexual assault; these norms include victim blaming and excusing the perpetrator's behavior as acceptable typical male conduct. When discussing the influence of rape culture on how we address sexual assault, many participants mentioned that their peers often deny that rape culture exists. For many of their peers, rape culture was just a term made up by, as a female participant said, "women being over-dramatic" and was not a social issue. One female student said that she noticed this denial of rape culture more with her male peers, often responding to them when they denied rape culture by stating "well you would never know about it because you don't have to face it everyday."

Act of sexual assault.

Students' descriptions of the situational factors surrounding a sexual assault were congruent with the notion of a "real rape." The common descriptions of a sexual assault given by participants included, "someone being abducted off the street," someone being taken advantage of at night, "forcible rape", "stranger rape", "a rapist beating a woman

and forcing her legs open." Most students affirmed they knew that the perpetrator of a sexual assault among college students would most likely be someone the victim knows. Yet they maintained the stereotypes of "real rape."

Perpetrators.

Respondents also discussed the stereotypes college students possess of perpetrators of sexual assault that are embedded within rape culture. Students talked about the reasons why perpetrators commit sexual assault. Female participants believed perpetrators committed assault, "for the thrill of getting away with it," and believe "[perpetrators] are not going to get caught so there is a big incentive to do it." Students also talked about the type of man they imagine is a perpetrator. Students described differing images of potential perpetrators. When asked to describe their image of a perpetrator, some female participants talked about a "creepy stranger," "creeper" or, "stalker in trench coat and dark clothes with a knife." They also said he could be an old guy in a van and discussed the prevalent stereotype of a perpetrator of sexual assault as a minority.

Some of the students, both male and female, talked about how, for some, the "dumb frat guy" is now the image of a typical perpetrator. This is an example of the cognitive dissonance that may exist for students when it comes to imagining the perpetrator of a sexual assault. They know statistically a friend or acquaintance is more likely to be a perpetrator but still imagine a stranger is someone committing an assault. For students, it may be psychologically easier to believe that a stranger would assault them rather than someone they know. One female participant stated, "you don't think, my

best friend is going to be the guy to be the one to do it, or that guy from class. You just have that trust and you don't think it will be them." Female participants also discussed the image of the "nice guy" with a good reputation on campus. Female participants said their peers and society will think, "that's a good guy. There's no way he could do this. She's lying."

Rape culture also perpetuates a false narrative that there is an epidemic of false accusations of sexual assault and students' comments corresponded with this narrative. Male participants discussed a fear of being falsely accused of sexual assault. Male participants believed that false accusations were a problem, stating, "[she] could just be getting back at an ex-boyfriend" or have a grudge against a man and be using a charge of sexual assault as retribution. One male respondent discussed how a woman could take advantage of someone's celebrity and fame. Male students also mentioned the perception of a lack of due process when it comes to sexual assault cases, saying men are, "innocent until proven guilty except in cases of sexual assault" and, "when a woman says she has been sexually assaulted, it turns into a witch hunt." There were male and female students, however, that did not endorse the idea of an epidemic of false accusations. One female participant stated it is, "hard for someone to come out and say they were raped and it's not something you want to bring on yourself."

Victims.

Students also discussed stereotypes associated with victims and their experiences. The majority of students believed that after a sexual assault, a victim's reputation is hurt more and suffers more consequences after an assault compared to the perpetrator.

According to female participants, a victim is considered “damaged goods” or no longer datable; and the sexual assault is considered “personal baggage”. Female respondents said victims feel “helpless” and are often overly critical of themselves, thinking, “maybe it wasn’t the guy; maybe it was me.” They may be, “afraid how other people will perceive them now and like will she lose friends.” Students discussed the things that change for a woman. A female participant stated you are going to be, “looked at as a person who was raped or claimed to be raped and you're then walking around with that label. People are going to be looking at you differently, treating you differently….” Female respondents said the label of victim is a “lower term,” “defines the rest of their lives,” and their peers might think, “oh my gosh poor victim girl she's so like helpless or probably really traumatized now…and she's being dumb about it.” College students may fear they will be judged if people know they have been assaulted. Female participants said victims will be thought of as, “weaker than [their] assaulter,” and, people will ask, “why didn’t you – couldn’t you push them off, why couldn’t you stop them?” For some victims it is, according to one female participant, “horrible having to admit that you aren’t strong enough to defend yourself.” Multiple participants stated that there is a stigma that comes with being a victim of sexual assault and that the stigma must be eliminated for college women to feel comfortable coming forward and reporting when they have been sexually assaulted.

Respondents discussed other barriers victims have reporting a sexual assault and the potential negative experiences afterward. First students discussed those characteristics that their peers associate with a credible victim. Female participants said a credible victim

"conforms to the label" and acts like a victim; meaning they are, "long term morose for it, saddened and you know, almost like mourning, you know like you gotta act differently and be that way for a while 'cause of what has happened to you." If a victim is not emotional, as one male participant said, people think, "how can someone who's a rape victim be so calm?" Students also discussed the unfairness of requiring a victim to be emotional, with female participants stating, "people deal with trauma in different ways" and, "it was normal not to be emotional because of the trauma."

According to both male and female students, a credible victim also reports the assault immediately. A male respondent said that for his peers, victims have an obligation to report because, "If they don't speak up, then there could be another victim that the perpetrator will go to because you didn't speak up and tell them your side – they could have been caught earlier." Also, if she does not report immediately, people will ask, "are you sure it happened," with one male participant stating he would be skeptical of a woman who waited to report a sexual assault. However, many female students acknowledged that, "everyone is not going to report right after" and, "not reporting it immediately isn't proof you weren't raped." Overall, students believed it was unfair to ask victims to report immediately; however, a sexual assault has, as a male participant stated, "an expiration date that you need to act on it early as opposed to wait because you know, why'd you wait?" According to students, physical evidence also made a victim more credible. A credible victim also has bruises or scars; male participants said having, "no bruises or scars would add some questioning" and, "people think if you don't have bruises and scars, how do you know if was forced." However, like the other indicators of

credibility, many students did not believe that, with a male student saying, “a lack of violence does not mean that a sexual assault did not happen.”

Participants also mentioned systemic reasons why a victim may not report that she has been assaulted. Students mentioned that victims do not want to repeatedly talk about what happened to them. One female participant asked, “how are you going to tell your story a thousand times?” They also mentioned that women may have to report to a male police officer and feel uncomfortable with the prospect of talking about sexual assault with a man. Participants also said victims may feel that, even if they do find the courage to report the assault, they, as one female participant stated, “don’t think they will be believed.” The prevalence of the “real rape” scenario that involves a stranger, means that victims may be, “more likely to report if it is a stranger,” said one female participant. Female respondents said that victims who are sexually assaulted by a friend or acquaintance, “may not want to get them in trouble,” and, “if you report someone you know [who] assaulted you, then you are exposing your whole life to scrutiny.” Respondents said victims would have to discuss their sexual history and if she had been sleeping around. Overall, participants believed college women do not report because of fear, humiliation, shame, and a general belief that they will not receive the support they need. Many respondents expressed support for victims, discussing the need to give victims the right to be believed. Some acknowledged the broader patriarchal system that perpetuates the idea that it is not acceptable for a woman to speak out about her experiences of sexual assault. The stereotypes of victims create a hostile environment that

has the potential to keep them from reporting a sexual assault and experiencing worse mental health symptoms due to the lack of support (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004).

One prevalent aspect of rape culture is the tendency to blame a victim for a sexual assault and question the victim's behavior. Students reflected on these inclinations among their peers. Respondents discussed multiple reasons why a victim would be blamed for a sexual assault. One female respondent said, "people would assume [a woman] is just one of those girls and I did something to cause it." Many students mentioned that women are often blamed for a sexual assault if they are wearing provocative clothing. People will think, as one female participant stated, "oh but she was wearing this short skirt, oh but she was dressed in that way, she was totally asking for it." However, students did not believe she should be, with one female participant stating, "a woman wearing something revealing doesn't mean that she is asking for it." Students mentioned other women's behavior that could lead people to blame them if they have been assaulted. Society asks women if they were leading the man on, or, if she was flirtatious or promiscuous. If a woman has been in multiple committed relationships, one male participant said people will say, "oh you're always like that. You always want sex." Another female participant said her peers will think, "all of a sudden you are in a relationship where you're not giving consent for sex, but they do it to you anyway, then people are going to think, well, you have been having sex with all the other people, you probably said yes."

According to participants, victims were also blamed and questioned if they had been drinking. Respondents said college students villainize victims and believe women are placing themselves at risk if they go to fraternity parties, drink and do not take

precautions, allowing themselves to get into situations where a sexual assault could occur. A female participant said, "if I am completely sober and I am still allowing myself to be pushed into a situation that I am not comfortable with, then I am also really responsible because I have a lot of issues that are leading to me just going with the flow and I should probably deal with those issues pretty soon or I'm going to get raped." A male participant agreed with this idea, stating, "I think she is responsible for getting raped, like you should drink to your limits." Even when consuming alcohol, students believed women were culpable in ensuring their safety from sexual predators. Male participants said women, "should not get blacked out drunk," and still have self-control when drinking. Two additional male participants stated, if she is going to get drunk, "she should have someone who can stop her from making decisions that put her at risk for a sexual assault," and, "if they are getting drunk with the wrong person, they are putting themselves at risk." Ultimately, for students, even intoxication did not preclude women from putting up the greatest resistance to assault; one female participant said, "if somebody's too drunk to even really speak – a lot of times if you are in a kind of situation, I imagine they would at least try to fight a little bit – not fight, but just kind of trying to communicate more with their body more than their words."

Alcohol consumption and sexual assault.

Respondents also mentioned the double standard that exists related to sexual assault and alcohol consumption by the perpetrator or victim, with one female participant asking,

> But there's also the thing of why is there more responsibility put on a woman when she's drinking than the guy when he's drinking. Because if a girl is drinking and something happens then it's automatically that aspect that comes into play oh they were drinking. But less often I feel like if a guy's drinking and does something it's not really like oh he was drunk. He wasn't in the right state of mind.

Students recognized the tendency to blame the victim of a sexual assault when she has been drinking but excuse the perpetrator when he has consumed alcohol. For students, alcohol consumption did not necessarily indicate a sexual assault and did not always mean the person could not give consent; for them, there were degrees of intoxication and a person's ability to give consent depended on where they fell on that spectrum. One female respondent said, for students, "it's hard to say oh you can't have sex with someone if they're drunk cause they can't consent 'cause they can but they can't in a way also so it's like a hard line to place." Students also mentioned how alcohol complicates consent; one male participant said the person, "may not recognize nonverbal cues that their partner does not want to have sex," and, a female participant said, "it is not sexual assault if the person would have said yes both intoxicated and sober." For participants, alcohol complicated their perceptions of sexual assault and consent.

Participants also indicate that their peers may claim that a perpetrator would not have committed a sexual assault if they had not been drinking, but they did not believe it was an excuse for committing a sexual assault and perpetrators should be held responsible for their actions even if they have been drinking. Therefore, participant's perspective was different than that of their peers. A common analogy used was

comparing a drunk perpetrator to a drunk driver who was in an accident; a drunk driver is still held responsible even though he or she was under the influence. One female participant stated, "I've been drunk before and it never crossed my mind to force someone to have sex with me." For college students, alcohol muddies perspectives of sexual assault and presents challenges for identifying a sexual assault.

Burden of prevention.

Another major aspect of rape culture that students discussed was the responsibility placed on women to prevent a sexual assault from occurring. Overall, students thought there was an undue burden on women to prevent an assault from happening. Women talked about how they must calculate their every response in social interactions. One respondent said, "there is always in the back of my mind, am I going to get assaulted today? Am I going to get raped?" Female respondents talked about the reality that most sexual assault prevention strategies are geared towards women. Programs mention things like, "how not to get raped. Tip number one," "don't wear that," "don't walk through that dark alley," instead of, "hey guys, stop assaulting people who walked through dark alleys." Students said that women were taught to be responsible for how a man responds to them and their behavior.

On the other hand, not all respondents thought it was a burden and felt it was the woman's duty to do everything possible to prevent an assault from happening. One female respondent implied that women, including herself, do not do enough, stating, "I feel like they're not careful enough and we really should educate like women on how to be careful and how to protect ourselves…." Another female respondent said, "women are

smart, but they put themselves in these situations." The obligation of women to take precautionary measures to prevent a sexual assault was just a necessary part of being a woman despite the unfairness. As female college students, they are told they should not drink from open containers. Female respondents said they are told they should carry pepper spray and, "I put my keys in my hands before I start walking to my car." The female participants said, "before I get in my car, I check the backseat," and, "I call someone if I need to walk to my car late at night by myself." When they go to parties or clubs, they stay in groups. Female participants said they must also be mindful of the signals they are giving to make sure that a man is not misinterpreting them. Female respondents said they should not, "give a man positive signals all night and then change her mind."

For college women, the prevailing message is that they need to take steps to prevent a sexual assault from happening because, as one female participant stated, "boys will be boys." Men are and should be sexually aggressive and that, as a female participant said, "guys are going to act that way no matter how much we try to fix it." Students also discussed expectations of how men and women should behave in sexually intimate situations or relationships that potentially reflect rape culture; particularly, the normalization of persistence, even in the face of multiple no's, until consent is given. Students referenced the idea of token resistance. Token resistance is the idea that when a woman says no she really means try harder (Meulenhard & Rogers, 1998). Students said that college men often believe when a woman says yes, she really means try harder, with one male participant stating, "society teaches us if she said no, then keep being persistent

and it will happen." Another male respondent said that his peers believe if a woman is being shy or coy, "[they] are just going to perceive it as you can go after her." The persistent idea of token resistance reinforces the stereotype that in sexual interactions with men, women do not want to be perceived as promiscuous, so they make the man work to achieve the privilege of having sex.

Relationship status.

