

Reclaiming the hunting ground: Examining college students' receptiveness towards sexual
violence prevention programming and education

by

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B.A., Hastings College, 2010
B.A., Hastings College, 2010
M.A., Kansas State University, 2019

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

Each year, millions flock to colleges and universities to revel in nearly limitless opportunities for personal and professional development, scholastic discovery, and social connection. Approximately 13% of college students will experience sexual violence during their matriculation, and of these experiences, an estimated 90% will go unreported. Scholars continue to explore and examine the persistence of this phenomenon despite institutional and federal interventions which ensure the provision of prevention and response programs and services on college campuses. While studies examining sexual violence prevention have contributed knowledge regarding best practices in prevention programming, risk factors, and program evaluation, there is a dearth of literature that examines how sexual violence prevention programming and education is received by students. The primary purpose of this study was to identify which factors most influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming and education. Survey data for this study were collected from a sample of 614 undergraduate college students from a mid-sized Midwestern university. A quantitative examination of these data indicated that college students who reported greater levels of perceived campus safety and empathy as well as those who identified as women or nonbinary and as upperclassmen demonstrated higher levels of receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming and education. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are considered in the final chapters of this dissertation.

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Abstract

Each year, millions flock to colleges and universities to revel in nearly limitless opportunities for personal and professional development, scholastic discovery, and social connection. Approximately 13% of college students will experience sexual violence during their matriculation, and of these experiences, an estimated 90% will go unreported. Scholars continue to explore and examine the persistence of this phenomenon despite institutional and federal interventions which ensure the provision of prevention and response programs and services on college campuses. While studies examining sexual violence prevention have contributed knowledge regarding best practices in prevention programming, risk factors, and program evaluation, there is a dearth of literature that examines how sexual violence prevention programming and education is received by students. The primary purpose of this study was to identify which factors most influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming and education. Survey data for this study were collected from a sample of 614 undergraduate college students from a mid-sized Midwestern university. A quantitative examination of these data indicated that college students who reported greater levels of perceived campus safety and empathy as well as those who identified as women or nonbinary and as upperclassmen demonstrated higher levels of receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming and education. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are considered in the final chapters of this dissertation.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all educators, advocates, and support professionals who continue to show up each day ready to address challenges, both old and new, and to support each other and those in need. This work is never easy, but it is worth it. Your commitment, dedication, and loyalty to student wellbeing and campus safety inspires me daily, and there will never be enough gratitude that can be shown to you for all that you do. I also dedicate this dissertation to my friends, colleagues, and mentors from Adams Central High School, Hastings College, and Kansas State University. You believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself and reminded me daily what a privilege and gift it is to learn and use my knowledge and skills to be a changemaker. This dissertation is also dedicated to my family. Some of you I have known all my life and some of you have given me the privilege to choose you and the honor of being chosen in return. The love, support, and care you have shown me throughout this journey is indescribable.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 2016, a lawsuit was filed against Baylor University, the nation's largest Baptist higher education institution. The plaintiffs included fifteen women who alleged that the University had failed to respond to or otherwise mishandled multiple claims of sexual assault that had taken place on or near the Baylor University campus between 2011 and 2014 (Lavigne & Schlabach, 2017). Among the accused in these claims were members of the University's decorated football team and a President of the institution's celebrated Phi Delta Theta fraternity chapter. The lawsuit alleged that between 2011 and 2014, at least women reported being sexually assaulted by at least 19 Baylor University football players, though the actual number of assaults is believed to be much higher.

Some of the plaintiffs revealed that their reports of sexual assault were ignored and dismissed by University administrators while others claimed that they were discouraged from reporting their experience altogether. An NCAA external investigation by the Pepper Hamilton law firm, which collection nearly 3.2 million pages of documentation regarding the institution's policies and response procedures, revealed that Baylor University failed to delineate clear and accessible alcohol policies outlining the definition of consent, sanctions for policy violations, and reporting procedures for sexual violence claims. At the time, Baylor University's student Code of Conduct forbade alcohol, drug use, and premarital sex. Critics argue that the outright bans on these activities systematically dissuaded those who experienced sexual violence from coming forward out of fear that they themselves would be held responsible for violating the code of conduct, thus risking expulsion and other sanctions.

The clear and accessible implementation of alcohol policies contribute to the prevention of violence by establishing institutional oversight regarding alcohol distribution and

consummation on campus property as well as by establishing amnesty policies that may protect those who do choose to report crime from the threat of sanctions. Aside from being largely ineffective in preventing drug and alcohol use and abuse, outright drug and alcohol bans discourage bystander intervention and reporting of victimization, and often drive substance users to engage in risky behaviors at other off-campus locations outside of the substantive purview of the institution (Cameron & Wollschleger, 2021; Lippy & DeGue, 2014 & Stotzer & MacCartney, 2016). Similarly, premarital sex bans are not shown to be effective in preventing premarital sexual activity and often lead to the sanctioning and shifting of blame to those who report experiencing sexual violence. (Glick & Fiske, 1996 & Kingkade, 2022). Taken together, Baylor University's strict bans on alcohol consumption and premarital sex created a culture of shame, secrecy, and fear that shielded perpetrators from repercussions and compounded the trauma experienced by sexual assault survivors.

This highly publicized scandal sent shock waves through the Baylor University community and ultimately resulted in the dismissal of Baylor's decorated head football coach, the University president, and the University's Athletic Director. The institution's Title IX Coordinator also resigned after revealing that the University had failed to provide them with the information and means necessary to properly investigate reports of sexual violence (Vertuno, 2023 Associated Press). Ultimately, the Baylor University Board of Regents found that the University was not in compliance with the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and with the requirements of the Violence Against Women Act which holds federally funded Universities accountable for responding to sexual violence claims (Vertuno, 2023). Further, Baylor's Athletics department was found to have been negligent in

recognizing and responding to systematic acts of sexual and relationship violence perpetrated by team members. In 2023, after eight years of investigation, a settlement was reached.

Though the terms of the settlement have not been publicly disclosed, the financial, emotional, and reputational costs to Baylor University, and more importantly, to the survivors, are immense. An additional lawsuit against the University described the institution's systematic and negligent response towards sexual violence survivors as creating "a hunting ground for sexual predators." Today, Baylor University's website states their commitment "to take courageous, comprehensive actions to cultivate a caring campus environment and ensure systems and process that support all students, including victims of sexual violence." In 2017, an additional lawsuit was filed by a woman who also claimed that Baylor University failed to respond to her allegations that she had been sexually assaulted by multiple team members from the university's football team in 2014. A representative from her law firm claimed that their investigation had revealed that between 2011 and 2014, at least 52 rapes and five gang rapes were carried out by at least 30 football players, a substantially higher number than what was alleged in the 2016 lawsuit.

Yet another lawsuit was filed in 2017 against Baylor University by a woman who alleged that she was raped by four to eight football players in 2012. Her lawsuit also claims that sexual assaults, including gang rapes, were common practice for members of the football team who would allegedly photograph and record their actions as part of a team hazing or bonding ritual. This lawsuit also alleges that sex was utilized as a recruitment tool for the Baylor University football program as underage recruits were taken to strip clubs and were promised access to women through an unofficial "hostess" program.

As showcased by the Baylor University scandal, sexual violence remains a persistent and plight for many higher education institutions seeking to bolster student support services, enrollment, and retention. Stanford University, Florida State University, Vanderbilt University are among a number of many institutions who have been alleged to have dismissed, ignored, or otherwise mishandled students' claims of sexual violence. Given the complexity and ever-growing expansion of the academic exploration of sexual violence, there are some definitional challenges to consider when addressing this issue as it relates to college populations and to the questions examined in dissertation specifically. First, *sexual violence* is an umbrella term that is typically used to denote a broad spectrum of harmful non-consensual sexually based experiences perpetrated through a wide array of methods including force, fraud, coercion, incapacitation, and abuse of power (Kilimnik, McMahon, & Meston, 2024). Specific forms of sexual violence, such as rape, are defined variably according to specific policies, legislation, and jurisdictions.

Campus based sexual assault describes a spectrum of any non-consensual sexual activity that may range from unwanted touching to rape that takes place on a college campus or within a college population. Recent statistics reveal that an estimated 26.4 percent of women, 6.8 percent of men, and 26.1 percent of transgender, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming individuals have reported experiencing sexual assault as undergraduates (RAINN, 2024). College campuses present unique conditions that elevate the risk of sexual violence such as opportunities for peer interaction and substance overconsumption at parties, bars, and private residences with little to no supervision or regulation. These unique conditions will be expanded upon later in the subsequent review of the literature.

This dissertation will utilize the broader terms of sexual assault or sexual violence as opposed to more specific terms such as rape which may fail to capture most campus-based

incidences that may not involve penetration but still cultivate trauma and harm. Studies suggest that sexual violence prevention outreach and education programming that address the broader spectrum of sexual violence, rather than specific forms such as rape that are limited in their definitions, has been shown to have greater efficacy in changing attitudes and behaviors among college students (Banyard et al., 2010; Cares et al., 2015 & Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020). The terms sexual assault and sexual violence will be used interchangeably in this dissertation.

Next, there is significant scholarly and colloquial debate regarding appropriate usage of the terms *victim* and *survivor* as it applies to those who experience sexual violence. The term *victim* has been challenged as centering trauma resulting from sexual violence as a defining feature of a person's life, stripping them of agency, identity, and placing them at greater risk of victim blaming (Hockett & Saucier., 2015; McCarthy, 1986; Wilson & Miller, 2016). To address these critiques, the term *survivor* is presented to combat the negative connotations associated with 'victim' by highlighting the attributes of many who experience sexual violence such as resilience, empowerment, and agency. Notably, as many as half of individuals who experience sexual violence do not self-identify as either victims or survivors, even if their experience meets the legal definition of sexual assault (Wilson & Miller, 2016). To prevent making unwarranted assumptions about what are often deeply personal identification preferences or individual perceptions of victimhood status, unless the term 'survivor' is utilized by cited authors, the term *victim* or *those who experience sexual violence* will be used throughout this dissertation.

Of those who experience campus-based sexual assault, approximately 80 to 90 percent of these assaults are not reported to law enforcement agencies or campus officials (Wagner, 2017). The decision not to report an experience of sexual violence is often influenced by feelings of shame or stigma, fear of retaliation, or failure on the part of the victim to classify an act of sexual

violence as a crime or violation of personal safety (Mennicke et al., 2021). Even if barriers to reporting are overcome, sexual violence victimization may result in a myriad of negative outcomes such as physical injury, poor mental health, increased risk for substance abuse, poor academic performance, and economic impacts such as job loss, court costs, treatment costs, and lowered future earning potential (Eisenberg et al., 2016). The momentous potential of sexual violence to negatively impact the overall wellbeing and life chances of those who experience it are at the forefront of concern for higher education institutions seeking to improve student services and maintain enrollment and retention standards. To mitigate the harsh impact of campus sexual violence on student success and retention rates at federally funded institutions, federal regulations, such as Title IX and the Clery Act, guide and compel institutions to implement systems and programs to prevent and respond to sexual violence as well as to collect and share data relating to campus safety and response (Yung et al., 2015).

To meet these demands, many institutions have implemented sexual violence prevention programs and initiatives intended to educate students, faculty, and staff on topics such as victim blaming, consent, resource awareness, bystander-intervention techniques, and trauma-informed advocacy and response practices. The most widely utilized prevention programs often operate according to the socioecological model of violence prevention which identifies sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based violence, as a social problem that requires individual, structural, relational, societal, and community-based solutions (NSVRC, 2023).

Given the complexity of campus sexual violence and the call to meet the many regulatory demands to address it, the institutional effort to evaluate the efficacy of prevention strategies and campus community members' receptiveness towards these programming efforts is often inadequate. Overall, the body of literature relating to campus-based sexual violence is vast

and spans across many disciplines. Despite significant contributions to the research relating to sexual violence perpetration, victims, and sexual violence prevention efficacy, there is still a dearth of literature that examines how and why sexual violence prevention programming is received, or not received, by its target audience. Given that college students, particularly those who are in their first year of study, are at an elevated risk for sexual violence and are the most likely target population for sexual violence prevention education and programming, it is necessary to examine and evaluate their receptiveness to this programming.

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to address this gap in the literature and to identify and examine the factors that influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. For the purposes of this study, receptiveness may be understood as the degree of willingness to receive ideas, information, and suggestions, even if these ideas are contradictory to one's own. Despite legislative mandates and institutional prevention responses, sexual violence continues to persist at a steady rate. To understand why prevention programming efforts have not resulted in a substantial overall decrease in campus based sexual assault rates, the present study seeks to yield revelatory insights into students' perceptions and knowledge of sexual violence, perceptions and attitudes towards victims and perpetrators, degree of trust in their institutions to address the issue, and their willingness to engage with and learn about challenging and contentious topics. Ideally, these findings may inform advancements in the development and facilitation of sexual violence prevention programs. Through quantitative survey research, this dissertation seeks to identify and examine the factors that influence receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming including the following: knowledge of sexual consent, rape myth acceptance, ambivalent sexism, empathy, personal sexual violence experiences, and degree of perceived campus safety.

The next chapter of this dissertation will provide a review of the literature related to campus based sexual assault, the role of rape myths and rape culture in perpetuating this issue, an overview of the concepts of ambivalent sexism and empathy, and a review of the literature regarding sexual violence prevention programs, strategies, and efficacy. The third chapter will provide an overview of the potential contributions and unique elements of the current study through a bridging of the review of the present body of literature and the methodological approaches of this study. Chapter Four will review the quantitative survey research methodology to be used in this study with an overview of the topics of a rationale for a quantitative methodological approach and the use of survey methodology, sampling procedures, instruments and variable measures, and data collection, analysis, and protections. The final chapters of this dissertation will present the results of the survey, a discussion of the findings and their implications, as well as some concluding remarks regarding study limitations, directions for future research, and recommendations for policy application and implementation.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The next chapter of this dissertation will present an overview of academic literature that has produced noteworthy empirical findings and theoretical developments that address and examine the topics of campus based sexual assault and sexual violence prevention strategies. This review will establish the phenomenon of campus based sexual assault and describe its statistical scope. It will present an overview of rape culture and the role of rape myth acceptance, empathy, and victim blaming in creating and maintaining rape culture on college campuses. The subsequent section will identify several unique college campus environmental risk factors that contribute to the perpetuation of campus based sexual assault such as The Red Zone, the construction of gendered hierarchies and collegiate peer groups, the convergence of party and hookup culture, and the pervasive problem of hazing. This literature review will conclude with an overview of the literature relating to sexual violence prevention programs with a particular focus on legislative mandates, prevention strategies and approaches, including consent and sexual health-based prevention programming, and common challenges and barriers relating to program facilitation.

Campus-Based Sexual Assault

Establishing The Phenomenon

Sexual assault is a form of interpersonal violence that may generally describe any behavior in when an individual is forced, coerced, or manipulated into unwanted sexual activity without their permission or consent (NSVRC, 2010). Sexual violence occurs on a broad spectrum and a range of behaviors such as rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, flashing, sex trafficking, image-based sexual abuse, and many others. Scholastic understanding of the complexities and variations of sexual violence and its associated definitions under continuous

development despite records of its occurrence dating back centuries. To highlight the relative novelty of this field, a 1982 study by Sarrel and Masters was the first to present empirical evidence of the problem of sexually harmful acts towards men by women. The empirical study of sexual violence continues to advance through a multi-disciplinary lens within the fields of criminology, sociology, psychology, public health, anthropology, and biology to name a few.

While sexual assault is known to affect individuals across the demographic spectrum and within a wide range of social environments, the issue has been demonstrated to be particularly elevated among college populations and accounts for approximately 43 percent of the total on-campus crimes in the United States (NCES, 2022). It is estimated that 13 percent of students, graduate or undergraduate, experience sexual assault or rape during their time at college through force, coercion, or incapacitation (Cantor et al., 2020). The commonly cited statistic that 1 in 5 college women in the U.S. will experience sexual violence continues to hold true while research has revealed that 1 in 16 men and 1 in 4 transgender, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming college students will also experience sexual assault (NSVRC, 2024). Among this population, the most consistently reported forms of sexual violence among college populations are alcohol or drug facilitated sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact, and sexual coercion (Fedina, Holmes, & Backes, 2018).

Empirical explanations for the elevation of sexual violence rates on college campuses are significantly variable and highly nuanced. College often presents young adults with a novel opportunity to live independent of their parents or guardians apart from the familiarity of home. Despite being an often exciting and pivotal life experience, college students are prone to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Lamis, Ballard, & Patel, 2014). To alleviate these relational challenges, college student seek to forge new relationships and social connections, and often

seek to appear socially desirable to their peers by participating in party and hookup cultures, a convergence of which is highly predictive of campus based sexual assault and will be addressed in greater detail in subsequent sections (Anders et al., 2020). Alcohol-facilitated sexual violence is the most common form of sexual violence on college campuses and accounts for approximately 50 percent of assaults with 43 percent of cases involving an intoxicated victim and 75 percent involving an intoxicated perpetrator (Abbey, 2002). This form of sexual violence is particularly prevalent among college populations with higher rates of student participation in athletics and Greek life (Hoxmeier & Zapp, 2022; Moylan et al., 2024; Roebuck & Komanduri, 2016; Scramm, Swan, & Williams, 2017; Spencer et al., 2024).

In their 2021 study of fraternity and sorority members, Barnes et al. found that in general, men and women who belong to a fraternity or sorority group were approximately three times more likely to experience unwanted sexual contact than students not involved in Greek Life. Importantly, most victims of sexual assaults on campus know the perpetrator and are most likely to experience victimization in familiar places like their own on or off-campus residence or a residence of a friend or acquaintance (Morrison, 2007 & Cantor et al., 2015). Reflective of broader sexual violence trends, campus based sexual assaults are predominately perpetrated by college men (Voller & Long, 2010). In their 2019 systematic review of studies examining the frequency of sexual perpetration among U.S. and Canadian college men, Anderson and colleagues (2020) found that on average 29 percent of the men reported engaging in some form of sexual violence perpetration. Despite institutional attempts to address and reduce sexual violence through educational interventions, disciplinary actions, and increased advocacy and support services available on campus, the rates of campus sexual violence remain steady.

Rape Culture

A common theme across the literature examining campus sexual assault is the imperative to explain its persistence despite the establishment of legislative directives, campus response and prevention initiatives, and social movements such as #MeToo. To address this conundrum, many researchers have turned their attention to the mutually reinforcing issues of rape culture and rape myth acceptance. The term ‘rape culture’ first entered the public vernacular during the 1970s second wave feminist movement and describes the complex and pervasive embeddedness and normalization of sexual violence within our social institutions, structure, and culture (Nicholls, 2021). Definitions of rape culture vary depending on the contextual application. For the purposes of this dissertation, rape culture is defined according to Tracey Nicholl’s description provided in her 2021 book *Dismantling Rape Culture: The Peacebuilding Power of ‘Me Too’*:

“A rape culture is one that normalizes and excuses rape, a social context in which the desires of privileged aggressors are prioritized over the comfort, safety, and dignity of marginalized populations who are seen as targets, as prey...Men are normalized as the hunters for sex and the conquerors of women; women are normalized as the guardians of our own chastity and virtue. Those who ‘fail’ to be virtuous are disparaged, disregarded, and pathologized in these cultures which tend to be slut-shaming and victim-blaming, and of course, heterosexist.” (pp. 27-28).