Lastly, respondents discussed how rape culture affects how people view sexual interactions in relationships or with intimate partners; particularly, how being in a relationship implies consent. Students discussed that partners will often assume that if they give consent to one intimate act, they are consenting to all intimate acts, including intercourse. One female participant mentioned that, "making out implies sex when it isn't definite." Students also discussed the pressure women feel in relationships to have sex when they do not want to. For example, students talked about women saying yes to sex because their male partner threatened to leave them, with a female respondent saying, "but after like once it's a relationship, I feel girls are expected to have sex just because they're in a relationship with a guy or the guy is going to be like, 'Oh, you are not going to have sex with me, I am going to date someone else." Participants also said women may say yes out of an obligation to fix a relationship; a female participant said women will think, "I don't understand how else I could be fixing this, but I am going to try by using sex because I know that it will make you feel loved and accepted and it will put a patch on our relationship or it will put a patch on what I want to be a relationship." There was a general feeling that women feel pressure to have sex in relationships.

Gender Roles and Expectations

Students discussed societal level expectations of men and women that were not specifically about rape but norms that could influence their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of sexual assault and contribute to rape culture. Students discussed the idea that men are expected to want and pursue sex all the time. A male participant said, "kind of like that mindset that's passed down like, yeah man, go get that chick, go try and sleep with as many women as you can, because then they start to question your masculinity if you are not going after females and stuff like that." Both male and female participants said society plays a significant role in perpetuating the idea that men should be sexually aggressive towards women. Students said they are taught to believe it is acceptable for men to follow through on their sexual urges without restraint. Female participants said that their peers believe men "can't control themselves" and "once men start having sex they can't stop." Students said those urges are then used as an excuse when a man commits a sexual assault. A female participant said her peers would say, "they were driven by desire and would not, in a rational state of mind, [have] made the same decision." A male participant stated, "guys get caught up in a situation where the girl is making subtle hints and they don't want it."

Expectations of what it means to be a man also lead men to feel entitled to sex. Students discussed the sense of entitlement their male peers may have. A female respondent said men "take what they feel they have earned," and believe they can have what they want, and nothing can affect them. Students described sex as being viewed as a prize. Female participants said a man thinks, "because [he] paid for your meal that you

owe him something" or, "it's like oh I took you out on this elaborate, wonderful date and I did all this for you, now like, you're not even gonna put out?" Female participants discussed the entitlement men feel if they are considered "nice guys." They think, "just because they're nice to you and they like be your friend that you like owe them sex. It's like no. That has nothing to do with it. We're friends. You're a creep."

Students believed there was a general lack of respect for women among their male peers who were only interested in pursuing their own self-interests. The normalized expectations of male/female interactions and the social position of women as inferior has made negotiating relationships and sex difficult. Female students believed their own wants and desires were ignored, with one stating "I think it's so screwed up that just a regular no doesn't stop a lot of guys. You have to tell them that you have a boyfriend and they respect your boyfriend more than they respect you." College women feel objectified; they feel sex with them is treated like a commodity

Students also discussed behavioral expectations of women; primarily focused on the effects of society's broader sexism on how college women are treated. For students, even the way a woman dresses influences the way she is treated. Male college students believed women dress for them and for their attention; and, as one female respondent said, "want to be treated a certain way when they wear provocative clothing." Female participants also discussed the double standard in society in terms of their sexual behavior. Women are taught they should not want to have sex with men but should always say yes when asked or pursued; one female respondent said "your body is a thing men want. Then it says you should protect it. You're kind of a temple but also guys want

this. Men want this but then it's like you should protect yourself. You're able to enjoy sex. Then you're placed into either like you're normal, you're a nympho or you're like a prude." Female students said they and their peers may be, "uncomfortable saying no." One female participant said they are taught they should be happy men want them and be, "passive recipients of men's sexual aggression." Students believed when men are in social situations and pursue a sexual partner, they are congratulated and considered more of man; however, as one female student put it, "it's not okay for girls to have sex with a guy because she wants to." If a woman actively pursued sex, she would be called a slut. Because women are not supposed to pursue sex, when they are pursued they are expected to accept and enjoy that sexual aggression.

Students often brought up the differences in how men and women behave, and the experiences afforded to them because of their gender. Participants mentioned the behaviors men and women cannot equally engage in due to behavioral standards women are expected to abide by to remain safe. One female participant stated:

> A guy can just chug alcohol and go streaking through the neighborhood and not have to worry. I would love to do that. I would love to go to a party and just go crazy and not be over sexualized or at risk of rape or anything like that. But just being a person. I would love to not be afraid to walk at night alone. I would love to not worry about someone putting something in my drink or keeping my guy friends close but not too close. Like it's ridiculous…why do we even have to do that?

Male participants stated that them and their male peers are not as concerned about their personal safety. It is important to ensure that college women have the best possible

college experience. One female participant stated, “you shouldn’t have to worry about being raped.”

Communicating Sexual Intent

Two research questions focused on understanding how college students communicate their sexual intent. The researcher wanted to know the indicators of a healthy or unhealthy communication about sexual desires or needs between male and female college students that could lead to or prevent sexual assault. The researcher also wanted to know how college students defined and characterized consent and how they would describe a circumstance in which consent was given. Also, what students perceive to be a healthy dynamic between intimate partners can vary. Healthy relationship practices have the potential to reduce sexual assault. Therefore, it is important to identify those variables that demonstrate healthy communications about sex between male and female partners. Students identified multiple indicators of what they consider healthy intimacy and communication about sex. Participants described healthy and unhealthy sexual interactions that could prevent or lead to a sexual assault. Also, students did not have consistent descriptions of consent. As a group, they conceptualized of consent differently. Also, it appeared easier for students to identify those circumstances that were not consent rather than those things that indicated a person wanted to participate in sexual activity. It is important to understand how students conceive of consent, how they describe it, how they ask for it and how they ensure they have received it to address one of the most important aspects of determining if a sexual assault has occurred and preventing them from occurring.

Consent

Students were not able to give detailed descriptions of consent and often had trouble putting into words how they give consent or recognize that it has been given. Some students discussed the difficulty of defining and describing consent. Respondents said no one is 100% sure what it is, and different people could have different definitions. One female participant said it is, "hard to say how a person should give consent because every sexual encounter is different for everyone." Another female participant said establishing a standard definition of consent can be difficult because, "you can't just be told oh this is what you have to look out for 'because people are different, everybody's going to be different, so you have to have that understanding to learn quickly about that person." For the students, as a male respondent said, "consent looks like a lot of different things" and can often be confusing. Many of them discussed the challenge of being told to wait for consent but not be given guidance on what signals they should be waiting to receive.

When students attempted to give a definition of consent, they were not consistent and often vague in their descriptions. For example, one female student said consent was, "respecting the autonomy of another person," but could not clearly explain what that meant to the student. It was not easy for students to identify those signs that indicate a willingness and desire to participate in sexual activity. Sometimes it was easier for students to describe situations that would not be considered consent. For example, a person could not give consent under duress. Female students mentioned if someone pressures another person into having sex or, "pushes a woman's boundaries," she is not

giving consent. A male participant said it is also not consent if, “she is scared and if the only reason she's given consent is because she's freaked out that something is going to happen.” Female participants often mentioned a woman saying yes to sex due to fear of a man’s reaction to the rejection. Some said they felt unsafe and said yes to prevent a physical assault. Others discussed the potential labels of “prude” or “uptight” by their partners if they did not say yes to sex. Some college women expressed the idea that they do not feel empowered to say no to sex. In the face of potential physical retaliation or intimidating behavior, women may engage in sexual activity. Despite the different attempts at defining consent, most students described consent as saying or communicating yes to a partner that they want to participate in sexual activity. Both male and female participants described consent as a, “clear and coherent yes,” and needs to be “enthusiastic” and not a “hard maybe.” For students, the yes does not always have to be verbal and can be communicated nonverbally through body language.

Nonverbal communication.

Respondents said nonverbal communication was the preferred method of communicating consent, with one male participant stating, “if you need a verbal no, something is wrong.” For students, if a partner has to communicate verbally that they do not want to have sex, potentially the situation has already passed the point of mutually desired sex. However, when probed to identify those nonverbal signs that a student is giving consent, students were not able to give detailed examples. Students gave imprecise indicators; one male participant said, a woman could, “sound uncomfortable like they don’t want to do it anymore.” Sometimes they referred to eager participation as an

indicator of consent; one male participant said, “when they are kissed, they kiss the person back.” Although students were often not able to give specific actions that demonstrated consent, they did discuss nonverbal communications of resistance. The examples they gave included: the woman is pushing the man away, getting tense, sounds uncomfortable, is holding back, recoils, not doing anything (i.e. not actively participating in sex) or covering herself, closing her legs, or pushing someone away.

The over-reliance on non-verbal communication complicates the process of ensuring both men and women communicate their intent and their male partners correctly interpret that intent. Although sexual situations are social interactions, as one female participant stated, “people look for the same clarity in signals as they would look for in other intimate situations versus looking for the social cues that you could find in any other type of non-intimate contacts.” This implies that in situations where college students would understand an implied or indirect no in a social situation, they do not use the same skills and understanding in sexual interactions. Because indirect and nonverbal communication is open to subjective interpretation, many students stated that when it comes to consent, direct communication is necessary because signals can be difficult to understand, particularly if alcohol is involved. The problem is that, as one female participant said, “people aren’t direct,’ and students, “need to say you aren’t comfortable with it.” Male respondents said they need to hear a woman say no, saying, “I feel if someone who is not actively saying they don't want to, but they aren't expressively giving consent, there might be miscommunication that someone would take it as saying yes when they really didn’t want.” Another male respondent reiterated the same idea, stating,

“I don't hear a no. I don't hear anything. I assume the entire time that she's with it. She's not fighting it. She's not doing anything like how am I supposed to know in that moment something's wrong.” However, some students thought miscommunication was used as an excuse to commit an assault, with a male respondent stating it, “should be obvious the person doesn’t want it to happen.”

Students also discussed the difficulty of interpreting the subtle hints a woman may be using, with a male participant stating, “physical cues can be difficult to understand.” Understanding those cues can be especially difficult if two people just met. Students said that the college campus climate encourages one-night stands and therefore, the possibility of miscommunication is great. According to students, knowing whether someone is giving consent can also be confusing, with a female respondent stating it can be difficult, “when people are incapacitated or when people are incredibly emotionally immature or when people can't read signals.” Therefore, the ability of a person to recognize consent depends on multiple factors. However, according to male participants, if you are unsure, “it’s better to stop and not move forward because if she’s not sure, she’s not giving you consent. She doesn’t know what she really wants.”

Students discussed the obligation for men to be perceptive enough to understand these nonverbal communications; it is, as a male participant said, “easy to say no without saying no.” People can be clear about what they want without saying anything. Participants discussed overt physical cues, like if a person looks terrified, or subtle cues, like an engaging touch. Despite the belief from multiple participants that a man should know when a woman is not interested, when he is getting positive feedback, and when an

advance is unwanted, one male participant said it is, “understandable how someone can miss cues when you are full steam ahead.” Another male student stated, “[nonverbal communication may not be enough for someone to stop if they’re in the moment.”

Communication.

For students, miscommunication can contribute to the perpetuation of sexual assault. For two male students, an incident could simply be a “misunderstanding between a guy and girl” and, “sometimes the signals can get crossed.” They discussed unclear body language and how they could mistakenly continue with sex if the person, as one male participant said, “seems like they are down with it.” However, students were not able to identify the specific body language that would let them know the person wanted to continue with sex. Students stated that clear communication was necessary for the man to know what the woman wanted and prevent a sexual assault from occurring. One male student specifically mentioned that it was difficult to call an incident a sexual assault if the person’s, “physical and verbal cues don’t match”; meaning the woman said yes but her body language suggested she was uncomfortable. If a woman is uncomfortable, she must clearly say no, and if she does not, and, “there is no clear communication about what [she] wants,” according to a male participant, a sexual encounter cannot be labeled a sexual assault.

Students also discussed complicating factors in communicating and knowing someone has received consent. One particular factor frequently discussed was alcohol consumption. For example, some students stated that they have learned if a person who has been drinking cannot give consent, with one female student saying, “if a person has

been drinking, technically they can't give consent." However, for others, alcohol consumption did not always indicate that a person cannot give consent. One male student stated, "it's okay if the woman has been drinking as long as her body language is clear and she is aware enough to give consent." A female student said someone can, "clearly see when a person is too drunk to give consent." A woman can't give consent, as a female respondent said, if "she's passed her limit and she can't walk straight or she can't really talk without slurring her words…." Male participants stated that for students, if a person is drinking, "they must be in their right mind," in order to give consent and "be aware sex is going to take place." The subjectivity of their ideas about alcohol and consent is challenging and complicates a student's determination of consent. A woman's ability to maintain coherence and awareness varies person to person. Therefore, there is no clear standard to base a person's ability to give consent if they have been drinking. Another complicating factor was the timing of permission. Male participants discussed the confusion if a woman changes her mind during sex. One male respondent said, "if you are having sex with someone after they have given you consent, then you are thinking about sex, that's what is on your mind. And if you're in the act of sex and your partner suddenly doesn't want to do this anymore or doesn't feel like having sex any longer, you're not going to know."

Implied consent.

Students also discussed those situations that their peers believe imply consent. The colloquial phrase "Netflix and Chill" was discussed in groups as a term used to communicate sexual intent. They discussed the problematic nature of this new

euphemism for sex; sometimes, as a female student said, “I just want to sit and binge watch Netflix.” There are other situations, according to participants, that imply consent, such as agreeing to go to someone’s house or having a prior relationship. A female participant said some of her peers think, “verbal consent isn’t necessary in a relationship.” A female student said a boyfriend cannot assume, “oh you’re my girlfriend, of course you would give consent.” This discussion about consent concerns the challenges of social norms surrounding sexual interactions that teach men and women that in certain situations, sex should be expected. College students feel pressure to have sex in certain situations and women feel obligated to say yes under specific circumstances.

Ensuring consent.

Even with the potential to miscommunicate sexual desires and the pressure of social and cultural norms dictating how men and women should interact in sexual situations, participants discussed the steps individuals should take to ensure they do have consent. Before intimacy begins, partners should communicate with each other to make sure sex is what they want. Also, alcohol should never be used as a means to put a woman in a state of mind where she is not capable of consent; one male respondent said, “you shouldn’t try to convince someone to drink more so you have a better chance of having sex with them.” For students, consent should be asked for more than once. Male participants said when a woman, “says yes, the person should ask are you sure” and, “even if she seems to be going along with it, she seems uncomfortable keep asking her. If she says maybe, then be like we can wait. You know don't kind of pressure yourself

into her. Like don't feel at any point any sense of entitlement to a woman's body." Some male participants stated that men should create an environment where a woman feels safe to say yes or no without pressure or coercion. According to a male participant, after asking for consent, "you say yes [then] you should ask them back like are you sure you want to do it too and then if they say yes, then yes. If you initiate it you need to make sure that you're not like putting pressure on the person like hey, let's have sex now." One female participant said when a woman says no, "the person should let it go." If someone has any doubts, as one male respondent said, "you have to rethink it and have to say, no, we're not going to do this yet or we are not going to do this at all if you are uncomfortable with it."

Ask for consent.

Students were not explicitly asked about why men do not ask for consent but many of the participants mentioned reasons why men are hesitant to ask. Students talked about men being afraid that if they asked for consent, sex would not happen. One female participant said if every person, "were to ask hey do you want to have sex before things were to get that far, a lot of times the sex wouldn't happen." Female participants said, "men just want to get their way," and would not want to do anything to jeopardize their opportunity for sex. Female participants also discussed that in the heat of the moment, the last thing men would want to do is stop and ask for consent. Men really want something to happen and, as one male respondent said, "don't wanna give [women] the opportunity to think about it and regret it or process it." Some college students believe that asking for consent ruins the moment. Multiple students said that some men consider it a mood killer and male participants said it does not allow them to be spontaneous. Respondents

particularly thought that continuous consent, asking for consent with every sexual progression (i.e. kissing, touching, etc.), would be disruptive. Participants also mentioned that no one, as one male participant said, "wants to feel rejected by their partner. Feel like they aren't performing well." Therefore, men do not ask for consent because they believe a no reflects their performance. One female student mentioned, "it may be embarrassing to ask for consent." Students discussed the need for men to be open to hearing no and not be upset if they do not get consent; consent is not guaranteed or permanent. One male participant stated, "I've been in a lot of situations where personally where I do take a girl home, and nothing ends up happening. cause she's like yeah I don't want to actually do anything I changed my mind or I'm not in the mood anymore whatever." Perhaps, men believe asking for consent demonstrates insecurity. Also, there may be social norms that teach men to take action and go for what they want. Therefore, it is not manly to ask for permission to be sexually intimate. It is vital to consider that men may be aware of the indicators of consent; however, masculine behavioral expectations may keep men from asking.

Students discussed the many obligations people have in relationships or intimate situations to ensure consent has been clearly communicated. Students said that it was important that women be clear when they are giving consent; the person's intentions and desires should be clearly communicated before the person moves forward. Respondents said that women need to have the confidence to speak up about what they want but acknowledged that, "some women are uncomfortable saying no." A male participant said other women, "don't really know how to either say no or some girls are really nice and

they have problems saying no and they go along with it. And then some guys, their egos are bigger than what they are, and they think, oh yes, she likes me, but she surely doesn't." One participant said that he asked female peers after having sex they were uncomfortable with, "well did you say anything. I've straight up asked girls did you say anything. [They would say] well no but like I just didn't know how I felt. You gotta say something." Both male and female participants said it is a woman's responsibility to herself to be clear and firm about what she wants. One female participant said, "it's big problem if you're not comfortable to say no to someone but you're comfortable enough to have sex with them." However, one female participant acknowledged the challenges of direct verbal communication due to social norms, stating, "for 80% of cases, a no means no." When a woman says maybe, it does not always mean that a man should not proceed; as one female participant said it, "depends on how you say maybe though. There are a lot of variables cause sometimes it's like maaaayyybeeee." This clarity was necessary because, as a male student asked, "how am I supposed to know that wasn't okay if you're not going to say anything or show me that it wasn't okay."

Students also discussed the responsibility of the man to make sure he has consent. Female participants discussed the need for men to be open to what the person sincerely wants. Men would, "misunderstand friendliness for flirtation" and interpret nice behaviors as more than just indicators of friendship. Female participants discussed the problem of men ignoring their communications about wanting to have sex, with one woman stating, "I was aware of what was going on and I communicated that I did not want him to and he still went ahead with it because it sounded like I was enjoying

myself." According to participants, women need to communicate their needs clearly and men need to take those communications at face value rather than through the lens of sexual desire or male social norms.

Healthy Intimacy

For students, healthy intimacy was about making sure both partners are enjoying the experience. Respondents described how sex should be to ensure that both partners are enjoying the experience. Students mentioned the reciprocal nature of the act. For students and their peers, good sex can only happen when both people want it and have given consent. One male participant said, "if they're really interested in having sex nice sex where they want to please you and not just themselves, wouldn't you want a yes?" One male participant said if they are having sex with someone, "you want to know – it's good for both of you – if one of you is not just bored or sitting there not having a good time or not wanting it any longer. So, you will obviously try to pick up on cues of what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong." Students discussed the need for mutual satisfaction to continue with any sexual intimacy, with one participant stating, "if you are having sex with someone, and they are obviously not into it, you're not going to want to keep going." Male students talked about needing to be entertained and needing positive feedback to be stimulated during sex. If they are not receiving positive feedback, "[they're] not going to put any effort towards this." They do not want to have sex with someone, "who's like a maybe to having sex with [them]." For students, sex is not the just intercourse. One male participant said, "it's everything surrounding the act. Cause it's like the more...in my opinion the more that's...the more goes in before you actually do it the

more fun it is when you actually get there." Students said that sex is an experience, with another male participant stating,

> It's not a race. It's not a competition. It's nothing like that. It's an experience. And you're trying to see what the person wants. What the person likes. You're hoping the same kind of thing happens to you by returning the favor. It's not something that you want to just you know rush into, go 0 to 100. From nothing to hard right away. You want to go slowly build that whole experience into something is a positive memory, a positive experience as a whole.

Respondents also said that both people should feel comfortable, with one female participant stating, "and feel like you trust your partner." For participants, sex was about mutual participation and satisfaction

Students identified multiple factors that demonstrated healthy behavior and communications about sex that could prevent a sexual assault. Respondents talked about the need to communicate their discomfort even if it is an awkward conversation. One male student said, "I feel like a lot of couples suffer from like sexual assault or rape because early on they don't say that I'm not comfortable with this and because it's uncomfortable I guess it's like people don't like to talk about it." Before sex happens there must be, as a male participant stated, a discussion between partners, "saying 'this is what I want' or like 'this is what needs to happen' and stuff and you need to respect that and I'll respect what you want or need and come to a compromise…and then like her partner not being an ass about it and is not pressuring her." Some students suggested

taking the time to get to know each other so you understand their nonverbal communications. One male participant said,

> I made sure that I understood the person well enough before I tried anything. I wanted to get to know them like extremely well before I put myself in the position of where I was going to be doing these things, so I felt like I understood the signals pretty well at that point but at the beginning of the relationship if I had tried something like this I would have not have a clue.

If they do not have time to get to know each other because it is a "hookup" or one-night stand, they, as a male respondent said, "shouldn't rely on those nonverbal cues. I think you should be straight up yes, I want to have sex with you. It's clear because all of the nonverbal stuff can be misinterpreted… [a woman should] be like hell yeah let's go." Not only do students need to communicate their discomfort, but they also need to be clear about their intentions; they need to establish boundaries. One female participant said it is, "both their responsibility to make their intentions known before they go back because once you're there I feel like it's like oh, we're not gonna talk about it, we're just gonna do whatever we both or one of us intended to do beforehand especially if there's drinking or drugs or anything like that." For students, one important factor in healthy intimacy is the ability to effectively communicate their true sexual wants and desires.

Students discussed how a sexual interaction should progress to guarantee both people are comfortable with sex. One male participant said:

> If all things had gone pretty well up to that point and then maybe you guys are getting undressed and she just kind of stops, and like looks uncomfortable then

> that's when you can reaffirm is this still...like...I know it was fine earlier. Is this still something you want to do or maybe we should do this another time maybe we should wait. Things like that it doesn't have to be awkward conversations. or anything like that. it's just a matter of keep...trying to understand the person you are about to have sex with or have any sort of relationship with trying to empathize with them, see things from their point of view and take their needs into account. things like that.

Male participants acknowledged that some women may hesitate, so they ask, "are you actually sure that's all right with you? But I am not usually asking for anything specific. It's actually, do you want to do this now or you actually want to hang out." Students had specific suggestions for how to interact with a partner to ensure both people know what is going to happen. These suggestions demonstrate the specific beliefs students have about how men and women should interact in sexual situations.

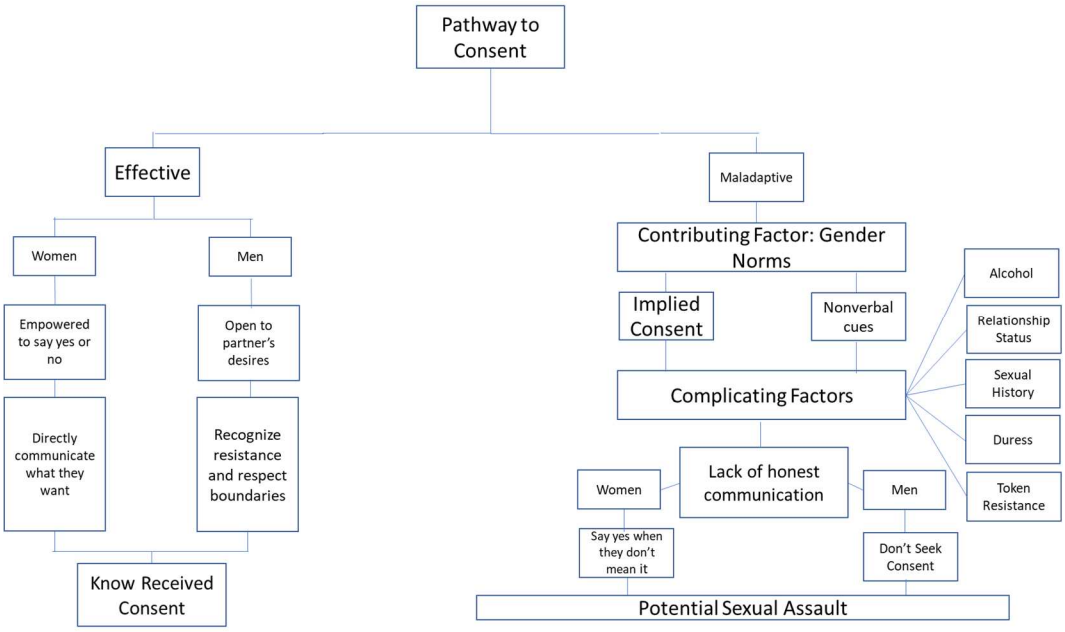
Overall, students acknowledged barriers to understanding and communicating sexual intent that may lead to a sexual assault. One of those barriers is their ability to recognize and define consent. Respondents' discussion of consent reflects a general lack of understanding of consent and brings to light multiple social and cultural factors that influence how college students define and characterize consent. Participants were open about their own misunderstandings about consent and specifically addressed how difficult it can be to define. Students, for the most part, found it easier to describe resistance and signs that a partner does not want to participate in sex rather than affirmative signals. Students were also able to identify situational factors, like alcohol and communication

ability, that could influence a person's ability to understand the hints, whether subtle or overt, that an individual wants to participate in sexual activity. Responses also indicated a need to address nonverbal communication since students tend to rely on it to communicate sexual intent. Students also provided information about what men and women can do to prevent a sexual assault. Many of the ideas students expressed about consent and how to communicate consent were based in gender norms and expectations. Students also described how the experience of sex should be like for all participants. Students also emphasized the need for improved communication in sexual situations; they and their peers need to do a better job of talking about what they want before any sexual contact begins. Many of the male participants narrated how you can ask for consent and what to say if you received certain responses.

Conceptual Framework

Results provided more information about college students' inability to understand consent and the contributing factors to how students conceive of, give and ensure they have received consent. The conceptual framework below uses the data collected to describe a pathway to consent and the potential barriers to giving consent and to knowing consent has been given.

Figure 1



The framework first demonstrates a healthy and potentially effective method of knowing consent has been received. In this model, women feel empowered to say yes or no based on their true feelings. They are not negatively influenced by social or cultural norms, or individual pressure from a partner that is impacting her decision to give or not give consent. This sense of empowerment leads a woman to feel comfortable telling her partner what she wants and directly communicate those intentions. At the same time, the male partner is creating an environment that gives a woman the space to say no. He is maintaining a slow pace and awaiting consent, even if nonverbal, that each progression of intimacy is something both of them want. The male partner also wants the experience to be mutually satisfying. Because he is open to what his partner wants, he recognizes any nonverbal or verbal cues of resistance and respects her boundaries. Even though the results demonstrate that college students have difficulty defining consent and describing

it in concrete terms, this process is more likely to lead to a situation where consent has been truly given and a male partner is certain he has received it.

Results also demonstrate a potentially unhealthy and maladaptive pathway to that could lead to a sexual assault. First, there are gender norms that interrupt this path that influence the mechanisms through which consent is given and received. Gender norms dictate that women are supposed to be compliant, nice and "act like ladies." Therefore, they may give a verbal or nonverbal indicator they want to participate but do not want to engage in sexual activity. Women are also taught they should be, according to a female participant, "passive recipients of a man's sexual aggression," and should be grateful that a man wants them. Men should be persistent until a woman says yes. A sense of entitlement may lead men to pursue sex without consideration of their partner. Social norms also teach men that they should always want sex and being a man is about taking what he wants. Both men and women behave in ways that adhere to proscribed gender norms that influence their strategies when it comes to identifying and giving consent. The path to consent for college students is possibly one that relies solely on nonverbal cues and situations that imply consent rather than direct communication. Participants discussed the potential for miscommunication due to their reliance on cues that can be misunderstood. The data demonstrates students may be more comfortable using indirect communication about sex, including euphemisms. Students may also rely on misinterpreting situations that imply consent, such as going to a person's room, dorm or apartment to "Netflix and Chill." Further complicating the path to getting consent are complicating factors like alcohol, relationship status, sexual history, duress and token

resistance. Although any alcohol consumption indicates someone cannot give consent, participants discussed the idea that this determination of ability to consent is not realistic. Alcohol is a part of their college experience and a potential typical and/or welcomed part of sexual intimacy. Students discussed the fact that being in a relationship, for their peers, means that you always consent to sex. The same can be said for a sexual history of having multiple partners. There is a sense that if a woman typically says yes to sex with partners, she always wants sex; therefore, it is not likely she would say no to having sex with anyone. Women cannot give consent under duress. If they feel obliged in any way to say yes due to fear of retaliation, intimidation or as the result of coercion, they are not giving consent. Lastly, women are taught that token resistance is a typical part of sexual interactions and that they should be coy and play hard to get; make a man earn the privilege of having sex with them.