A rape culture centers men’s heteromasculine expression of sexuality and gender as a baseline for what is healthy, normal, and desirable. Sexual assault is subsequently viewed as an inevitable and natural strategy to maintain this reified and gendered hierarchy (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018). Rape culture is upheld by and manifested through a spectrum sexually aggressive behaviors that include rape and sexual assault but also mundane and easily dismissed

behaviors such as rape jokes, sexual harassment, catcalling, and the policing of gender expression through bodily appearance, dress, voice, and interests (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018). In all, rape culture describes a broad range of practices that vary in terms of legality, prevalence, and sociocultural acceptance (Braxton, 2022; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018).

Rape Myths & Rape Myth Acceptance

A central feature of rape culture is the pervasive and broad acceptance of rape myths, which are prejudicial, stereotypical, or false beliefs about sexual violence, those who cause harm through sexual violence, and those who experience sexual violence (O'Hara, 2012). Rape myths play a substantial role in maintaining rape culture on college campuses. Some rape myths that researchers have identified as being commonly held and reinforced by college populations include the belief that women who dress provocatively or drink excessively invite sexual assault, that victims of sexual violence often make false claims for the purposes of revenge or attention seeking, and that men who perpetrate sexual violence, particularly under the influence of alcohol, are unable to control their sexual impulses and are normally good natured and law-abiding and should not be blamed (Acquaviva, Meeker, & O'Neal, 2022; O'Shea et al., 2024).

Rape myths are often founded and reinforced by the common belief that there must be clear and uncontestable evidence that an alleged perpetrator, often a man, is at fault before support can be rendered to a victim (Braxton, 2022). In his 2022 book *Empowering Black Boys to Challenge Rape Culture*, Gordon Braxton identifies several assumptions based in rape culture that allow for the dismissal of sexual violence to occur. For example, he states that for an act of sexual violence to be considered real or legitimate, there must be definitive physical evidence such as bruising, torn clothing, or the presence of bodily fluids such as blood or semen. He adds that sexual violence is often only legitimized if it appears a victim actively resists, particularly through physical or vocal means, or tries to avoid it. Lastly, he states that acts of sexual violence

are most likely to be legitimized when an offense is committed by perpetrator who is perceived to be evil or monstrous with little to no redeeming qualities against a perceptively innocent victim.

Rape myth acceptance, or the degree to which an individual accepts or believes in rape myths regarding sexual violence, perpetrators, and victims are central to reaffirming and upholding rape culture. Rape myth acceptance often manifests in non-supportive attitudes towards those who experience sexual assault such as expression of disbelief, blaming, and even hostility (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). When confronted with non-supportive attitudes and behaviors, those who experience sexual violence are less likely to seek further support or to report their victimization. Acceptance of rape myths upholds rape culture by minimizing the harm caused by sexual violence, creating justifications for sexual aggression, deny victimhood status to men and gender-nonconforming individuals, and shifting blame from the perpetrator to the victim (Davies et al., 2012 & Thelan & Meadows, 2022). Victim blaming as is closely linked to rape myth acceptance and is a particularly persistent issue that will be examined more thoroughly in the following section.

Rape myth acceptance influences behaviors of both victims and perpetrators and has been linked to higher levels of rape proclivity, or the likelihood that a person will perpetrate sexual violence if presented with fertile conditions and the opportunity (Bohner et al., 2005 & Seabrook et al., 2018). Those who experience sexual violence who also have high levels of rape myth acceptance are significantly less likely to identify and report their experience as sexual assault than those who do not (Thelan & Meadows, 2022). As an example of the harmful effects of rape myth acceptance, belief in the common myth that many claims of sexual assault are false may lead to broad disbelief of others' experiences of sexual assault and subsequent exoneration of

perpetrators (Weiser, 2017). Given the salience of rape myth acceptance, it will be measured as an independent variable in this study.

Victim Blaming

A steadfast cornerstone of rape culture, the act of victim blaming, or the attribution of blame to a victim for their experience of sexual assault, is common and uniquely damaging in its effects on sexual assault victims. The term was initially coined by William Ryan (1971) who applied the concept to racial economic disparities and the use of blaming to further marginalize Black families. Since then, the concept has been applied in a variety of contexts but has been shown to be particularly salient in the sexual violence literature (Hedrick et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2021 & Pacilli et al., 2025). In cases of sexual violence, victim blaming may come from a variety of different sources including peers, intimate partners, family members and law enforcement officers (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2021). Given that victim blaming often comes from sources known to and trusted by a victim who otherwise believes these sources will render support and assistance to them, victims often experience secondary trauma and revictimization from victim blaming experiences (Witte & Flechsenhar, 2025).

Some who experience sexual violence are more likely to have their victimhood status validated than others depending on a host of factors including the conditions under which the assault took place and the victim's social position. The concept of the 'ideal victim,' first identified by Nils Christie in 1986, is tightly intertwined with rape culture and acts as a key pillar of support to its maintenance. An ideal victim describes a person whose victimization experience garners the greatest degree of sympathy and whose victimhood status is legitimized and reinforced by society (Christie, 1986). Typically, an ideal victim receives this status due to societal perceptions of their weakness, passivity, innocence, and vulnerability, thus rendering them blameless. Sexual assault within the context of college and campus communities often

occurs when either the perpetrator and the victim, or both, were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, as part of a hazing ritual, or between intimate partners or acquaintances. These common factors may render many victims of campus-based sexual assault less likely to meet the societal criteria for ideal victimhood status.

Specifically, given that most victims of campus sexual assault know their perpetrator and are more likely to willingly and knowingly engage in risky behaviors such as binge drinking and sexual hookups, their sexual violence experiences may be more likely to viewed as preventable by them or as a predictable result of their own poor judgement. On the contrary, an ideal victim is viewed as innocent and their experiences as completely unpreventable and unpredictable. Those who experience sexual assault under these perceptively high- risk conditions are unlikely to report or seek assistance immediately following the assault, often due to feelings of shame and self-blame. This further cements their exclusion from an ideal victimhood status as it is expected a truly innocent victim would report and seek assistance promptly (Bernstein et al., 2024; Graham et al., 2021 & Mennicke et al., 2021).

In addition to the concept of the ‘ideal victim’, there are two additional theoretical explanations for victim blaming that will not be tested in this study but do warrant review. First the defensive attribution hypothesis states that whether or not a person attributes blame to a victim depends largely on their perceived similarity to the victim and their perceptions of their own vulnerability to victimization (Walster, 1966). According to this hypothesis, individuals often seek to attribute blame to victims of crime to distance themselves from crime victims to cope with feelings of vulnerability and fear of experiencing judgement and blame themselves (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2020 & Witte & Flechsenhar, 2025). For example, an individual may attribute blame to a victim of alcohol-facilitated sexual assault for drinking too much while also

asserting that they themselves do not overconsume and are thus unlikely to experience sexual assault. When a person who previously engaged in defensive attribution does experience sexual victimization, they often become less likely to engage in victim blaming (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2020). According to this theory, this may be because they can no longer distance themselves from other victims and are now aware of their vulnerability.

The just world theory is another perspective that has been utilized to explain the phenomenon of victim blaming. This theory suggests that people tend to interpret experiences in a way that is consistent with their belief in a just and fair world where people, good and bad, get what they deserve (Lerner, 1980). When people are confronted with experiences that do not align with their just world beliefs, they may seek avenues to attribute blame to the victim in ways that support their belief that a victim must be deserving of their victimization experience. Belief in a just world provides individuals with a sense of security in a world that is predictable and fair. Victim blaming and minimization or denial of harm in cases of sexual assault are a common response to violations of just world beliefs, particularly when it does not appear that justice can be easily restored (Hayes et al., 2013). For example, if a person encounters a sexual assault victim who they believe to be good and generally undeserving of sexual violence, because they cannot make sense of or rectify this injustice, they may try to nullify, minimize, or neutralize the harm. This may be done by suggesting that the act was not intended to be harmful and was just a misunderstanding, a result of the perpetrator's naivety, or the victim's unusual or momentary lapse in judgement.

There are some demographic variations in how victim blaming is directed and received. Research has consistently found that men are more likely than women to engage in victim blaming in cases of sexual assault (Pinciotti & Orcutt & 2021 & Witte & Flechsenhar, 2025).

One explanation for this is that victim blaming may be used by men as a way to essentially punish women for perceived violations of a patriarchal gender order in which sexual violence is a result of women's failure to allow men to protect them or to guard their own purity (Hackman et al., 2017; Kazmi et al., 2024; Oztemur & Toplu-Demirtas, 2024). Though men are more likely to engage in victim blaming than women, women also engage in victim blaming behavior often for the purpose of preserving their perceptions of their own invulnerability to sexual violence as explained by the defensive attribution hypothesis explained above.

Race has also been shown to influence attribution of blame to both the perpetrator and the victim. In her 2019 study of 2,238 University students, Audrey Miller found that research participants were more likely to attribute blame to a victim whose perpetrator was Black. She contends that this perception largely stems from rape-propensity mythology which identifies Black men to have a greater propensity for rape than men of other races. Similarly, due to racialized stereotypes that inform rape mythology, Black women are less likely than women of other races to be perceived as 'ideal' victims and are more likely to experience blame (Coles & Pasek, 2020; George & Martinez, 2002; Katz et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2019; Linhares et al., 2023; Wooten, 2017). Further, compared to victims who experience intraracial sexual assaults, victims of interracial sexual assaults are less likely to have their experiences validated and are more likely to be blamed and deemed less credible (George & Martinez, 2002). This occurrence is likely linked to the racist belief that Black men are more violent than men of other racial identities, therefore, victims who experience sexual assault by Black men should have known the heightened risk for violence and are to blame for their victimization.

Victim blaming experiences by those who identify as gender non-conforming or as a sexual orientation minority are also prevalent. Bisexual women are more likely to experience

sexual assault and to be met with negative and victim blaming responses than women who are lesbian or heterosexual. Bisexual women are often perceived as being more promiscuous and as being responsible for teasing men sexually or leading them on, thus strengthening the perception that they are responsible for their own sexual violence victimization (Dyar et al., 2021).