These contributing factors and barriers lead to dishonest communication about sexual needs and desires. Women do not clearly and directly say what they do or do not want. They do not feel comfortable establishing boundaries and do not feel empowered to act on their own sexual desires. Men do not ask for consent. They do not want to give a woman the opportunity to say no or be rejected because multiple sexual partners is part of what it means to be a man. Also, since they are supposed to go after what they want, they cannot stop to get consent because it is not masculine and demonstrates insecurity. This dishonest communication may lead to a sexual assault. The framework demonstrates, it is a complicated path that is not likely to lead to a situation that demonstrates a truly consensual sexual experience or relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The current qualitative study sought to provide a more in-depth understanding of the attitudes and beliefs of college students concerning sexual assault. The current analysis focused on belief systems that should be addressed in sexual assault prevention programming; including, the barriers to discussing and preventing sexual assault, the social and cultural norms that influence their perspectives on sexual assault and how college students communicate sexual intent. In this chapter a summary of findings, social work implications and limitations of the study will be presented.

Summary of Findings

Barriers

As a group, respondents did not have cohesive and consistent beliefs about sexual assault. It was not possible, for example, to say that all the participants defined sexual assault with one set of characteristics or thought it occurred in specific circumstances. Consistent with previous literature (Campbell, 2002), respondents found it difficult to define sexual assault and talked about their own uncertainties about what constitutes a sexual assault. This doubt about the definition of and the multiple scenarios that constitute sexual assault indicate that discussions about the issue may be fruitless due to the lack of consensus. How a woman identifies a sexual assault has the ability to affect her willingness to report a sexual assault (Deming et al., 2013). Because college women report sexual assault less than their female peers not in college (Department of Justice, 2014), it is important to discuss the problematic nature of the respondents' difficulty describing the image they have of sexual assault. This could be contributing to the lack of

reporting among college women. This ambiguity may also prevent men from distinguishing consensual and reciprocal sexual behaviors from sexual violence. If students do not identify the same behaviors as constituting a sexual assault, researchers cannot develop effective targeted prevention strategies. Additionally, students were willing to accept a subjective definition of sexual assault based on individual experiences; further complicating the ability of students to be able to identify problematic situations and engage in productive discussions about how to prevent them.

Students also identified factors that complicated their ability to identify a sexual assault, including alcohol consumption. Participants discussed that alcohol had become a normal part of sexual experiences. Therefore, it was unreasonable, according to students, to say that a college student could not give consent if they have been drinking. For participants, alcohol consumption is not a primary indicator that a sexual assault occurred and does not preclude someone from being able to consent to sexual activity. Another complicating factor was perceived unclear communication. Participants emphasized the need for partners to be clear about what they want. For respondents, they did not know if an incident was sexual assault if a woman did not communicate clearly that she did not want to participate in sexual activity. Students believed that men should ask for and wait for consent. Research has demonstrated a tendency to blame a woman for an assault if she does not directly and clearly communicate that she does not want to participate in sexual activity (Abbey, 2002). Participants reinforced the idea that a woman can potentially be blamed for an assault by stating that she has an obligation to be absolutely and unwaveringly clear about her boundaries. One implication being that if she was not

straightforward about what she really wanted, a man could not be held responsible for acting on the cues he interpreted as consent. The relationship status of the two individuals was also identified as a complicating factor. Participants demonstrated a misconception that a sexual assault by a partner is less of a crime than one by a stranger (Seyller et al., 2016) Participants talked about the fact that among their peers, a relationship itself often implies consent; their peers were less likely to see sexually aggressive behavior of a partner as sexual assault. The idea that sex is an expectation and obligation in a committed relationship is a norm even among college students and needs to be addressed.

There were three concepts, consent, coercion and intent, that were important to participants when deciding whether an incident was a sexual assault. In addition to not receiving consent, an individual had to have malicious intent and intend to do harm. Even if a situation met the criteria of a sexual assault, if the person did not willfully have sex with the person without their consent, it was not considered a sexual assault. For college students, situationally specific circumstances, like intent, may influence how they interpret an incident. A study in 2014 by MIT demonstrated that some college students believe that it is possible to accidentally sexually assault someone (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014). Participants demonstrated similar beliefs by acknowledging that if someone did not intend to do harm or violate someone, it was just a mistake that someone would not have normally done under typical circumstances (i.e. not drinking, not using drugs, or not giving into sexual urges). Participants acknowledged that the use of coercion to manipulate a woman into having sex (e.g. threatening to leave a relationship if she didn't have sex), is a sexual assault. But they also recognized the

normalization of pressuring a woman to have sex. Therefore, if pressuring a woman into having sex is a normal part of sexual interactions, either sexual assault is a norm of college sexual experiences or intellectually they know it is sexual assault, but not necessarily in practice.

Students discussed the denial their peers have about the prevalence of sexual assault. This persistent denial may be present for students to feel safe on campus; it is a survival mechanism. Even when college students do recognize that sexual assault is a problem, it is not taken seriously and the impact of sexual assault on a victim's mental health and college experience is minimized. College students did not consider sexual assault a traumatic incident. This could reflect the idea that students believe sexual assault is only about sex rather than sex, power, and control. Therefore, it is an incident of "bad sex" rather than a crime of violence. Participants also discussed the general discomfort they had talking about sexual assault, mentioning various reasons why college students feel uncomfortable talking about the issue. For some they found the conversation embarrassing and awkward. Again, this embarrassment could be the result of framing sexual assault as an issue related to sex, which can make people uncomfortable, rather than safety and violence. Research has demonstrated that men may become defensive when talking about sexual assault because of the gendered nature of the discussion (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Male participants in the study discussed the same idea, saying they felt like they are always portrayed as the bad guy and walked away from prevention programs depressed and sad. The gendered nature of the discussion about sexual assault is necessary, specifically to address the social and cultural norms that lead

to sexual assault. However, the discussion must be nuanced so that men are not excluded from the conversation as potential allies. Despite the general discomfort, students did mention the need to have more open discussions. Participants did not believe enough people talked about the issue and only a small group of people were working to educate themselves and others and attempt to reduce the prevalence of sexual assault.

Rape Culture

Throughout the interviews, students referenced social and cultural norms that could negatively influence their beliefs about sexual assault. Students mentioned ideas and perspectives that perpetuate rape culture. Unlike results from previous quantitative studies, this data demonstrated that students both endorse and reject certain rape myths. Even though they had difficulty defining rape culture and discussing its relevance, they mentioned multiple aspects of rape culture and those rape myths that serve as the foundation of it.

Students often described sexual assault in a way that was congruent with the stereotype of "real rape." They believed a sexual assault would happen at night, in a dark alley, would be violent, the perpetrator would use a weapon and it involves a stranger. This endorsement of, "real rape," is common among college students (Sampson, 2003). Despite the participants' knowledge contradicting this archetype of a sexual assault, students, particularly female participants, remained steadfast in their belief. This persistent belief could be a survival mechanism; for college women, it may be easier to control the circumstances that would lead to a sexual assault by a stranger. College women may gain control by believing a sexual assault can be prevented by doing certain

things. But those risk reduction strategies primarily apply to protecting themselves from a stranger. Therefore, they believe a stranger is more likely to sexually assault them because that is something they have the skills to protect themselves from.

Students also endorsed multiple stereotypes of perpetrators of sexual assault and mentioned new stereotypes that have evolved from their experiences; including the idea that a perpetrator is going to be a member of a fraternity. Participants often held contradictory ideas about sexual assault, including those about perpetrators. They simultaneously maintained the intellectual understanding that someone they know or at least have met would most likely sexually assault them rather than a stranger. This cognitive dissonance may also serve as a protective mechanism. A college student can use self-defense strategies to protect against strangers and simply stay away from fraternity houses. These stereotypes of a perpetrator can also be harmful and have serious implications for how victims are treated and if perpetrators are held accountable for their actions (Eddy & Sandor, 2011). First, perpetrators of sexual assault may not admit they did anything wrong because they do not fit the stereotype of a perpetrator in a "real rape" scenario. Secondly, women may not believe they were assaulted because they knew the person who sexually assaulted them. Lastly, people may be less willing to believe someone who is perceived to be a good guy would perpetuate a sexual assault even in the face of contrary evidence.

A common misconception that prevents productive and effective conversations about sexual assault prevention is that sexual assault is primarily used as a mechanism to enact revenge and the majority of allegations are false (Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa & Cote,

2010). Research has shown that college men do endorse the rape myth that women lie about being raped (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds & Gidyz, 2011). Participants, overwhelming male, discussed this narrative that reports of sexual assault are used as a method or reconciling with a regretful night of sex or used to get revenge on an ex-boyfriend. It is possible that one false report of sexual assault or a vigorous rush to persecute an alleged perpetrator without due diligence or due process had led students to assume the majority of cases are similar false accusations. Or perhaps, the narrative of an epidemic of false accusations is also a survival mechanism. Believing sexual assault is not prevalent allows students to feel safe. For men, believing that false accusations are a problem may allow them to continue to have faith in the goodness of their peers or feel they themselves are not at risk of perpetuating a sexual assault. Supporting the idea that most reports of sexual assault are false due to a woman regretting a sexual encounter or wanting to get revenge has the potential to keep victims from reporting and prevents social changes needed to reduce sexual assault. Also, believing that those who are accused of sexual assault are vigorously persecuted prevents substantial reforms in how colleges handle sexual assault charges.

They also discussed stereotypes associated with victims, mentioning the stigma of being labeled a victim of sexual assault and how it affects a woman's reputation. The stigma may prevent students from reporting a sexual assault; they do not want to be labeled and treated like a victim. This lack of reporting contributes to the denial that sexual assault is a problem on college campuses by suppressing the rate of sexual assault and misrepresenting the prevalence of sexual violence. Respondents also discussed the

idea of a credible victim and the characteristics used to determine if a victim should be believed. These characteristics mirrored those mentioned in previous studies that identify characteristics such as physical evidence, the victim's enthusiastic resistance, the use of a weapon or a perpetrator who is a stranger to the victim as indicators of a victim who is more likely to be believed, particularly by police and administrators (O'Neal, 2017). For participants and their peers, a credible victim is emotional, reports the assault immediately and has physical bruises and scars as evidence of the violence. Participants also discussed the reality that if a woman does not see herself as a credible victim by those standards, she may be hesitant to report. Overall, students did not endorse these stereotypes of a credible victim and were understanding of the individualized nature of reacting to trauma.

Participants mentioned other reasons a victim may not report an assault. One of the major reasons discussed was the fear of being blamed for the incident. Circumstances like the victim's clothing, sexual history, flirtatious behavior, and alcohol consumption were all reasons students said a woman may be blamed for her victimization. Although the participants often did not endorse victim blaming, they were aware of the prevalence of these beliefs among their peers. Even among a population that is presumed to have more understanding of sexual assault, the participants acknowledged that some negative beliefs persist, including victim blaming.

Alcohol consumption contributes to continued victim blaming and complicates attempts to hold perpetrators accountable. Participants acknowledged that college students endorse the double standard concerning alcohol consumption and acts of sexual

assault (Schuller & Stewart, 2000); victims who drink are held accountable for their own victimization while perpetrators who drink are excused for not realizing what they were doing and the harm they were causing. However, although alcohol made it more difficult to hold perpetrators accountable, students believed it should not be used as an excuse for a sexual assault. College students recognize the unrealistic task of attempting to eliminate alcohol from the social aspects of college and sexual experiences.

Respondents also mentioned the complicated nature of women being asked to take precautions to prevent a sexual assault. Both women and men talked about the unfairness of the burden placed on women to protect themselves and be responsible for how men react to them. However, they acknowledged it as a necessity because of the reality of the potential dangers on campus. Lastly, participants discussed behavioral expectations of sexual interactions. They discussed token resistance, the idea of interpreting a woman's no as a motivation to try harder. They also discussed the implied consent that exists between people in a relationship and the pressure women may feel to have sex to maintain that relationship. Among college students, there are norms both in and out of relationships associated with sexual interactions that dictate how they interpret behaviors and give consent.

Gender Norms

Studies have demonstrated that college students' attitudes and beliefs are influenced by gender norms (Paul, McManus & Hayes, 2000). Participants demonstrated that societal level norms may influence behavior both within and outside of intimate situations.. They mentioned specific stereotypes and expectations surrounding men's

behavior. One of the prominent ideas was the expectation that men should want and try to attain sex all the time even through sexually aggressive means. This belief that sexual aggression is a natural proclivity for men is dangerous for both men and women. It insults men and teaches them that, despite their own misgivings, being a real man means pursuing sex no matter the circumstances or potential consequences. It is also dangerous for women because it makes them vulnerable to assault and teaches them that since men are going to be aggressive no matter what, it is their responsibility to prevent an assault by taking precautions and somehow dictating how a man responds to them. With the expectation that men should be sexually aggressive comes the demand that women should provide that sexual fulfillment. According to students, this demand leads men to feel entitled to sex. The belief that men are entitled to sex is problematic because it reinforces that because men should always want to have sex, they should also be allowed to pursue it with violence. Also, college women feel objectified; they feel sex with them is treated like a commodity. Women also feel pressure to have sex, particularly when they do not want to. This feeling could be due to social norms that dictate women should provide sex for men.

Participants discussed the expectation for college women to be virginal as well as sexual. These competing role demands may cause internal conflict and confusion that could lead women to say yes to sex when they do not want to consent due to pressure to be a sexual being. Women also discussed the freedom of being a man because they do not have to conform and restrict their behaviors to maintain their safety. Women mentioned the fear that comes with being a woman and how that fear has become a part of their

everyday lives. For college women, it has become a part of their daily routine to change their behaviors to navigate potential dangers to their personal safety. The need to constantly worry about protecting themselves from assault can cause college women stress and anxiety that can interfere with their college experience.

Consent

Students discussed how they communicate sexual intent in both healthy and unhealthy ways. One important concept in determining if a sexual assault occurred is whether the individual gave consent. Therefore, it was important to ask students about how they characterize and know they have received consent. A standard definition of sexual assault does not currently exist in the literature (Beres, 2007) and participants' discussion of consent reflected this inconsistency. For them, it was not possible to identify standard nonverbal and verbal indicators of consent because, according to them, everyone is different. However, they were able to describe steps that can be taken by individuals that can ensure consent has been given. When they did provide definitions of consent, they were inconsistent and vague. Also, many of the students based their definitions of consent on their own experiences and how they give consent in intimate situations. For students, consent may be a concept difficult to operationalize, but they have specific suggestions for how someone may prevent a sexual assault from occurring. College students may not be able to consistently imagine a consensual situation, but they do know what can be done to make sure they are engaging in consensual sex.

Participants reinforced the belief that directly communicating interest could lead to embarrassment, shame or rejection, making them reluctant to overtly disclose their

intentions (Lindgren, Schacht, Pantalone, Blayney & George, 2009). Students also talked about their reliance on non-verbal communication to determine consent. However, they gave imprecise indicators of non-verbal consent and found it easier to describe those behaviors that would let them know the person is not interested in having sex. Because college students rely on behavioral indicators of consent, they need to have precise knowledge of those signals that a person is interested in participating in sex and not simply rely on subtle hints that the person does not want to have sex.

Alcohol complicated what students perceived to be consent. For students, alcohol consumption did not automatically mean the person could not give consent. Previous research has emphasized that college students' sexual experiences often include alcohol consumption (Abbey, 2002), complicating the ability to identify a consensual sexual situation or sexual assault. For students, their ability to give consent was based on how much they drank and how the alcohol affected their judgment. As a group, college students' individual experiences may shape how they perceive a person's ability to give consent; this perception may even be based on their own behaviors concerning alcohol and sex. This is problematic because there is no standard to compare someone's behavior to determine that their level of intoxication makes them incapable of giving consent. Male students also discussed determining whether or not a woman would give consent based on whether or not shoe would participate in the same sexual activity sober. However, the issue with this perspective is that there is no way for the perpetrator to know, if in the presence of an intoxicated woman, if she would say yes sober. The criteria for determining an ability to give consent has always been any alcohol consumption

because of the variability in which alcohol affects a person's behavior. However, this standard may not be realistic for college students. Alcohol may be such a normal part of sexual interactions in college that it cannot be used to gage whether someone can give consent.

Students also identified other circumstances that made it more difficult to know they were participating in a consensual sexual act; for example, if a woman changes her mind after saying yes. College students may not know that if a woman changes her mind during sex, it is no longer a consensual situation. They may not think continuing with sex after someone has changed their mind is sexual assault because the person did, at some point, give consent. Students also talked about situations, like going to someone's apartment or using the colloquialism "Netflix and chill", that their peers believe implies consent. College students do not often directly communicate their sexual needs. Therefore, students may interpret certain situations or language as a euphemism for a willingness to participate in sex; many times, incorrectly.

Students also identified circumstances that clearly indicated a person is not giving consent. Participants said a woman could not give consent under duress or because of a feeling of obligation in a relationship. They were able to identify situational circumstances that negate any verbal yes, a person may give. Both male and female participants discussed the need for women to be clear about what they want and men to be 100% certain they have received consent before moving forward. Women have an obligation to be direct and communicate their discomfort, even though it may seem awkward. However, some did acknowledge that women may not feel comfortable saying

no or fear the consequences of saying no. Therefore, sexual norms need to change so that women feel empowered to say yes or no based on what they truly want. In the case they do not feel comfortable directly stating they do not want to have sex, men need to interpret any wavering on the part of the woman as non-consent. According to participants, the over-reliance on non-verbal communication may be one of the major reasons why sexual assaults continue to occur. Women may give subtle hints that men may find difficult to interpret. and therefore, may assume a woman is giving consent when she is not. College students may not be comfortable directly communicating about sex; yet their interpretation of nonverbal communication is not always accurate. Participants also discussed multiple reasons why men may not give consent, many of the reasons potentially stemming from men's insecurities and avoiding feelings of rejection. Some college men, because of social norms that expect men to be aggressive, may view asking for consent as contrary to masculinity.

Healthy Intimacy

Research has demonstrated that promoting healthy relationships can prevent sexual assault (Keel, 2005). Participants described what they consider healthy intimacy that could ensure their sexual relationships are fully consensual. For students, sex should be enjoyable for both partners. Participants described sex as an experience rather than an act. For these students, sex was about mutual satisfaction. Many of the male participants stated that if they do not receive positive feedback, they do not want to continue with any sexual intimacy. Therefore, students needed to have consent to enjoy sex even though they did not label it consent.

Because of the reliance on non-verbal communication, one way to prevent a sexual assault was to establish a relationship. According to participants, a relationship was another way to ensure accurate communication between partners. However, if there was not enough time to establish a relationship, it was imperative that people use direct communication to establish their sexual wants and intentions. This imperative poses a problem. Direct communication is needed to prevent sexual assault; but college students prefer to rely on and are more comfortable with nonverbal communication. Respondents said college culture encourages one-night stands, so partners needed to establish boundaries early and quickly. Their preference for sexual relationships needs to be acknowledged and they need education on how to navigate consent and develop healthy sexual intimacy with limited prior interaction. Campus culture may be encouraging and dictating. sexual assault through expectations of what someone's college experience should be like.

Theory

The feminist framework was important in trying to understand the attitudes and beliefs that influence the perpetuation of sexual assault among college students. Participants discussed the many social and cultural norms the patriarchal system has created (Ward, 1995); and how those beliefs contribute to the perpetuation of sexual assault through the creation of rape supportive beliefs. Results reinforced the perspective of sexual assault as a social issue and a problem that needs to be addressed through systemic change (Anderson, Beattie & Spencer, 2001). This systemic change should seek to reduce social and cultural norms that perpetuate stereotypes that normalize sexually

aggressive behavior by men and disempower women. Results have also demonstrated that the focus on sexual assault as an individual deficiency has led to the endorsement and proliferation of perpetrator and victim stereotypes, and rape myths (Anderson, Beattie & Spencer, 2001). These gender norms have also had a negative influence on the perception of the normal progress of sexual interactions and led to confusing conceptions of consent. These gender norms have also led women to feel pressured to engage in sexual activity (Hooks, 2000) and men to avoid asking for consent. Rape myths have a profound effect on how college students interact with each other and engage in sexual relationships. These myths have affected their perceptions of sexual assault and led them to hesitate to acknowledge it is a problem on college campuses, endorsing the narrative that there is an epidemic of false allegations (Fisher et al., 2010). These myths have also shaped how they define a sexual assault and recognize that one has occurred. Feminism provides a framework to understand the broader influences on behavior that leads to the continued perpetuation of sexual assault on college campuses.

Throughout discussions, participants reinforced the idea that the rape myths they endorse serve as psychologically protective factors. Participants referenced the notion that these myths give them a sense of control over their environment (Ward, 1995) . For example, they know that they are more likely to be assaulted by someone they know but it is easier to accept that a stranger would hurt them versus someone they trust. The belief in "real rape" means that the precautions they take to carry their keys in their hands, call someone if they are driving home late at night, dressing modestly, not letting someone bring them a drink or not wearing headphones when they walk or jog outside will prevent

them from being assaulted. The Just World Hypothesis states that people find ways to separate themselves from victims of sexual assault by identifying victim behaviors they would never participate in or environmental characteristics they would avoid (Ward, 1995). Female participants mentioned multiple ways they can separate themselves from victims of sexual assault by following gendered social standards and expectations (i.e. not getting drunk, not going home with someone, etc.) that restrict women's behavior with the intent of maintaining their safety. The intersection of Attribution and Feminist theories provide an understanding of why these myths persist despite more understanding of the reality of sexual assault and expressed empathy for victims.

Adolescent development theories provide mechanism through which to understand why adolescents participate in risky behavior; and the cognitive processes that take place in their decision-making. Participants demonstrated the tendency to make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits (Commendador, 2003). Participants discussed the lack of punishment for perpetrators and the belief that men commit sexual assault because they do not believe they will get caught. For them, the benefit of sex, and ultimately the validation that they are manly and masculine, is worth the potential and unlikely cost of being reported to police or college administrators. Participants also mentioned the fact that their peers do not believe that sexual assault is a problem on campus, adhering to the theory of the personal fable and egocentric focus (Gordon, 1996). They believe that because a sexual assault has not happened to them or been disclosed to them by someone they know, then it is not a problem. Their lack of a healthy sense of autonomy, independence (Mcdermott, 1998) and self-efficacy (Commendador,

2003) has influenced women's inability to be direct about their sexual needs and feel empowered to be honest about their boundaries. Previous literature has discussed the significant impact of peers on adolescent decision-making (Chein, Albert, O'Brien, Uckert & Steinberg, 2011). Male participants discussed the impact peers had on their behavior towards women. Many of them referenced the pressure they feel to engage in sexual activity; and because much of the conversation with their peers centers around sex, they feel that to belong to their peer group, they also need to have sex with as many partners as possible. They may also have an unrealistic perspective of how much sex their male peers are having. Overall, participants gave multiple examples of their decision-making limitations due to their cognitive development.

Social Work Implications

Prevention and Practice

This data has multiple implications for prevention program development. As previously mentioned, the rates of sexual assault have not changed in the last decade (Department of Justice, 2014). The static rate of sexual assault on college campuses could reflect ineffective sexual assault prevention programs. This data can be used to enhance or develop a more nuanced primary prevention program for college students that specifically targets changing the attitudes and beliefs that influence their sexual behaviors. Addressing the individual factors (i.e. beliefs and attitudes), and the human aggregate factors (i.e. sexual expectations and gender norms) explored in this study can be used in combination with other aspects of the socio-ecological model such as physical setting factors (i.e. proximity to bars), organizational factors (i.e. universities' lack of

enforcement of Title IX policies) and community factors (i.e. training campus law enforcement) to create a multi-pronged approach to preventing sexual assault on college campuses (National Association of Student Personnel, 2004).

Studies have demonstrated that current sexual assault prevention programs have a positive but moderate to low impact on changing attitudes and beliefs (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Therefore, the content of those interventions may need to be changed to better target the most impactful attitudes and beliefs. Programs must first provide students with a definition of sexual assault that is relevant to their experiences. Students need to be able to identify those situations that are sexual assault to stop them from occurring. When talking about sexual assault and its effects on victims, students must have similar characterizations. This consistency allows all students to know when a sexual interaction is no longer consensual. Focusing on concepts, like consent, coercion, and intent, may provide a good starting point for developing an adequate definition of sexual assault; and therefore, be better able to develop effective interventions.

Another major factor that prevents meaningful conversations about sexual assault is the students' lack of awareness of the problem of sexual assault and potential denial that it is an issue on their campus. For sexual assault prevention programming to be effective, students first need to acknowledge the occurrence of sexual assault and articulate the social circumstances that led to the assault (Jozkowski, 2015). Prevention programs need to make the problem of sexual assault tangible to students by potentially incorporating survivors' stories. However, confronting them with the reality of sexual violence should not make them afraid to fully invest in their college experience. It is

important that students feel safe even in the face of potential violence. College students find the conversation about sexual violence awkward and embarrassing. Making them more comfortable with the discussion requires acknowledging their potential discomfort, validating their feelings, and working to change it with repeated exposures to programming and information. The more students are confronted with the reality of sexual assault and the more it is discussed as an important issue for college students, the more they may become comfortable talking about it. College campuses must provide students with a safe space free of judgment to have an open discourse about their concerns and have the freedom to make a mistake. Prevention programming can encourage this dialogue and use any mistakes as teaching moments.

One area that prevention programs need to address is the aspects of rape culture (i.e. rape myths) that college students endorse and believe are relevant to themselves and their peers. Many recommendations can be made based on the implications that emerged from the analysis of their perspectives. First, programs must change students' endorsement in the "real rape" scenario so they are better prepared to prevent sexual violence. Second, women still feel that it is their responsibility to prevent a sexual assault and prevention programs reinforce that idea. They discussed being told what precautions to take instead of men being told not to commit a sexual assault. Despite positive societal changes, the focus is still on a woman or victim's behavior. Victim blaming must be discussed as a concept detrimental to the well-being of victims; victim blaming prevents women from reporting when they have been sexually assaulted. College women report assault less compared to their nonstudent counterparts (20% versus 32% respectively;

Department of Justice, 2014), so it is especially important to work to change these attitudes so that victims may receive the support and services they need. Programs must take a balanced approach; they must confront the issue of victim blaming but not reinforce the prevalent emphasis on a woman's conduct when examining the circumstances leading to and after a sexual assault. Developers should do their best not to create a subconscious inclination to first examine a woman's behavior instead of a perpetrator by spending most of the time during prevention programs talking about women and victims. Third, programs need to be careful about how they talk about men. Although the majority of sexual assaults are committed by men, it is imperative that men are not demonized. Men are potential allies and need to be made to feel a part of this movement and a positive agent of change in preventing sexual assault.

Fourth, the data demonstrated that the gender norms that potentially govern college students' behavior are different than what could be considered the traditional gender roles mentioned in previous literature. Therefore, programs should incorporate the most relevant norms college students adhere to and provide methods for changing them. It should also be clearly explained to students how these beliefs have an influence on their behaviors.

Prevention programs should also address normative behaviors that men and women participate in during sexual interactions. For example, students mentioned that their peers believe that pressuring a woman to have sex and being persistent even when a woman says no is normal behavior. Therefore, programs should work to change gendered behavioral expectations that influence how college students interact with each other in

intimate situations. It is vital that effective prevention methods address the expectations of how sexual relationships should manifest in real life and try to change the norms that perpetuate potentially dangerous beliefs about how men should act; especially if those beliefs lead men to be violent and aggressive due to wanting to conform to the image of what it means to be a man

Programs should include information that addresses how college students communicate in sexual situations. With the advent of euphemisms like "Netflix and chill," comes new situations that college students believe imply consent. Prevention education must work to change the idea that certain situations imply consent. Because college students rely on nonverbal communication to know if they have received consent, the messages of "no means no" and "yes means yes" may not resonate with their experiences. Therefore, gender communication and lessons in understanding non-verbal communication should be incorporated in programs. Students had specific suggestions about indicators of healthy sexual intimacy and communication; many of those suggestions should be incorporated in any education about gender communication so it is based on the context of their experiences. Student participants believed sex was about both people involved but that may not be a prevalent belief among their peers. Therefore, any conversations about sexual assault should emphasize the reciprocal nature of sex. Sex should be demystified and talked about in a real way.