Transgender individuals are also at an elevated risk for sexual assault and are more likely to experience victim-blaming than gender-conforming individuals, however, transgender men are less likely to experience victim blaming and sexual violence than transgender women (Buist & Stone, 2014). Violence towards transgender individuals and subsequent victim blaming behaviors may once again be a form of punishment for perceived transgressions of the heteronormative gender order. Overall, victim blaming is one of the most significant reinforcers of rape culture and rape mythology and serves to uphold systems of sexism, racism, and homophobia that perpetuate sexual violence. The following section will provide an overview of a closely related concept to victim blaming; empathy.

Empathy

The concept of empathy and its connection to rape culture, rape myth acceptance, and victim blaming has been widely studied. Empathy can be understood as the capacity to share, understand, and respond with care to the emotional needs and affective states of others (Hudson-Flege et al., 2020). Researchers have identified two primary forms of empathy: cognitive empathy and emotional empathy (Stephens & George, 2009). Emotional empathy describes one's ability to reflect the emotional state of another person and to essentially feel what they are feeling. Cognitive empathy describes the act of 'perspective taking' or the degree to which a person can accurately perceive and understand another's experience of a situation or conditions.

High levels of empathy have been linked to many prosocial traits and behaviors such as volunteerism, sportsmanship, and high employee performance (Levitan & Vachon, 2021).

Conversely, low levels of empathy have been linked to sexual aggression which may manifest in the form of an inability to tell when a person is in distress and lack of response to resistance (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Levitan & Vachon, 2021 & Stephens & George, 2009). Higher levels of empathy towards those who experience sexual violence has been demonstrated to be associated with more favorable perceptions and attitudes towards sexual assault victims and lower levels of victim blaming (Rinehart et al., 2023). As stated previously, sexual assault who meet the criteria of the ‘ideal victim’ are more likely be given credibility and validation of their experience and are thus more likely to be extended empathy (Christie, 1986). When met with empathy, those who experience sexual assault are more likely than those who are not to seek further support and assistance (Hudson-Flege, 2020 & Spencer et al., 2023).

The concept of empathy has been applied to many studies of campus sexual violence as a way to understand sexual violence perpetration and victimization experiences as well as bystander behavior. Given that college is often a primary site of identity, ideological, and social exploration, it also serves as a fertile site of empathy awareness and cultivation (Hudson-Flege, 2020). College students between the ages of 18 and 25 have a highly malleable capacity to develop cognitive empathy, which is often a key goal and ideal outcome for many sexual violence prevention programs (Levitan & Vachon, 2021).

Research has consistently found that lower levels of empathy are associated with higher levels of perpetration risk (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Rinehart et al., 2023 & Spencer et al., 2023). For example, in their 2020 study of 544 college men, Hudson-Flege and colleagues found that men who had higher levels of empathy were less likely to succumb to peer pressure to engage in forced sex, to engage in risky drinking behaviors, to have high numbers of sexual partners, and overall less likely to hold rape supportive beliefs and hostile sexist attitudes towards women.

These authors contend that overall, the moderating effect of empathy significantly reduces the likelihood that highly empathetic men will perpetrate sexual violence despite the temptations and persuasions of their surroundings.

Similarly, Long and Herr found that hostile attitudes towards victims of sexual assault increased for men who have low levels of empathy after they were asked to empathize with a fictional victim of sexual assault. In other words, for those who are already low on empathy, prompts to increase and develop empathy may be met with increased hostility and resistance rather than receptiveness. This is particularly challenging when seeking to address male peer groups as these groups may seek to reinforce traits relating to hegemonic masculinity such as emotional detachment, sexual conquest, and binge drinking (Hudson-Flege, 2020; Katz, 1995 & Spencer et al., 2023).

Research also suggests that higher empathy towards sexual assault victims is associated with personal experiences of sexual violence victimization (Osman, 2016; Osman & Gingerich, 2025 & Smith & Frieze, 2003). For example, in their 2025 study, Osman and Gingerich found that women who have past sexual assault victimization experience are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of empathy towards sexual assault victims than those who have not. Interestingly these authors found that the women who experienced alcohol facilitated sexual assault had lower levels of empathy for other victims than those whose past experiences with sexual assault were not alcohol facilitated. Given that approximately 50% of campus based sexual assaults occur under the influence of alcohol, it is important to consider the role of victimization memory in capacity for empathy among sexual assault survivors (RAINN, 2024).

Empathy is not extended to all victims of sexual assault in equal measure. For example, in her study of 567 college students, Davis (2023) found that participants were likely to

attribute blame to a male perpetrator who assaulted a woman but were more likely to attribute blame to men who experience sexual assault. This may render men less likely to seek support from peers or professionals following a sexual assault. While women in general are more likely to receive empathy, White women are significantly more likely to have blame attributed to their perpetrators than women of color with Black women being the least likely to receive empathy (Davis, 2023; Franklin & Garza, 2021 & Johnson et al., 2023). This is largely attributed to the historical and cultural erasure and dismissal of Black women's pain and racialized perceptions that they are promiscuous and less concerned with consent in sexual contexts (Katz et al., 2017; Wooten, 2017).

Ambivalent Sexism

Another theoretical perspective that has been frequently applied to explain the persistence of campus based sexual assault is Glick and Fiske's (1996) theory of ambivalent sexism. This theory states that sexism manifests in two distinct but interrelated forms; one that is overtly misogynistic and antagonistic while the other is more covert and insidious. Together, these two forms of sexism create a complex ideological system that ultimately justifies and maintains gendered hierarchies and reinforces the dominance of men and the subordination of women (Jolley et al., 2024). Hostile sexism occurs when women who defy traditional expectations of gender roles are perceived negatively and treated with hostility, contempt, harassment, or violence as form of punishment for their gender transgressions. While both hostile and benevolent forms of sexism have been linked to greater myth acceptance, hostile sexism has been demonstrated to have the strongest link to rape proclivity among men as well as higher levels of rape myth acceptance and victim blaming attitudes and behaviors and lower levels of bystander intervention (Abrams, 2002; Angelone et al., 2018; Begany & Milburn, 2002; Hill & Marshall, 2018; Kazmi & Rauf, 2024; O'Leary et al., 2022 & Vidal-Fernandez &

Megias, 2014). Importantly, with a sexual violence prevention context, hostile sexism has also been linked to denial of empirical studies and evidence related sexual violence rates and demographics (Betz, Deegan, & Gomes, 2023).

Benevolent sexism describes attitudes and beliefs that appear positive and well-intentioned towards women such as that women are pure and should be cherished and protected. These attitudes, though tinged with positivity and benevolence, reinforce the inferiority of women and femineity and suggest that they must be guided and controlled (Glick & Fiske, 1996). While not overtly misogynist, benevolent sexist attitudes often manifest in placing blame on women for acts of sexual violence due to their perceived unwillingness to allow themselves to be protected or to remove themselves from male-dominated spaces (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism on the part of both men and women has been linked to victim blaming attitudes and behaviors as well as greater overall rape myth acceptance (Hill & Marshall, 2018; LeMaire, Oswald, & Russell, 2016; O’Leary, Myers, & Lozano, 2022). Interestingly, while those who experience sexual assault are generally less likely than those who have not to adhere to either form of ambivalent sexism, those who do adhere to benevolent sexism, are less likely than those who do not hold these views to label their sexual assault experience as such (LeMaire, Oswald, & Russell, 2016 & Wilson & Newins, 2023).

As it applies to college student populations specifically, ambivalent sexism has been associated with higher levels of rape myth acceptance, victim-blaming, and minimization of harm (Abrams et al., 2003; Angelone et al., 2020; Wilson & Newins, 2024 & Yamawaski et al., 2009). These trends are not exclusive to heterosexual men and often plays a salient role in the gendered lives of women as well. For example, their 2012 study of 323 undergraduate students, Davies, Gilston, and Rogers found that while men were more likely to display hostile sexism,

women endorsed benevolent sexist attitudes and behaviors at a nearly equal rate. In this study, women demonstrated more supportive attitudes about male dominance than men did and were just as likely as men to attribute blame to sexual assault victims and to diminish the act, particularly in cases where the perpetrator and victim are known to each other. Similarly, Fields, Swan, and Kloos (2010) found in their study of 78 undergraduate women that while very few (7%) of the women surveyed agreed with statements regarding hostile sexism, many (64%) indicated agreement with statements related to benevolent sexism. They indicated particularly strong support for the myth of complimentary gender differentiation, a subscale of benevolent sexism that asserts that men and women have fundamentally different qualities and abilities which are complimentary to one another. The women in this study indicated belief that women are naturally emotionally and physically weaker than men and that women's dependence on men for guidance and safety is necessary and justified.

Angelone and colleagues (2020) applied women's ambivalent sexist beliefs to perceptions of sexual violence and found that complimentary gender differentiation mediates the relationship between gender and rape myth acceptance among both college men and women. They contend that many college students hold ambivalent sexist beliefs that men are naturally dominating and entitled to women's companionship and submission but also therefore responsible for protecting women. Sexual assault of women is assumed by those who hold ambivalent sexist views to be a result of a victim's disregarding their role and position in society and refusal of male protection (Angelone et al., 2020). Ambivalent sexism is not exclusive to perpetrators, and sexual assault victims who hold strong benevolent sexist belief are significantly more likely than victims who do not to label their experience as an act of sexual violence (LeMaire, Oswald, & Russell, 2016).

Given that a significant proportion (50%) of campus-based sexual assaults occur under intoxication and between acquaintances, victim blaming and harm minimization among college populations. In their study of college men and women from the United States and Japan who adhered to gender-role traditionality, Yamawaki, Ostenson, and Brown (2009) found that men were more likely than women to hold both hostile and benevolent beliefs which lead them to both victim blame and minimize harm while women were more likely to only hold benevolent sexist beliefs which led them to victim blame but less likely to minimize harm. Importantly, for men who experience sexual violence, the myth that men cannot be victims of sexual assault is strongly reinforced through victim blaming, shaming, and degradation from both men and women, though women are less likely than men to engage in further violence and degradation towards them (Davies et al., 2012; Wilson & Newins, 2024).