Programs should also confront the reality of how college students communicate consent. It needs to be defined in a specific and relevant way. If college students do not at least have congruent ideas on how to recognize consent and ensure it has been given, they

will continue to commit sexual assault. Their concept of consent seemed to be based on their individual ways of giving consent rather than general characteristics or guidelines. Sexual assault prevention often begins by telling students to ask for consent; and to stop if consent is not given. However, if two people in a sexual situation do not recognize the same indicators of consent, a sexual assault may occur.

Lastly, because alcohol consumption influences what rape myths college students endorse, whether they perceive a situation to be sexual assault, and their characterizations and communications of consent, it is imperative programs confront the interactions of alcohol and sexual assault. College students see alcohol as a normal part of their experience. For them, alcohol may not prevent a woman from giving consent or be a strict indicator that a sexual assault occurred. College students also have norms that are influenced by alcohol consumption. Programming must be relevant to their own experiences of alcohol and sex, how they interact, and affect their perspectives.

Bystander intervention programs that engage the college community in preventing sexual assault and address roots of oppression (Perry, 2005), have been utilized to attempt to change those norms that potentially lead to sexual violence and create healthy norms that reduce sexist and abusive behaviors (Elias-Lambert & Black, 2015). Another benefit of the bystander approach is that it does not rely on identifying men as perpetrators (Elias-Lambert & Black, 2015), which the current study demonstrates, lead men to disengage from the conversation about sexual assault and how it can be prevented. Involving men in sexual assault prevention as allies and peer leaders can be extremely important in positively influencing male peers and their sexually aggressive

behavior (Katz, 1995). Studies have demonstrated that bystander intervention has been effective at reducing rape myth acceptance, increasing prosocial behaviors, and decreasing sexually coercive behaviors (Elias-Lambert & Black, 2015). Further study is needed to understand how bystander intervention programs affect individual behavior and a person's ability and willingness to engage in healthy sexual behaviors in their own intimate situations. A more targeted approach to changing attitudes and beliefs could provide one piece of the complex puzzle of changing college students' behaviors in intimate situations

It is imperative that sexual assault prevention address multiple topics such as gender-role socialization, sexual assault education, human sexuality, rape myths, sexual assault awareness, dating communication, victim empathy, and risk-reduction strategies (Vladutiu, Martin & Macy, 2010). However, it is also important that these programs cover the most important topics. Research has shown that superficial coverage of multiple topics can be ineffective (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Previous studies have demonstrated that comprehensive sexual assault prevention programs that address the most relevant topics have the greatest likelihood of reducing problematic rape attitudes, increasing rape awareness, positively affecting behavioral intentions, increasing sexual assault knowledge, reducing rape myth acceptance, increasing empathy, and reducing sexual victimization (Vladutiu, Martin & Macy, 2010).The current research can inform the development and adaptation of prevention programs so they engage in discussing the most pertinent topics that need to be considered in changing behavior and reducing sexual assault.

Although content is important, sexual assault prevention must also take into consideration the limitations of adolescent cognitive development and its implications for decision-making. Research has shown that even with accurate knowledge, confidence, self-efficacy, an ability to reason and a rejection of problematic attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault, college students may still participate in risky behavior due to an inability to navigate complex and intense emotions that can override rational thoughts (Mcdermott, 1998). Even with evidence-based prevention methods, emotion regulation may provide an important key to preventing sexual assault. The cognitive limitations of college students may also mandate a focus on the benefits of participating in healthy relationships and consensual relationships; adolescents may be more persuaded by the potential gains of a decision rather than the losses (Satia, Barlow, Armstrong-Brown & Watters, 2010). Implementing environmental structural changes, along with primary prevention approaches, may be more successful due to adolescent cognitive limitations and their inability to make mature judgments (Mcdermott, 1998).

Research

This data has multiple implications for social work research. First, the questions developed for a scale to measure attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault must be tested and validated. This scale can provide more accurate quantitative data about what beliefs college students endorse and those most significant to their experiences. Secondly, prevention programs must be developed and evaluated to ensure they are changing detrimental attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault, potentially reducing the prevalence of sexual violence. A new scale would also be relevant to the evaluation process. A more

comprehensive measurement tool would allow evaluation studies to more effective in examining whether programming is achieving one of the outcomes of changing rape supportive beliefs and nurturing attitudes that lead to positive sexual interactions. Lastly, students mentioned that their denial of the problems of sexual assault allows them to feel safe on campus by providing them with behavioral standards to prevent an assault. Therefore, the data supports a potential connection between attitudes about sexual assault among college students and the Just World Theory. The new measurement tool that emerges from this data can be used to try to establish a connection between the Just World Theory and beliefs about sexual assault.

Policy

This study demonstrates that support for effective prevention strategies is still needed on college campuses. The prevalence rates have not changed, and students still have misperceptions of sexual assault that have negative effects on their behaviors during sexual situations. Therefore, the Department of Education should continue to fully support Title IX and provide schools with the financial support to implement effective programming. This data can also guide colleges and universities to prioritize the type of sexual assault prevention programming they believe would be most effective with their limited funding. Reflected in the data is a sentiment among some students that sexual assault needs to be properly addressed on college campuses and many students are taking initiatives to make those changes. Therefore, colleges and universities can provide students with resources to create and implement interventions that could be beneficial to them and their peers. As previously mentioned, environmental structural changes can be

made to better reduce the prevalence of sexual assault. Environmental changes could include creating and enforcing clear policies concerning alcohol consumption and sexual misconduct.

Study Limitations

There are multiple limitations to this study. One of the major concerns when discussing a sensitive topic like sexual assault is the potential for social desirability. Steps can be taken to make sure that students feel they are in a safe environment and can respond honestly. Although steps were taken, like having groups and interviews away from administrators and professors, to make sure students felt they were in a safe and nonjudgmental environment, the groups were still on campus. The location may have prevented them from being honest about their feelings about sexual assault. Another factor that could have prevented them from being open was the gender of the researcher. The researcher identifies as female and male students may not have felt comfortable talking to a woman about sexual assault. Male notetakers were not always available during the scheduled times for focus groups and interviews, and they may have eased some of the anxiety male participants may have felt.

Another limitation of the study is that all the participants were from one university. Due to time constraints, the researcher was not able to triangulate the data and further provide a sense of trustworthiness of the data through member checking. Therefore, their ideas may not be a reflection of college students as a whole. Some of the students participated in groups in-person while others participated online. The method for collecting data could have had an impact on the content; those who were online may have

felt less inhibited due to the distance between them and the researcher. Also, the sample may have been limited by selection bias. The full scope of perspectives college students have may not have been captured because those with more negative or troubling beliefs may not have wanted to participate due to the potential scrutiny.

Conclusions

This study also has multiple strengths. First, this study contributes in depth knowledge about the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions college students have of sexual assault. In the past, assumptions may have been made about what college students believe about sexual assault and the scope of understanding may have been limited due to the focus on quantitative research. This data provides a more comprehensive perspective of sexual assault. Secondly, multiple students said they decided to participate in the study simply because someone was interested in their perspective. Therefore, this study may have had a tertiary positive impact by giving college students a voice, validating their experiences and viewpoints, and making them feel like they can be allies in reducing sexual assault. Third, this study brings to light the potential deficits of current prevention programming. Many of the students mentioned they, along with their peers, had taken part in sexual assault prevention programming. Yet they supported or endorsed rape myths and could not define consent or sexual assault. Therefore, prevention programming may not be having a lasting impact on their beliefs or behavior.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Instructions

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Adrienne Baldwin-White and I am a doctoral candidate in the school of social work. Thank you for coming. During this focus group/interview, I will ask you about your attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault. I will not be asking you about your own experiences of sexual assault but rather asking you to reflect on your beliefs and the beliefs of your peers. This information will be used primarily for my dissertation but also for publications. This focus group/interview is confidential. I will not use your name or any identifying information in the manuscripts and I ask that you not use your name during the discussion. I also ask that you not talk about anything that is said during the focus groups outside of this room. I want you to feel comfortable and be honest about your perspectives. There is no judgment about anything you can say. I also want you to respect each other's points of view. Also, you can leave anytime if you are uncomfortable and you will still receive the gift card. If you chose the Target gift card, you will receive it after the group today. If you chose the Amazon gift card, it will be emailed to you within 24 hours of completing this focus group. Do you have any questions?

Recording

This focus group/interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Do you agree to be audio-recorded? (participants verbally agree to be audio recorded)

Consent

Please take a few minutes to read the consent form in front of you. Do you have any questions? Do you verbally consent to participate?

Focus Groups/Interviews

First, I would just like to start with some icebreaker questions asking about your college experience. (This was done to build rapport with participants due to the sensitive nature of the questions)

1. How would you describe your overall experience here at (University name)? Do you like going to school here?
    a. Is there anything you would like to change about your experience so far?
2. What has been your favorite class you have taken?
3. What do you like to do for fun on or off campus? How has your campus experience been overall? Do you belong to any groups on campus?

Now, we will start to really talk about sexual assault and I really want to understand your perspectives and points of view.

4. How would college students define sexual assault?

5. How would college students define rape? Do you think there is a difference between rape and sexual assault?
6. How serious is it to commit a rape or sexual assault?
    a. What type of punishment does a perpetrator deserve?
7. Do you feel that sexual assault is a problem on campus?
    a. If yes, why?
        i. If no, why not?
    b. Are there things in the campus culture that promote sexual assault?
8. What do you think of this idea that rape is just a mistake?
    a. Do college students understand what rape/sexual assault are?
    b. Is it possible for a person to commit a sexual assault/rape and not know that it is a rape/sexual assault?
9. Do college students think rape/sexual assault is a serious problem? Do they care?
    a. Why or why not?
10. Do college students know what to do if they are sexually assaulted?
11. Do college students talk about sexual assault?
    a. Are college students comfortable talking about sexual assault?
        i. Why or why not?
12. How are college women expected to act with men?
    a. How are men expected to act with women?
13. What perceptions do you think college students possess about rape?
    a. Why do you think that these perceptions exist?
14. What does the role of social media play in their perceptions of rape/sexual assault?
15. Imagine a person consenting to have sex with someone else. What does that look like?
    a. What does it mean to give consent?
    b. Describe a situation in which consent was achieved
    c. In what situations are college students able to give consent without judgment?
        i. Is a verbal no required?
            1. Is one no enough?
            2. What do you think of the idea of affirmative consent?
    d. Some people have said if you ask continuously, it ruins the romantic moment. If you ask can I kiss you, can I touch you etc., then it ruins it. Do you think college students believe that?
    e. [Example about indirect communication of no. If you ask me to dinner, and I say well I don't know if I can get a babysitter or I don't think I have

the time, people understand the implication is no. Do you think college students understand when someone is implying no?

i. Do they understand but use the inability to understand as an excuse to commit an assault?

16. Is it sexual assault if a women doesn't feel comfortable having sex but gives consent anyway?
    a. Is it socially appropriate for women to want to have sex?
    b. Are women taught by the culture to say yes to sex even if they don't want it?
17. What affects a woman's willingness to report?
    a. Are there things in the campus culture that discourage women from reporting a sexual assault?
    b. Is a woman's reputation hurt if she is raped?
        i. Is a perpetrator's reputation hurt?
        ii. Whose reputation is hurt more?

18. Imagine a situation in which a rape would occur.
    a. How would college students describe what happens? What do you imagine when you think of rape? Imagine you are telling a story of rape, what would that story be?
    b. In what situations is a rape more likely to occur?
    c. How would college students describe the relationship between the victim and perpetrator?
19. Imagine a rape victim.
    a. How would college students describe the victim? Describe the victim's personality.
    b. What characteristics do you think college students would associate with victims/survivors?
        i. Do you think there is a difference between the two?
        ii. Do college students define them differently?
    c. Why do you think victims/survivors are not willing to come forward and report the assault?
    d. What type of person is more vulnerable to rape?
        i. What kinds of behaviors is the individual exhibiting?
            1. Imagine the woman has been drinking. A woman has been drinking. Is she more or less responsible for a sexual encounter if it occurs?

            a. What if she didn't want to have sex but was too drunk to refuse?
            b. What level of responsibility does the man have in this situation?
                i. Should he be punished if she was drunk but said yes.
        2. A woman is dressed provocatively. Is she more or less responsible for a sexual assault?
            a. Do you think college students believe that if a woman is dressed a certain way, a man can treat her any way he wants.
        3. A woman goes back to a person's private living area. Is she more or less responsible for a sexual assault?
    e. What should a victim do after a rape?
    f. Responsibility versus blame
    g. What types of things do college students believe women should do in order to prevent a sexual assault?
    h. What can a victim do that would prevent people from believing her?
        i. Waited to report?
        ii. Didn't have bruises/scars?
        iii. Emotional?
    i. Visually describe a rape victim
20. Imagine a perpetrator of rape.
    a. How would college students describe a perpetrator? Describe this individual's personality
        i. How would college students describe his/her sentiments towards the opposite sex?
    b. What characteristics do college students have about perpetrators
    c. What type of person is more likely to commit a rape?
    d. What kinds of behaviors is a perpetrator most likely to be exhibiting?
        i. A man has been drinking. Is he more or less responsible for a sexual encounter if it occurs?
    e. What do college students think a perpetrator does after a rape?
        i. Does the perpetrator feel remorse?
        ii. Does the perpetrator feel like he/she has committed a crime?
    f. Visually describe a perpetrator

21. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what you think college students believe about rape that you think is important for me to know.

After Focus Group/Interview

After the focus group/interview, participants were asked to give feedback on their focus group experience and if they had any feedback to give that could improve focus groups. The men, in particular, were asked if they had any suggestions for getting more men to participate in focus groups. Those who chose the Target gift card were given their incentive. Once all participants left, the researcher asked the notetaker, if one was present, for feedback concerning improving focus groups. The researcher also debriefed with the notetaker, if one was present. We briefly discussed any memos that we took, any responses that stood out to us that needed to inform any changes in the questions and any noteworthy patterns in the responses.