Overall, the relationship between ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance is strong and highly complex and nuanced. It is important to recognize ambivalent sexism is not exclusive to heterosexual men and as a highly salient factor in gendered life experiences. As it relates to sexual violence prevention, the findings in this section indicate that prevention efforts should be targeted towards people of all genders but may also require a gendered approach to application as ambivalent sexist attitudes and beliefs are gendered and manifest differently. Men have been shown to adhere to hostile sexist beliefs and views more strongly than women, and hostile sexism specifically has been closely linked to denial and skepticism towards sexual violence research that challenges hostile sexist beliefs and assumptions about gendered behavior (Betz, Deegan, & Gomes, 2024). As a result, men may be less receptive and even hostile or resistant towards SVPPs (Russell & King, 2020). These findings are significant to understanding individuals' receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention efforts and willingness to

intervene and recognize their role in preventing gender-based violence (Bogen et al., 2022 & Stein, 2007). A further exploration of the literature regarding bystander intervention strategies and efficacy will be covered later in this dissertation

College Campus Environmental Risk Factors

To understand the phenomenon and persistence of campus-based sexual violence, it is critical to identify and examine the unique risk factors put forth by the college campus environment itself. College presents new opportunities for young adults to pursue and build new social connections, routines, and interests away from the guardianship and guidance of their parents and secondary school officials. It is viewed culturally as a rite of passage through which young adults are to develop independence and prioritize personal and professional growth and development. Given that the average age of a college student in the United States is 18, the experience of starting college and adapting to the college lifestyle is often equal parts exciting and overwhelming. The average 18-year-old college freshmen is still developmentally immature as development of the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for decision and judgement making necessary to gain full awareness of potential consequences of behavior, is not believed to reach completion until around the age of 25 (Arain et al., 2013). Given their natural state of lessened development in conjunction with the pressures to make mature decisions and to exist independently, college freshmen possess a significant vulnerability to campus based sexual assault. The Red Zone denotes the period of time when college freshmen are at the highest level of risk for sexual assault and will be examined in more detail in the following section.

The Red Zone

The Red Zone denotes the time period between the beginning of the Fall semester and Thanksgiving break during which 50% of all reported campus sexual assaults take place. The

risk of sexual violence during this time is particularly elevated for first-year college women and transfer students who are new to a specific campus community (Lisak, 1998). There are some mixed findings regarding whether the effects of the Red Zone extend beyond first year students and into sophomore student populations, however, a significant portion of the evidence suggests that this is a unique first-year student phenomenon (Carey et al., 2018; Cranney, 2015; Flack et al., 2008; Kimble, 2008). There are several factors that influence this phenomenon and its unique impact on first-year and transfer students, however, the most consistently identified factors are alcohol and drug misuse and experimentation (Caamano-Isnora et al., 2021), unfamiliarity with the campus community (Flack et al., 2008), and lack of social connections and trusted sources (Cranney et al., 2015).

Gendered Hierarchies & Fraternization

While campus based sexual assault perpetration is not exclusive to men, in accordance with non-campus based sexual assault trends, most of these crimes are perpetrated by men (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Martin, 2016; Sanday, 2007 & Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Research has established some explanations for this phenomenon and have drawn connections between perpetration and the concepts described in above sections. For example, research suggests that men who engage in sexual or relationship violence are more likely than men who do not to have higher levels of rape myth acceptance (Duran et al., 2018; Mouilso & Calhoun, 2013; O'Connor, 2023). In a college context, this is particularly true for men who are also involved in all-male peer groups such as fraternities or all-male athletic teams (Bogen et al., 2022; Forbes et al., 2006; Harkins & Dixon, 2010; Martin, 2016; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Boswell & Spade, 1996). This relationship is strengthened in male peer groups that are small and dense versus groups that are large, diverse, and only loosely connected (Bogen et al., 2022). The

following sections will review the literature relating to how gendered hierarchies are formed and the influence of men's fraternal peer groups in upholding rape culture and perpetuating campus based sexual assault.

The college experience provides fertile ground for all-male peer groups to form particularly in the form of fraternities, all-male athletic teams, and all-male dormitories and housing arrangements (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Franklin et al., 2012; Seabrook, 2021). Given the relatively young age of most college students and the increased likelihood that they will seek out a same-sex peer group, college men are likely to turn to other men for advice on navigating relationships and for modeling and reinforcement of masculine standards. Research related to fraternity and all-male athletic team membership indicates that these groups tend to attract and select men who are inclined to drink, engage in sexual conquests, and who demonstrate above average athleticism (Bogle, 2008; Boyle, 2015; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Ojje, 2015). This indicates that there is a clear masculine ideal that members of these peer groups are seeking to achieve, model, and reinforce for one another.

Though it will not be tested by this study, DeKeseredy and Swartz's 1997 male peer support theory (MPT) is a predominant theoretical model used to explain the persistence of sexual violence against women and warrants review. As a branch off social learning theory, MPT asserts that gender-based violence is a socially learned behavior that is taught to men and reinforced through their interactions, attitudes, and behaviors of their male peers. DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1997) contend that a significant thread that maintains all-male peer group relations is the belief that femininity is an inferior and unwanted "other" that is meant to be exploited and conquered. Many male-peer groups teach and reinforce attitudes and beliefs that women are to be sexualized and objectified (Martin & Hummer, 2016 & Cameron &

Wollschleger, 2021). They are things to be caught and acted upon instead of as autonomous beings with rights and dignity. These groups essentially teach men that violence against women and rejection of femininity is justified and even necessary to preserving their own masculinity. In their meta-analysis of risk and protective factors for men's sexual violence against women, Steele and colleagues (2022), found that the influence of the male peer group's acceptance and reinforcement of rape myths on men's proclivity for sexual violence was significantly stronger than the effect of individual rape myth acceptance outside of peer influence.

Expanding upon male peer support theory, Kimmel (2008) theorizes that these gendered hierarchies and fraternal organizations are maintained through a culture of entitlement. This theory rests on the idea that hypermasculinity is inherently superior and deserving of support while the culture of silence and protection refer to the idea that men's reckless and dangerous behaviors should be excused, legitimized, and concealed (Kimmel, 2008). Kimmel (2008) argues that male peer groups use their unity and loyalty to one another to uphold the expectations of these cultures and to preserve one another's masculinities and statuses of blamelessness. This is often reflected in the colloquialisms that "boys will be boys" or the prioritization of the wellbeing of a male perpetrator over a person they have victimized (e.g. "his life will be ruined"). Rape myths that are reinforced through male peer groups work to transfer blame from perpetrators to victims and to trivialize sexual violence experiences and outcomes. One way in which these cultures of masculinity and the broader rape culture more generally are upheld and reinforced is through an insidious interlacing of party and hook up culture.

Party & Hook Up Culture

One of the keys ways in which gendered hierarchies are created and reinforced by male fraternal organizations is through party and hook up cultures. Party culture, or the behaviors,

norms, and values associated with social gatherings, remains a central distinguishing feature of college life. Some common features of college campus party culture include binge drinking, drug experimentation, sexual fraternization, and other risk-taking behaviors (Teran et al., 2024).

Adjacent to party culture is the phenomenon of hook up culture which describes behaviors, norms, and values associated with the pursuit of casual sexual encounters that are typically free from commitment and emotional intimacy (Anders et al., 2020 & Lindo et al., 2018). The following section will provide an overview of how these two subcultures work to uphold the gendered hierarchy and dominance of male peer groups on college campuses.

Given their relative power over the sites where party and hook up cultures are expressed, such as fraternity houses, all male peer groups, like fraternities, also strongly influence their peers' attitudes towards sex and alcohol consumption (DeSantis, 2007; Borsari et al., 2007; Boyle, 2015; McCready et al., 2022 & Treat et al., 2021). Fraternity parties often serve as environments where positive attitudes towards alcohol consumption and sexual conquest merge, thus creating a high-risk environment for sexual aggression towards women and those who do not conform to traditional gender norm (Sanday, 2007). Fraternity status is often a position of privilege on many college campuses. Fraternities are often the only formal student organizations on campus that are permitted to host parties. Thus fraternity members exert control over party environments by dictating alcohol provision and consumption for party attendees, particularly if attendees are underage and have no other source of alcohol provision. Fraternity groups often police the behaviors, appearance, and movements of women who attend their parties, which reinforces gendered hierarchy and the dominance of male peer groups (DeSantis, 2007; Harris & Schmalz, 2016; McCready et al., 2022; Sanday, 2007; Seabrook & Ward, 2018)

The dangerous intermingling of party and hook up culture is reflected in the statistic that 50 percent of all campus based sexual assaults when a victim, perpetrator, or both are under the influence of alcohol (Abbey, 2002). While there is not a direct causal link between alcohol use and sexual violence perpetration and experiences, alcohol is known to inhibit cognitive processing such as decision-making, reading social cues, and seeking non-aggressive solutions to problems or conflicts (Treat et al., 2021). In fraternity party settings, alcohol abuse decreases the likelihood that men will respond to resistance or rejection cues and increases the likelihood that they will seek aggressive solutions to rejection or resistance, particularly if reinforced and encouraged by other fraternity members (Boyle, 2015).

Male peer groups often indicate to their members that to be rejected or left ‘blue balled’ is a challenge to their masculinity and to the dominance and desirableness of the entire peer group (Sanday, 2007). In her application of routine activities theory, Franklin (2016) found that women whose sororities prioritize contact with fraternity men through party attendance were more likely to binge drink and with greater frequency than those belonging to sororities who do not. Importantly, this finding suggests that while binge drinking is a risk factor for sexual violence, it is the male-dominated fraternity party environment itself that facilitates sexual violence. Also notable is the finding by Stotzer and MacCartney (2015) that the number of fraternities present on a college campus is not necessarily predictive of the number of sexual assaults. Rather, it is the degree to which the fraternities on campus uphold and adhere to rape culture that is more significantly attributed to higher sexual assault numbers.

In her 2007 study of fraternity members and Greek Life practices, Sanday found that fraternity men are socialized by their male peer groups to seek out sexual conquests and to “work out a yes” (p. 131) to verbally coerce women who are initially resistant into sexual encounters or

to incapacitate them with alcohol. She found that the fraternity men she interviewed often expressed disgust towards women who overconsumed alcohol and were significantly less likely to legitimize sexual assaults against them and more likely to attribute blame to them. She adds that while a few of men she encountered indicated that they would be willing to assist a woman who was drunk or in danger of sexual assault, most indicated that they would be more concerned with the protection and wellbeing of their other fraternity brothers and suggested that the welfare of women who attend their parties is not their responsibility. Lastly, this author concluded that while many of the fraternity men she interviewed expressed concern for the potential for sexual violence to occur at their parties, they were more concerned that reports and accusations of sexual violence would ruin their personal and organization reputations and standings rather than that harm would be caused to sexual assault victims. So far, this section of the literature review has focused on sexual violence perpetrated by men against women, however, it is important to note that sexual violence may also be perpetrated by men against other men, often in the form of sexualized hazing, as a way to reinforce gendered hierarchies and assert masculine dominance within all male peer groups. This form of sexual violence will be explored in greater detail in a later section. To further expand on the gendered dimensions of campus based sexual assault, the following section will provide a conceptual overview of Glick and Fiske's 1996 theory of ambivalent sexism and its application to the phenomenon of campus based sexual assault.

Hazing & Culture of Secrecy

Hazing is a broad form of interpersonal violence in which potential group members are required to participate in activities that are emotionally humiliating, degrading, and often physically dangerous to secure their group membership (Alexander & Opsal, 2021). Hazing takes place within a variety of different organizations such as fraternities, athletic teams,

performing arts organizations, and academic clubs. These rituals are often shrouded in secrecy and pose a challenge to new members of a peer organization to test the limits of their physical and emotional endurance and willingness to protect and uphold the interests and values of the group above their own (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1997). Despite the clandestine nature of hazing, many acts of hazing are done in public spaces, on campus, and with the knowledge of coaches, alumni, and organization advisors (Kerschner & Allen, 2025). To explain the persistence of hazing despite the risks of death and serious physical and emotional injury, Alexander and Opsal (2021) contend that those who participate use techniques of neutralization to justify the practice and minimize the potential harm. For example, they may claim the practice is necessary to build group rapport, suggest that it is a normal and expected aspect of the college experience, or blame hazing victims for failing to clearly resist or to know the limits of their endurance.

One form of hazing, sexualized hazing, is known to contribute to elevated rates and risk of sexual violence on college campuses (Kerschner & Allan, 2025). Acts of sexualized hazing often include forced and coerced actions such as undressing, viewing or creating pornography, paddling and whipping, simulation of sexual behaviors, unwanted penetration, and many more sexually violent behaviors across the spectrum (Alexander, 2020; Jeckell et al., 2018; Malinen & Tobin, 2020; McKee, 2022; Sanday, 2007, & Wood & Toppelberg, 2017). This form of abuse may also prompt individuals to engage in sexual violence perpetration in the form of drink-spiking, sexual coercion, and harassment of others. The purpose of these rituals is to assert and reinforce group hierarchies, values, and attitudinal and behavioral expectations for group members (Kroger, Venema, & van Baarle, 2023). Sexualized hazing specifically in college

settings is often normalized and trivialized as a form of play or ‘horsing around’ to establish the dominance of more senior members and to reinforce hypermasculine ideals (McKee, 2022).

Those who experience acts of sexualized hazing are shamed into secrecy, particularly if they do not want to face ostracization or retaliation from other peer group members. Being able to keep these hazing rituals a guarded secret or at least keep feelings of shame and humiliation private is meant to reinforce masculine dominance and the inferiority of femininity (Berrill, 2002; Martin & Hummer, 1989 & Shaw & Smith, 2025). Those who endorse rape myth acceptance and other attitudes and behaviors that reinforce rape culture are also more likely than those who do not to accept hazing in any form, including sexualized hazing (Malinen & Tobin, 2020; Seabrook, 2021 & Shaw & Smith, 2025). Despite the harm caused by hazing rituals and practices, some research suggests that many who experience hazing view the practice positively and perceive it as necessary to building group cohesion (Kerschner & Allan, 2025 & Waldron, 2021). Perceptions that hazing rituals build group trust and belonging through secrecy and are necessary to maintaining the exclusivity of peer groups and organizations, may at least partially explain the persistence of hazing on college campuses despite efforts to raise awareness about the potential for harm. Like campus based sexual assault more broadly, incidents of hazing are also severely underreported and unregulated by higher education institutions. The following section will explore the issues of campus safety and security and the role of higher education institutions in sexual violence prevention and response.

Campus Safety & Institutional Risk Factors

As addressed above, party and hook up culture, limited guardianship, and endless opportunities for social engagement are just some of the unique risk factors associated with college campuses. As such, the topic of campus safety and security is of paramount importance

for college students, administrators, and other stakeholders. Common campus safety initiatives taken by higher education institutions include the implementation of secure building access procedures, increased campus security capacity and services, improvement of communications systems, drills, and educational trainings and workshops (Braaten, Tsai, & Vaughn, 2022; Patton & Gregory, 2014; Schafer, Lee, & Giblin, 2016; Maffini & Dillard, 2022).

In their 2021 study examining the racial differences between Black and White college students in their perceptions of campus safety, Maffini and Dillard found that Black students felt significantly less safe and reported higher levels of physical and sexual assaults when compared to White students. Importantly, these authors note that minority students are more likely than non-minority students to consider the effects of discrimination, animus, and microaggressions when reflecting on their perceptions of campus safety.

Despite institutional efforts to maintain campus safety and to increase student and stakeholder perceptions of campus safety, institutions often fail to respond adequately to safety and security concerns. Those who have experienced campus-based sexual assault often report experiencing secondary victimization resulting from institutional failure to respond adequately to safety and security concerns or reports of victimization. Institutional betrayal, or the problematic actions or inactions of an institution in response to reports and complaints of issues such as violence, harassment, or discrimination, has been demonstrated by research to play a complex and significant role in the perpetuation of campus based sexual assault (Smith & Freyd, 2014).

Many who experience sexual violence on college campuses decline to report their experience due to distrust in the institution to rectify harm and to prevent acts of retaliation by the perpetrator or the perpetrator's peer group (Gomez, 2022; Lutz-Zois et al., 2024 & PettyJohn et al., 2023). Institutional betrayal has been linked to a host of negative outcome for sexual

assault victims such as poor job and academic performance, higher rates of mental health disturbances, increased risk of revictimization, and withdrawal from academic and social activities including total drop out. The failure of an institution to provide an adequate response to complaints and claims reinforces rape culture by minimizing harm, signaling to potential perpetrators that sexual assault will go unnoticed and unsanctioned, and demonstrating a general unwillingness to put the needs of victims above those of the institution if there is a risk of reputation damage or backlash from wealthy and powerful stakeholders.

For example, given the elite status of many fraternities and athletic teams, these peer groups often evade deterrence measures and detection by institutions and stakeholders who are interested in protecting the interests the institution or organization as well as preserving its integrity (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013). Fraternities are often positioned on top of the collegiate peer hierarchy, and membership is viewed as a symbol of social capital and status (Harris et al., 2019). This positioning is often upheld by national fraternal and panhellenic organizations who seek to highlight the role of campus engagement, leadership, philanthropy, and scholarship that fraternity and sorority groups are meant to fulfill (Garcia et al., 2021). In this way the behaviors of many college men who perpetuate sexual violence are hidden or excused by both their direct peer group and the greater institutions. Many members of fraternities come from White and privileged backgrounds and are often legacy members and children of alumni (DeSantis, 2007 & Seabrook & Ward, 2018).

Importantly, the vast majority of institutions do not intentionally dismiss sexual assault. Rather, perhaps due to low levels of report and low availability of prevention and response resources, institutions often fail to account for sexual violence in their policies and procedures. For example, sexual violence rates have been shown to be higher within institutions that do not

have an easily accessible and frequently advertised and reviewed student code of conduct or alcohol policy (Cameron & Wollschleger, 2021 & Stotzer & MacCartney, 2016). While creating more clear and accessible campus policies may seem like a simple solution, implementing and enforcing these policies is particularly difficult if high-risk environments for sexual assault, such as private residences and bars, are not under institutional jurisdiction.

If routine activities theory is applied, in these circumstances, there is a clear absence of a capable guardian in the form of an institution, thus increasing the likelihood for sexual violence to occur (Stotzer & MacCartney, 2016). Cameron and Wollschleger (2021) note that there may be variation between alcohol policies in dorms versus in fraternity houses. If the policies are stricter in dorms than in the houses, it is possible that underage students living in dorms may seek to attend fraternity parties, placing them at greater risk of sexual assault despite the policies meant to decrease risk. Given the insidious nature of institutional betrayal and the significant but relatively understudied role of it in maintaining rape culture and perpetuating campus based sexual assault, this dissertation will examine the influence of institutional mistrust on prevention receptiveness as an independent variable in this study. The following section will provide an overview of the literature regarding sexual violence prevention programs (SVPP).

Sexual Violence Prevention

The previous overview of rape culture and the complex factors that maintain and uphold it highlight a clear need and challenge for the implementation of effective sexual violence prevention programming on college campuses. In general, contemporary sexual violence prevention programs (SVPP) seek to achieve four overarching goals. The first is to increase awareness of the risk factors that influence sexual violence on college campuses such as binge drinking. The second is to increase awareness of the signs of sexual violence trauma and the

campus resources available to address them. The third is to provide safety and bystander intervention strategies. Finally, a central goal of many SVPPs is to foster the development of empathy and sense of shared responsibility for creating and maintaining safe campus communities.