Probes

Can you give me an example?
What specific behaviors would be considered…?
Can you clarify? What do you mean?
Why do you think that is?
What do you think?
Like what?
What do you mean?
What about you?
Anyone else feel the same way?
Nonverbal probes and encouragement were given like nodding the head and leaning in when a participant was speaking to encourage them to keep talking
When the interviewer could see a client was hesitating, the interviewer would say things like, "just be honest. Say what you want to say" or, "I know I'm asking tough questions, but there is no right or wrong, so just feel free to say whatever you want."
When a client was unsure, the interviewer made sure to reassure them that saying "I don't know" was a good answer and they did not need to apologize.

Clarifications

During focus groups/interviews, the interviewer often defined terms for participants. Terms like rape culture, token resistance, affirmative consent, active consent or implied consent.

During focus groups/interviews, the interviewer would sometimes have to give examples to further clarify questions. Participants would be given examples of aspects of campus culture and expectations of intimate behaviors between men and women. The interviewer did their best not to be leading when giving examples.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Please complete the following survey. You will be asked demographic questions and questions pertaining to your college experience. The survey is anonymous and does not ask any identifying information. Please answer honestly. Thank you for your participation.

Demographic Questions

1. Age
2. Race/Ethnicity
    a. White/Caucasian
    b. Black/African American
    c. Asian/Asian American
    d. Hispanic/Latino
    e. Native American
    f. Mixed Race
    g. Other
3. Education Level
    a. Freshman
    b. Sophomore
    c. Junior
    d. Senior
4. Gender
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Transgender Female
    d. Transgender Male
    e. Gender Non-Conforming/Non-binary
5. Are you currently in a relationship?
    a. Yes
    b. No
6. Have you ever had a sexual experience?
    a. Yes
    b. No
7. I feel comfortable discussing issues concerning sex and sexual relationships with peers
    a. Strongly Disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Agree
    d. Strongly Agree

8. Do you have an acquaintance, close friend or family member who has had a personal experience with sexual assault or rape?
    a. Yes
    b. No
9. What is your current major? (Write undecided if undecided)
10. Are you a student athlete?
    a. Yes
    b. No
11. Are you a member of a student organization?
    a. Yes
    b. No
12. Do you participate in social events on campus?
    a. Never
    b. Less than once a semester
    c. Once a semester
    d. Two to three times a semester
    e. Once a month
    f. Two to three times a month
    g. Once a week
    h. More than once a week
13. How often do you consume alcohol?
    a. Never
    b. Once or twice a semester
    c. Once a month
    d. Two to three times a month
    e. Once a week
    f. 2-3 times a week
    g. Daily
14. Are you a member of a Greek organization (fraternity or sorority)?
    a. Yes
    b. No
15. Do you currently or have you ever lived on campus?
    a. Yes
    b. No

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table 1
Demographics

		N	%
Gender			
	Female	21	51.2
	Male	17	41.5
	Transgender Female	0	0
	Transgender Male	2	4.9
	Gender Non-binary/Non-conforming	1	2.4
Race/Ethnicity			
	White/Caucasian	17	41.5
	Black/African American	9	22
	Hispanic/Latino	5	12.2
	Asian	5	12.2
	Native American	0	0
	Pacific Islander	0	0
	Mixed Race	4	9.8
	Other	1	2.4
Education Level			
	Freshman	2	4.9
	Sophomore	7	17.1
	Junior	13	31.7
	Senior	19	46.3

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

Table 1
Participant Descriptive Questions

		N	%
Are you currently in a relationship?			
	Yes	22	53.7
	No	19	46.3
Are you currently or have you ever been in a sexual relationship?			
	Yes	37	90.2
	No	4	9.8
Have you ever had a sexual experience?			
	Yes	39	95.1
	No	2	4.9
Are you a student athlete?			
	Yes	2	4.9
	No	39	95.1
Are you a member of a student organization?			
	Yes	21	51.2
	No	20	48.8
Are you a member of a Greek organization?			
	Yes	2	4.9
	No	39	95.1
Do you currently or have you ever lived on campus?			
	Yes	31	75.6
	No	10	24.4
Do you have an acquaintance or family member who has had an experience with sexual assault			
	Yes	29	70.7
	No	12	29.3

I feel comfortable discussing issues concerning sex and sexual relationships with peers?			
	Strongly Agree	21	51.2
	Agree	16	39
	Disagree	4	9.8
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
How often do you participate in social events on campus?			
	Never	3	7.3
	< once a semester	5	12.2
	Once a semester	5	12.2
	2-3 times a semester	9	22
	Once a month	9	22
	2-3 times a month	6	14.6
	Once a week	2	4.9
	More than once a week	2	4.9
How often do you consume alcohol?			
	Never	7	17.1
	1-2 times a semester	7	17.1
	Once a month	3	7.3
	2-3 times a month	9	22
	Once a week	4	9.8
	2-3 times a week	9	22
	Daily	2	4.9

APPENDIX E

THEMATIC CONSISTENCY: BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING SEXUAL ASSAULT

Table 3
Barriers to Sexual Assault: Thematic Consistency

		Interview	Focus Group	Online	In-Person
Defining Sexual Assault	Consent	"I think that [sexual assault] not having consent."	"If someone said no and the person does not stop."		"I guess sexual assault would be like if somebody were to make any kind of sexual offense towards another person without them consenting it."
	Intent	"I believe if there was no actual malice, if there was no malicious intent – it's very difficult to have a true rape situation without malicious intent."	"It's where someone makes the decision that I know this person doesn't necessarily want it or I know that I'm not necessarily in the right here but I'm going to do it anyways because I want to."	"I think intent does matter because if you know consciousl y in your mind the whole thing, like your moral compass says this is something that I should not be doing and you do it anyway and you keep doing	"Want to victimize."

				it anyway, then yes, I think that's worse than if you weren't educated on something and it happens."	
	Coercion	"They say they are persuading her. They might think of it as, 'Oh, I'm just persuading her. I didn't coerce her'. That's what I feel."	"Guilt tripping someone into having sex with you."	"I feel after the first and second, 'are you sure', it's just pushing it after that."	"To keep pursuing someone after they have said no."
Acknowledging Sexual Assault is a Problem		"I don't think it's a problem here I think people just brush it out because they have so many things on their minds."	"Don't know if it is something blown way out of proportion."	"The younger crowd is more invincible, like 'It can't happen to me' kind of thing."	"Easier to ignore it and pretend like it's not going on."
Comfort Talking About Sexual Assault		"I don't think they are. They would feel uncomfortable… I am not too comfortable saying what I think because I don't know if this is the right answer."	"I am not too comfortable saying what I think because I don't know if this is the right answer."		"But if you don't know about it and don't talk about it, then no you are not going to be comfortable with it. (not comfortable because

					don’t talk about it.”

APPENDIX F

THEMATIC CONSISTENCY: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NORMS

Table 4

Social and Cultural Norms: Thematic Consistency

		Interviews	Focus Groups	Online	In Person
Rape Myths	Victims	"I think definitely people would say "Oh you're dressed like this", "oh you're at this place", "oh you already had sex with him before…"	"Looked at as a person who was raped or claimed to be raped and you're then walking around with that label. People are going to be looking at you differently, treating you differently…."	"The emotions [when reporting] can be just…like crying or like scared. I think it's more believable.	"I think if you wait then people are like oh are you sure it happened?"
	Perpetrators	"A lot of students have this belief that the dumb frat boy who takes advantage of young girls is the most likely perpetrator."	"You don't think, my best friend is going to be the guy to be the one to do it, or that guy from class. You just have that trust and you don't think it will be them."	"Like alcohol, drugs that turn someone who is normally a good person and have them sexually assault someone."	"Creepy stranger," "creeper" or, "stalker in trench coat and dark clothes with a knife."
	Sexual Assault	"And I know false accusations are a problem so they may just be trying to get back at their ex boyfriend or something like that."	"Someone being abducted off the street."	"[rape culture is] guys feeling they can do whatever they want."	"Oh, it's not a big deal. That doesn't really happen that often. What are you talking about?"

Gender Norms	Men	“Some guys will say, Oh man, I slept with three girls in one night” and all that. I feel like sometimes they feel the pressure to.”	“Once men start having sex they can’t stop.”	“You do get those ones who feel entitled, who feel like nothing can affect them, they can kinda take what they want.”	“Kind of like that mindset that's passed down like, yeah man, go get that chick, go try and sleep with as many women as you can, because then they start to question your masculinity if you are not going after females and stuff like that.”
	Women	“Being a young woman I feel like she’s teaching standards that we are supposed to control how boys act.”	“I think it's so screwed up that just a regular no doesn't stop a lot of guys. You have to tell them that you have a boyfriend and they respect your boyfriend more than they respect you.”	“Yes, I think that’s definitely true [that women feel pressure to have sex].”	“[Women should be] passive recipients of men’s sexual aggression.”

APPENDIX G

THEMATIC CONSISTENCY: COMMUNICATING SEXUAL INTENT

Table 5
Communicating Sexual Intent: Thematic Consistency

		Interviews	Focus Group	Online	In Person
Consent	Nonverbal	"It's more of like assumptions. Both people just assume because of whatever body signals, language…."	"If you need a verbal no, something is wrong."	"I feel if someone is trying to actively get away from the situation or if they're just sitting there and not doing anything, I feel they're not going to be wanting to consent to anything."	"Physical cues can be difficult to understand."
	Communication	"I feel not being able to communicate that you don't know what you want is the leading cause of rape."	"I don't hear a no. I don't hear anything. I assume the entire time that she's with it…How am I supposed to know in that moment something's wrong."	"But they aren't expressively giving consent, there might be miscommunication."	"I feel if someone who is not actively saying they don't want to but they aren't expressively giving consent, there might be miscommunication."
	Token Resistance	"It is just the way the male perspective is, like every guy saying, No man! She's	"If a girl says no and a guy who's like really into the girl might not automatica	"I know girls who are flirtatious when they say no and that to me is more of a try harder than okay, let's go."	"But saying no in like a certain way then that's inviting."

		just trying to play hard to get, just go out there…"	lly just pull away. In some situations they may be like oh like maybe if i wait a little bit and then ask again or try to follow up on it. Maybe if I just keep asking then she'll say yes."		
	Alcohol	"But if it was something where they were both drunk or under the influence and they had sex. I know technically that's against the law because you can't give consent when you're intoxicated. But I don't think that's the same really."	"It's okay if the woman has been drinking as long as her body language is clear and she is aware enough to give consent."	"Clearly see when a person is too drunk to give consent."	"It's okay if the woman has been drinking as long as her body language is clear and she is aware enough to give consent."

	Why Not Ask For it	"Ruin the moment, yes. I feel like some guys think that; they would be like, Oh, I do not want to ask her, she's like okay with it. Most guys want to smooth in, be smooth about it."	"It may be embarrassing to ask for consent."	"I mean… Yeah, I mean, it wouldn't obviously be a straight up question."	"Don't wanna give [women] the opportunity to think about it and regret it or process it."
Healthy Intimacy	Respecting Boundaries	"Two partners having communication with each other on what it is and what it out… You have to sense if she is like not reacting or something like that. If she is terrified, you could see it by facial expressions also. It's not just verbally – Oh, she	"Even if she seems to be going along with it, she seems uncomfortable keep asking her. If she says maybe, then be like we can wait. You know don't kind of pressure yourself into her. Like don't feel at any point any sense of entitlement to a	"It's better to stop and not move forward because if she's not sure, she's not giving you consent. She doesn't know what she really wants."	."..trying to understand the person you are about to have sex with or have any sort of relationship with trying to empathize with them, see things from their point of view and take their needs into account. things like that."

		didn't say no.”	woman's body.”		

APPENDIX H

IRB SUBMISSION

Instructions and Notes:

- Depending on the nature of what you are doing, some sections may not be applicable to your research. If so, mark as "NA".
- When you write a protocol, keep an electronic copy. You will need a copy if it is necessary to make changes.

Protocol Title

Include the full protocol title: Perceptions and Characteristics Attributed to Rape, Survivors/Victims and Perpetrators by College Students

Background and Objectives

Provide the scientific or scholarly background for, rationale for, and significance of the research based on the existing literature and how will it add to existing knowledge.

- Describe the purpose of the study.
- Describe any relevant preliminary data or case studies.
- Describe any past studies that are in conjunction to this study.

College students are at a high risk to both perpetrate and be victims of sexual assault (Fisher, Daigle & Cullen, 2010) with the rate of sexual assault for college women 1.2 times higher than 18 to 24 year olds not enrolled in an institute of higher learning (Department of Justice, 2014). Therefore, college campuses do not necessarily provide a safe haven for students free from the possibility of sexual violence. In order to develop and provide the most effective sexual assault prevention education, it is important to understand the points of view that college students possess. In order to change behavior, it is imperative to change the attitudes and behaviors guiding that behavior. However, it is first necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of those attitudes and behaviors. The purpose of this study is to understand, explore and examine college students' perceptions of rape, survivors and perpetrators using a qualitative approach. The data collected will also be used to develop a comprehensive survey measurement to assess attitudes and beliefs about rape. The current study will be answering the following research questions: How do college students describe the act of rape?; What situational circumstances do college students associate with rape?;. What characteristics and behavioral expectations do college students associate with survivors of rape?; What characteristics and behavioral expectations do college students associate with perpetrators?; How would college students define/describe consensual sex and how would they describe a situation in which consent was achieved? In the past, quantitative studies that focused on using survey data have been used to capture college students' attitudes and beliefs about rape; therefore, only giving a limited perspective of what college students believe. This study, however, seeks to gain more in depth knowledge by having college students participate in focus groups in order to understand the multiple factors that influence college students' thoughts and attitudes about rape, survivors/victims and perpetrators. Also, the measures used to assess beliefs and attitudes about rape have tended to focus on misperceptions instead of attempting to gain an understanding of both the positive and negative beliefs. This study will have a more comprehensive approach by asking college students about their rape supportive and survivor supportive beliefs. The data from this study will be used to not only gain a potentially thorough grasp of college students' attitudes toward rape; but the information will also be used to create a scale to measure attitudes and beliefs about rape that will be validated in a later study.