While many institutions have adopted some version of these contemporary sexual violence prevention methodologies further outlined below, early prevention strategies placed the onus of safety largely on women as potential victims. In his controversial theory of victim precipitation, victimologist, Menachem Amir (1970) argued that the act of rape on the part of men is largely normal and that many acts of rape occur as the result of women's failure to clearly indicate that sexual contact is unwanted or will not be possible in the future even through persistence or pressure. In essence, the victim is deemed responsible for the interpretations of their actions or of the situation in general on the part of the perpetrator.

Early rape-avoidance prevention programs adhered to these conclusions and held women largely responsible for their own safety through equipping women to engage in self-defense and other defense strategies such as carrying pepper spray or pocketknives (Koss & Harvey, 1991). These prevention programs were also grounded in the problematic and simplistic belief that physical or verbal resistance is necessary to legitimize actions of sexual violence and to provide concrete evidence of non-consent (Ullman, 2014). Support for rape-avoidance prevention programs has waned significantly. Though defensive strategies are often still included in contemporary programming, many contemporary SVPP place emphasis on macro-level strategies that seek to address and change the behaviors of perpetrators and entire communities through challenging the cultures and structures that shape and maintain them.

Legislative Mandates

A significant source of motivation for the establishment and implementation of SVPP on college campuses is federal and state regulations and mandates. Generally, prevention of and response to sexual violence on college campuses is supported by four primary pieces of legislation: Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Jeanne Clery Act, Campus SaVE Act, and Title IX. As one of the first legislative responses relating to campus sexual violence, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits higher education institutions from discriminating against students or employees on the basis of sex. Within this broad description, the specific application of Title IX to campus sexual violence response is reflected in the requirement that institutions respond promptly to sexual violence, to conduct an adequate, reliable, and impartial investigation into the complaint, and to provide access to support and resources for victims during the investigation and after.

The Clery Act, first signed in 1990 in response to the rape and murder of college freshman, Jeanne Clery, whose death advocates contended was a result of Lehigh University's failure to address an ongoing safety issue of propped and unsecured doors on campus. This Act requires that higher education institutions who receive federal aid collect and disclose crime statistics from their campus communities, and failure to collect and report data may result in significant fines and potential loss of federal funding.

In 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) first amended the Clery Act and provided federal funding to aid in sexual violence prevention, investigation, and response in federal institutions and communities. VAWA reinforces the tenets of the Clery Act that requires the compilation and disclosure of sexual violence data while also contending that higher education institutions must create policies that address and prevent campus sexual violence and

provide education and training opportunities for members of the campus community to gain knowledge of these policies and resources for response and prevention.

To further specify this charge, VAWA expanded through the 2013 Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act amended the Jeanne Clery Act to address the issue of campus sexual assault at the federal level by requiring that higher education institutions increase the transparency of their data regarding sexual violence on campus, accommodations for victims, clarity and timeliness in disciplinary proceedings, and the implementation of campus-wide prevention and education programming (Campus SaVE, 2013). Importantly, while academic institutions that receive federal funding are required to comply with these directives relating to SVPPs, they are often not required to provide evidence of program efficacy. The following section will provide an overview of three of the most adopted forms of SVPPs on college campuses: bystander intervention, consent-focused sexual health education, and male-based prevention programming. The following section will begin with an overview of perhaps the most widely embraced and implemented forms of SVPP, bystander intervention.

Bystander Intervention

Bystander intervention is one of the most common forms of sexual violence prevention practices used in higher education (McMahon et al., 2017; Orchowski & Gidycz., 2018; Mujal et. al, 2021). A bystander is an individual who witnesses or is aware of a criminal or crisis situation but is not directly involved (Mainwaring et al., 2023 & McMahon & Banyard, 2012). Bystander intervention as a SVPP aims to equip individuals and communities with the skills necessary to identify potentially dangerous situations or to challenge violence-supportive norms as well as the skills to intervene in these situations safely with the goal of reducing future acts of violence (Coker et al., 2016 & Evans et al., 2019).

The bystander phenomenon was recognized in response to the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese whose attack was allegedly witnessed by at least thirty-eight people who initial reports claim did nothing to intervene or seek legal assistance (Gavinet al., 2021). These claims and the circumstances surrounding them have been largely challenged and debunked as it is now known that police contact had been made by some of the witnesses (Gallo, 2015; Lurigio, 2015). Despite this new evidence, this case still sparked interest in the role of bystanders in crime response and prevention and has served as the basis for many bystander intervention programs as well as the development of the 9-1-1 emergency call system (Gallo, 2015).

The influence of the Kitty Genovese case is reflected in the pursuit of bystander intervention programming to create community-level change through the engagement of entire communities in recognizing individual and group responsibility and responding to situations where sexual violence and harm is likely (Banyard, 2011). To begin to understand bystander attitudes, behaviors, and motivations, it is important to conceptualize bystander intervention as a process. To do this, Latane and Darly (1970) created a five-step model to explain the ideal bystander process after a person witnesses a criminal or crisis event:

- 1.) the witness notices the situation
- 2.) the witness recognizes the situation as dangerous and as an opportunity to intervene
- 3.) the witness takes personal responsibility to act
- 4.) the witness chooses a bystander intervention technique suitable to the situation
- 5.) the witness intervenes.

The role of the bystander in instances of sexual violence is known to have an effect on both the behavior of the perpetrator, in terms of whether or not they continue the behavior in the present or future, and on the behavior of the victim in terms how they process the event and help-

seeking processes (Ford et al., 2023). As such, it is not surprising that institutions that often rely on victims to come forward to render assistance, rely on bystander intervention as their primary SVPP strategy.

Bystander intervention is implemented in many forms including in-person training, social media and marketing campaigns, and online training (Evans, Burroughs, & Knowlden, 2019). As stated previously, the majority of college campus sexual assaults are reported during The Red Zone at the start of year with first-year students being the most at risk. As such, many institutions target first-year students at the beginning of the Fall semester or during new student orientation activities to participate in bystander intervention programming. Evidence for the efficacy of bystander intervention programming on reducing sexual violence on college campuses has been large mixed.

In a systematic review of bystander sexual violence intervention programs for first-year college students, Evans, Burroughs, and Knowlden (2019) found that the efficacy of these interventions on reducing sexual violence is largely dependent on a variety of factors such as program type (e.g. social media, educational, and role-playing), length and frequency of intervention programming, and efficacy assessment scales. Overall, these authors found that bystander intervention generally has a significant initial effect on awareness of intervention strategies and participant confidence in recognizing potentially dangerous situations, but it does not appear that bystander intervention programming has a lasting impact on bystander behavior, efficacy, or willingness to intervene in the long term. Given this mixed evidence for the efficacy of bystander intervention programming on long term information retention and reduction of violence, the dependence of many institutions on bystander intervention as a primary source of prevention programming to address this pervasive problem is concerning.

Consent-Based Sexual Health Education

In addition to bystander intervention, many educational institutions, often beginning in middle and high school, seek to achieve sexual violence prevention through some form of sexual education (Muscari, Littleton, & Cunnane, 2023). While the current study focuses on experiences and perceptions of sexual violence prevention programming among college students, it is important to note that 1 in 3 individuals experience an initial act of sexual violence before the age of 18 (Anderson et al, 2020). To begin to assess the issue of students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming, it is imperative to begin to identify and understand what, if any, sexual health and sexual violence education students enter college with and what definitions, meanings, and perceptions of sexual violence are gained through these encounters. Sexual education remains highly inconsistent across the United States, with minority groups and communities receiving notably less education placing them at a greater risk for unwanted pregnancies, STIs, and sexual violence (LeCroy, Milligan-Lecroy, & Lopez, 2022).

Sexual education programming is often one of the earliest sources for information regarding sexual and relational health and safety that individuals receive outside of their home (Muscari et al., 2023). These programs may be categorized into two main types: comprehensive sex education and abstinence-based sex education. Comprehensive sex education (CSE) aims to change negative and stigmatizing behaviors and attitudes towards sexuality and sexual development through education and promotion of healthy relationships, embracement of sexual diversity, the elimination of violence, and poor sexual health outcomes (Kalke et al., 2018 & Mark, Corona-Vargas, & Cruz, 2021). Essentially, CSE expands its scope beyond the anatomical and physiological aspects of sexual development and reproduction to incorporate social and cultural dimensions of sexuality and relational development. In contrast, abstinence-based

education posits that abstinence should be the primary form of prevention and tends to focus less on creating positive attitudes towards sexual health and development and more on reinforcing negative attitudes towards negative sexual health outcomes such as unwanted pregnancies and STIs. The influence of both forms of sexual education on endorsement and acceptance of rape myths and on general perceptions of sexual violence has been somewhat explored by the literature.

For example, in their 2024 study of the effects of high school sexual education on past sexual victimization and rape myth acceptance among college students, Caufield and colleagues found that most high school students in the United States have only received abstinence-based or abstinence-plus education using unstandardized protocols with a lack of information about sexual violence and consent. These authors state that college students who receive comprehensive sexual education were less likely to endorse rape myths and more likely to have a greater understanding of consent relative to their peers who did not have sexual education or had only abstinence-based sexual education. Even among students who do receive comprehensive sexual education, research has demonstrated that they have a much clearer understanding of pregnancy physiology and STIs but maintain a relatively poor understanding of sexual violence and consent (Kumar et al., 2013).

Consent-focused sexual health education is emerging as a central and critical component of comprehensive sexual education. This consent-focused programming is rooted in the concept of affirmative consent in which many institutional policies and procedures are grounded. The affirmative consent model places responsibility on the individual seeking another's consent to gain it through a clear and direct agreement rather than relying on assumption, pressure, or coercion (Javidi et al., 2020; Klement et al., 2017 & Setty, 2022). The tenets of this model are

reflected in the policies and procedures adopted by many higher education institutions due to its clarity and contemporary challenge to the notion that lack of resistance or clear refusal is evidence of consent (Borges et al., 2008 & Javidi et al., 2020). Given that a significant number of campus-based sexual assaults occur through coercion or incapacitation, affirmative consent policies may better account for acts of sexual violence that occur under higher education institutions' unique conditions.