Data Use

Describe how the data will be used. Examples include:

- Dissertation, Thesis, Undergraduate honors project
- Publication/journal article, conferences/presentations
- Results released to agency or organization
- Results released to participants/parents
- Results released to employer or school
- Other (describe)

The data will primarily be used for a dissertation. However, the data will also be used in publications in journals and for conference presentations.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Describe the criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final study sample. If you are conducting data analysis only describe what is included in the dataset you propose to use.

Indicate specifically whether you will target or exclude each of the following special populations:

- Minors (individuals who are under the age of 18)
- Adults who are unable to consent
- Pregnant women
- Prisoners
- Native Americans
- Undocumented individuals

Undergraduate college students between the ages of 18 and 24 will be the sample used for this study. Undergraduate college students over the age of 24 or graduate students of any age will not be allowed to participate.

Number of Participants

Indicate the total number of participants to be recruited and enrolled*:* 60

Recruitment Methods

- Describe who will be doing the recruitment of participants.
- Describe when, where, and how potential participants will be identified and recruited.
- Describe and attach materials that will be used to recruit participants (attach documents or recruitment script with the application).

The Co-PI will be responsible for recruitment. Students will be recruited through instructors and professors, fliers, informational emails, peers, student organizations, Greek organizations and through snowball sampling. Recruitment script is included with submission.

Procedures Involved

Describe all research procedures being performed, who will facilitate the procedures, and when they will be performed. Describe procedures including:

- The duration of time participants will spend in each research activity.
- The period or span of time for the collection of data, and any long term follow up.
- Surveys or questionnaires that will be administered (Attach all surveys, interview questions, scripts, data collection forms, and instructions for participants to the online application).
- Interventions and sessions (Attach supplemental materials to the online application).
- Lab procedures and tests and related instructions to participants.
- Video or audio recordings of participants.
- Previously collected data sets that that will be analyzed and identify the data source (Attach data use agreement(s) to the online application).

Those who have agreed to participate in the study will first complete a questionnaire online using Qualtrics that asks them demographic questions and questions about their college experience, Appendix A. The online survey will also assess their knowledge of sexual assault, see Appendix B. The questionnaire will be anonymous. At the end of the questionnaire, students will be given a link to participate in another online survey to give their availability. The doodle poll will also ask for their first name, email address, and phone number (including if they can be contacted via text) to provide multiple points of contact just in case the participant cannot be reached by one method. Participants will also be asked about the best day and time of day to be reached and also the best day and time of day to participate in focus groups. If the initial contact with the student is by email, I will organize a time to call the student. All students will be contacted by phone to schedule a day, time and place to participate in focus groups. Participants will also be given the option of participating in focus groups online using Google hangouts. While on the phone, students will be asked their age and class level to ensure they meet the inclusion criteria of being an undergraduate college student between the ages of 18 and 24. They will also be asked their gender in order to schedule gendered focus groups and major. Twelve semi-structured focus groups will be conducted with 5 participants in each focus group. Each group will be gendered. There will be a maximum of 6 focus groups of 5 men and 6 focus groups of 5 women. If researchers do not achieve equal gender participation, neither men nor women will be over-recruited to compensate for the differences to achieve the total desired sample. Meaning, once the maximum number of women has been reached (30), no more women will participate. The same is true for the men. Both the men and women will answer the same questions. Prior to the beginning of each focus group, each participant will be given a copy of the consent form and will anonymously verbally consent to participating in the focus group. Each focus group will have a moderator and a note taker. Both moderator and note taker will take field notes in order to help guide the conversation and make note of important quotes. For both the male and female focus groups, the female Co-PI will lead in order to better manage the content. However, the female focus groups will have a female note-taker present and the male focus groups will have a male note-taker present. Each focus group will last 60-90 minutes in an environment that is comfortable with students i.e. in the dorms, in student organizing spaces, or off campus; students will be given the opportunity to participate in non-academic environments, if at all possible. Each focus group will also be audio-recorded with participant verbal permission prior to each focus group. Prior to beginning the study, the focus group questions will be piloted to ensure the questions, see Appendix C, are appropriate for the population and understood, to assess how long the focus groups will last and to recognize any issues that may arise during the process. The Co-PI will give resources to all participants at the end of focus groups. These resources will include contact information of counseling services provided by the University in case the experience of the focus group served as a psychological trigger, it will include information about the local rape crisis centers, information from the Arizona Coalition on Ending Sexual and Domestic Violence if they want to become advocates and links to the national organization Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) about what to do if he/she is sexually assaulted. The Co-PI will also participate in journaling to reflect on the themes that emerge during the focus group process and whether or not those themes are conducive with any preconceived expectations about what the researcher expected to find. The Co-PI will also engage in writing field notes in order to understand how the researcher is being affected by the research and the process of collecting the data. Each focus group will be transcribed, either by the Co-PI or a professional transcriber. After the focus groups have been completed, each participant will be contacted by email to complete a demographics survey. They will be sent a link to an anonymous and confidential survey. Their information will not be linked to their responses during the focus groups. The demographic survey is to ensure that the focus groups are representative of the student population. The demographic questions are the same as in Appendix A.

Compensation or Credit

- Describe the amount and timing of any compensation or credit to participants.
- Identify the source of the funds to compensate participants
- Justify that the amount given to participants is reasonable.
- If participants are receiving course credit for participating in research, alternative assignments need to be put in place to avoid coercion.

Each student will be provided a $15 Target gift card for participating in the focus groups. The gift cards will be purchased with funds provided by the Co-PI. Students will also be given snacks during the focus groups. Student incentives will not be dependent on completion but students will need to at least partially participate, in whatever capacity they feel comfortable, in the focus groups to receive the incentive. All incentives will be funded by the Co-PI.

Risk to Participants

List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences related to participation in the research. Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.

There is potential psychological harm to participants. Although I will not be asking students about their own personal experiences with sexual assault, discussing the issue may cause students to think about their own personal experiences. Therefore, the moderator of each group will have resources for participants just in case they feel they need additional help after talking about the issue of sexual assault.

Potential Benefits to Participants

Realistically describe the potential benefits that individual participants may experience from taking part in the research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. Do **not** include benefits to society or others.

This study has the potential to allow participants to really think about and reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs; potentially beginning a process of changing misperceptions that could negatively affect them and/or the people in their lives.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Describe the steps that will be taken to protect subjects' privacy interests. "Privacy interest" refers to a person's desire to place limits on with whom they interact or to whom they provide personal information. Click here for additional guidance on ASU Data Storage Guidelines.

Describe the following measures to ensure the confidentiality of data:

- Who will have access to the data?
- Where and how data will be stored (e.g. ASU secure server, ASU cloud storage, filing cabinets, etc.)?
- How long the data will be stored?
- Describe the steps that will be taken to secure the data during storage, use, and transmission. (e.g., training, authorization of access, password protection, encryption, physical controls, certificates of confidentiality, and separation of identifiers and data, etc.).
- If applicable, how will audio or video recordings will be managed and secured. Add the duration of time these recordings will be kept.
- If applicable, how will the consent, assent, and/or parental permission forms be secured. These forms should separate from the rest of the study data. Add the duration of time these forms will be kept.
- If applicable, describe how data will be linked or tracked (e.g. masterlist, contact list, reproducible participant ID, randomized ID, etc.).

If your study has previously collected data sets, describe who will be responsible for data security and monitoring.

Each survey will be anonymous and data will be collected using the program Qualtrics. The IP address collection mechanism will be disabled in order to ensure there is not any identifying information associated with each survey. At the end of the survey, participants will be provided with a link to another Qualtrics poll. Each participant will be asked to include their first name, email address and phone number on a Doodle poll. The poll will be a hidden poll so that participants cannot view the information of the other participants. The information on the second Qualtrics poll cannot be connected to either the survey data or their responses in the focus group. Therefore, the survey data will be anonymous. Prior to each focus group, each individual participant will read the consent form and then verbally agree to participate in the focus group. Their agreement will be recorded. All focus groups will be audio-recorded with the permission of participants. For those participating online, the conversation will be recorded using an app called Camtasia. Participants will be asked if their conversation can be recorded. Confidentiality will be explained at the beginning of each focus group. Participants will be told that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Participants will also be told that they do not have to disclose their name during the discussion. The audio-recording will be transcribed and then the audio-recordings will be erased. The transcription data and survey data will be stored on a private computer secured by a password. Only the Co-PI will have access to the data.

Consent Process

Describe the process and procedures process you will use to obtain consent. Include a description of:

- Who will be responsible for consenting participants?
- Where will the consent process take place?
- How will consent be obtained?
- If participants who do not speak English will be enrolled, describe the process to ensure that the oral and/or written information provided to those participants will be in that language. Indicate the language that will be used by those obtaining consent. Translated consent forms should be submitted after the English is approved.

Prior to beginning the focus group, each individual will anonymously verbally consent to the study after being given a copy of the consent form to read. Researchers will also be asking for a waiver of consent because participants are more likely to fully participate in discussion if they do not have to sign their names on a consent document.

Training

Provide the date(s) the members of the research team have completed the CITI training for human participants. This training must be taken within the last 4 years. Additional information can be found at: Training.

Adrienne Baldwin-White 01/17/2014
Keiran Vitek 11/20/2014
Jessica Cohen 09/30/2015
Cody Merrell 01/28/015
Aaron Lind 09/13/2015

APPENDIX I

CONSENT FORM

Perceptions and Characteristics Attributed to Rape, Survivors/Victims and Perpetrators by College Students

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Jill Messing, Ph.D. in the School of Social Work in the College of Public Service and Community Solutions at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand and examine the perceptions and attitudes of college students concerning sexual assault.

I am inviting your participation. Participants should be undergraduate college students between the age of 18 and 24. Participation will involve the completion of a short anonymous survey that will take approximately 15-20 minutes. Participants will also participate in a 60-90 minute focus group. Each focus group will have five participants of the same gender. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time. After completing the survey, only those who fit the inclusion criteria of being an undergraduate student between the ages of 18 and 24 will be contacted to participate in the focus groups.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Each participant will receive a $15 gift card from Target after participating in the focus group. You must be 18 or older to participate in this study. Participants will be asked about their general attitudes toward rape and sexual assault. Participants will be asked to imagine a rape scenario and describe what they imagine occurs during and after a rape. Participants will also be asked to think about victims and perpetrators of rape and describe their characteristics. When discussing issues concerning sexual assault and rape during focus groups, participants should avoid using their own names or identifying details of themselves or anyone that becomes a part of the discussion. Participants are asked not to specifically identify any person or persons during the focus group.

This study has the potential to allow participants to think about and reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs; potentially beginning a process of changing misperceptions that could negatively affect them and/or the people in their lives. There are no major foreseeable harms to participants. However, there is potential psychological harm to participants. I **will not** be asking you about your own personal experiences with sexual assault, discussing the issue may cause you to think about your own personal experiences. Therefore, the moderator of each group will have resources for participants just in case you feel you need additional help after talking about the issue of sexual assault. Resources will include information about counseling services, and educational and advocacy resources.

Researchers will maintain confidentiality. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality and anonymity by other participants cannot be guaranteed. However, researchers will maintain confidentiality. Although you will provide a first name, email address and phone number, your first name, email address and phone number will not be connected in any way to the focus group responses. All of the participants identifying and

contact information will remain confidential. Researchers will not know which participants said which statements in the focus groups. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications. Participants may be directly quoted but your name, or any other identifying information, will not be used.

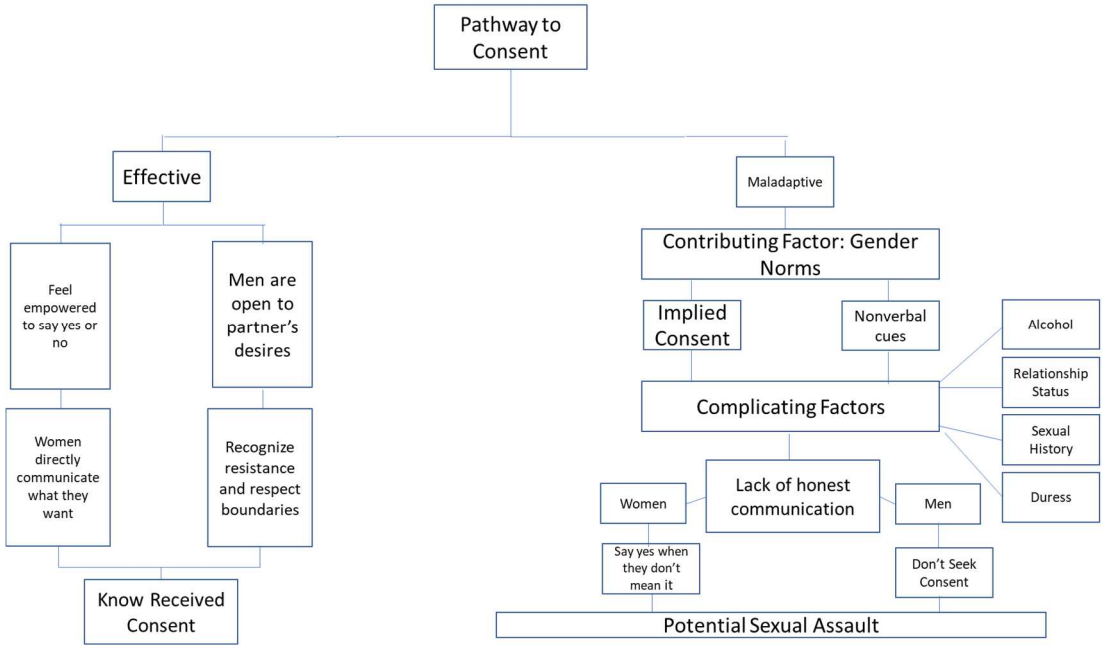
Focus groups will be audio recorded with your permission. The principal investigator can be reached at Jill.Messing@asu.edu or (602)496-1193. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: Adrienne.Baldwin@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

By verbally consenting, you are agreeing to be part of the study.

APPENDIX J

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1


Pathway to Consent
Effective
Maladaptive
Feel empowered to say yes or no
Men are open to partner's desires
Women directly communicate what they want
Recognize resistance and respect boundaries
Know Received Consent
Contributing Factor: Gender Norms
Implied Consent
Nonverbal cues
Alcohol
Relationship Status
Complicating Factors
Sexual History
Duress
Women
Lack of honest communication
Men
Say yes when they don't mean it
Don't Seek Consent
Potential Sexual Assault