Consent-focused sexual health education programs have been demonstrated to have greater efficacy in reducing rape myth acceptance levels and increasing positive attitudes towards sexual and relational health than abstinence-only based education (Delameter, 2015; Klement et al., 2017; Favor, 2022). Importantly, while there is strong support for the efficacy of consent-focused sexual violence programs, there are also studies that challenge these findings. The primary challenge to the support for efficacy of these programs is that there is little clarity and specificity in identifying the mechanisms through which consent-focused programming reduces rape myth acceptance levels and leads to attitudinal change (Beres, 2020; Borges et al., 2008; Durbach & Kirsten, 2017 & Haas et al., 2011). At best, it is widely accepted that there is some evidence that consent-focused SVPPs works to reduce rape myth acceptance and that there is potential for these programs to work towards attitudinal change, however, additional research is needed to determine the mechanisms through which these changes happen and the longevity of these changes.

While bystander intervention and consent-based sexual and relational health approaches to sexual violence prevention are often offered to all students regardless of gender, some institutions seek to address campus-based sexual violence through targeting men and male peer groups specifically. As reviewed previously, engagement with all-male peer groups such as

fraternities or athletic teams is positively associated with rape myth acceptance and attitudes and behaviors rooted in ambivalent sexism, such as victim-blaming. Colleges provide unique conditions for these all-male peer groups to form in conjunction with increased opportunities for alcohol consumption, sexual conquest, and hazing. To alleviate the elevated risk of sexual violence under these conditions, many institutions and program developers have created and implemented SVPPs that directly seek to address the role of hypermasculinity and heteronormativity in maintaining rape culture (Bossen et al., 2015).

Male-Focused Sexual Prevention Programs

Historically, anti-rape activism and prevention efforts have been led primarily by women and those who embrace feminism (Pease, 2014). While the impact of these efforts is crucial and undeniable, there is a persistent belief among individuals of all genders that sexual violence is a “women’s issue” due to the overrepresentation of women as sexual violence victims (Katz, 1995; Masters, 2010 & Stern, 2010). As stated in the introduction of this section, many SVPPs still focus on equipping women to defend themselves against sexual violence. These programs often fail in their mission to prevent and eliminate sexual violence by trivializing the role of men in the perpetuation and solution of sexual violence. Sexual violence must be understood and addressed as existing politically and socially within the context of socially constructed gender relations (Carline et al., 2018; Katz, 1995; Masters, 2010 & Pease, 2014).

Male-focused SVPPs such as *A Call To Men*, *The Men’s Program*, *Men Against Violence*, and *Going Off Script* seek to instill in college men a sense of responsibility for preventing and responding to sexual violence while also revealing the role of toxic forms of masculinities in upholding rape culture and gender inequality for the purposes of maintaining men’s dominance. Ideally, these programs provide a space for men to engage with one another

about rape culture without feeling the need to defend their masculinity and to ask questions without judgement (Locke & Mahalik, 2005). Men who participate in these programs are typically challenged to consider their perceptions of masculinity and the sources from what or whom they learned masculine definitions from (Katz, 1995). They are informed on how toxic definitions of masculinity function to preserve men's dominance at the expense of women's health and safety. The concept of masculinity is revealed as highly nuanced, and men who participate in these programs are given tips and skills for reframing their definitions of masculinity and how to use it positively and in a pro-social manner (Katz, 1995).

Like bystander intervention and consent-based SVPP, evidence supporting the long-term efficacy of male-focused SVPP is also highly nuanced and mixed. Research suggests that these programs may work to decrease rape myth acceptance and victim-blaming attitudes among some men, however, for the men who at high-risk for sexual violence perpetration, there is little to no response to intervention resulting in meaningful change (Schapansky et al., 2025). Male-based SVPPs are also challenged with choosing whether to directly craft their message to men as potential perpetrators or to emphasize their role primarily as pro-social bystanders and allies (Carline et al., 2018 & O'Connor, 2022). Striking a balance in this messaging approach is challenging and both options may result in negative outcomes.

In their 2018 study, Carline, Gunby, and Taylor found that the majority of the young men who participated in their study believed that sexual violence perpetrators were an easily identifiable and monstrous 'other,' and did not believe themselves or members of their male-peer groups to be potential perpetrators. These authors found that this belief influenced the men's perception that they were being unfairly targeted as potential perpetrators, which increased

resentment towards the programming and compelled some of the men to double down on victim-blaming attitudes and claims that men are often victims of false reports.

Further, while encouraging men to be allies and pro-social bystanders is important, this approach may inadvertently result in men continuing to embrace benevolent sexism if they conflate support for women with protection over women (Murphy, 2009). In other words, many male-focused SVPPs do not necessarily disarm men of their hypermasculine traits such as strength, control, and power, but instead instruct them to redirect these traits to non-violent, but potentially equally aggressive, protective and defensive actions. The risk for these unintended ‘boomerang reactance effects’ of male-focused SVPPs significantly complicate the efficacy of these commonly used programs that are often instated with gender-informed and good intentions. The final section of this literature review will provide an overview of the research regarding sexual violence prevention programming facilitation with a specific focus on frequency, modality, and formatting and the relationship of those elements to receptiveness to prevention programming initiatives.

Sexual Violence Prevention Program Facilitation

Frequency

First, while comprehensive sexual education programming that covers the topics of sexual violence, consent, and rape culture has been shown to have an initial impact on students’ attitudes, these impacts often do not have a lasting effect, particularly if the programming is not done frequently (LeCroy et al., 2022). In general, research suggests that to achieve long-term efficacy in attitude changes and information retention, SVPPs must increase the frequency of education opportunities over a long period of time rather than rely on single dose workshops and presentations (Banyard et al., 2018; Bundy et al., 2011& Nation et al., 2003). Prevention

programs, workshops, and presentations that are longer in length have also been found to increase efficacy (Anderson & Whiston, 2005).

Hoxmeier, McMahon, and Cusano (2024) add another nuanced dimension to the issue of frequency in their conclusion that not only do students need multiple sessions of SVPP, but they also need frequent education and emphasis on the situations related to sexual violence that they encounter most frequently. These authors state that many SVPPs place primary emphasis on hypothetical instances of sexual assault or rape, whereas most students are more likely to encounter sexist jokes, cat-calling, non-consensual image sharing, or harassment on a more frequent basis. These authors recommend that SVPPs place equal if not more emphasis on scenarios and strategies relating to these more common forms of sexual violence to match the frequency with which students encounter them in their daily lives.

Modality & Format

In addition to frequency, the modality through which consent-based education has been shown to have an effect on knowledge retention and acceptance (Banyard et al., 2018; Edward et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2011). In their 2021 study, Muscari, Littleton, & Cunnane found that many students receive sexual education through slide shows and lectures that often do not include opportunities for interactive discussion, role playing exercises, or practical application. SVPPs that use CSE and consent-based information in a variety of different formats such as through presentations, guest speakers, interactive workshops, online trainings, and social marketing campaigns have shown greater efficacy than those that rely on one format only (Coker et al., 2011; Edward et al., 2022 & Taylor et al., 2013). Similarly, Moynihan et al. (2015) found in their study of the impact of bystander sexual and relationship violence prevention programs on long-term student behavior that generally, bystander behaviors decreased over time. They add

that students who received more than one training session or exposure to a related social media campaign in combination with training demonstrated intervention behavior longer than those who did not.

Given budget restraints, large student populations, and high flexibility needs within higher education institutions, SVPPs that can be adapted to online formats are in high demand. There is a dearth of research regarding the efficacy of online SVPPs on changing attitudes and behavior of recipients. The literature that does examine this topic indicates that traditional in-person SVPPs can and should be adapted to online formats address the needs of students with busy schedules, discomfort in discussing sensitive topics with strangers, or who may be remote learners (Kleinsasser et al., 2015; White et al., 2010). In online contexts, shorter trainings and interventions have been shown to have greater efficacy, though the opposite is true for in-person learning (Cugelman et al., 2011).

In their study of the online *Take Care* program, Kleinsasser et al. (2015) found that students who engaged in the program were more likely than those who did not intervene on behalf of friends and others known to them for up to two months. Importantly, these students were no more likely to speak against sexist social norms or to intervene on behalf of a stranger than those who received no training. These authors indicate that while brief online interventions may have some positive impact on students' attitudes and behaviors towards sexual violence, they are often not sufficient to create lasting change or the confidence to address sexist jokes or to intervene on behalf of strangers. These findings indicate that additional research into the efficacy of online SVPPs is necessary and that while online trainings should be included by institutions for the purposes of inclusivity and flexibility, they should not necessarily supplant traditional in-person trainings.

Demographic Disparities

Importantly, research suggests that there is nuance in how sexual violence prevention programming is received by students on the basis of gender and race. For example, Byers and colleagues (2017) found that men are more likely to express greater satisfaction with the quality and comprehensiveness of sexual and consent-based education than women. Men are also less likely than women to receive contraceptive education leading to higher risks of STI contraction and unplanned pregnancy (Farkas et al., 2015 & Schrager et al., 2015).

In their study of over four thousand young men, Farkas et al. (2015) found that there were some racial disparities among men regarding consent-based sex education. They found that Black and Latino men were less likely than White men to receive formal sex education in school settings, however, they were more likely than White men to engage in more frequent and in-depth discussions about sex and sexuality with their parents (Farkas et al., 2015). It is important to consider other sources and influences of sex education that exist outside of formal school settings. Also significant is the persistent finding that many young people, regardless of race or gender, find their peers to be a more reliable source than teachers or parents (Buston et al., 2002; Freitas, 2013; Hayes et al., 2024 & Kennett et al., 2012). Many SVPPs have used this finding to justify the inclusion of peer educators in their consent-based education and outreach procedures, which has been demonstrated to have some degree of enhanced efficacy, particularly in the area of contraception and STI prevention (Masanet & Buckingham, 2015; Stephenson et al., 2008; Strange et al., 2002).

As it applies to bystander intervention as a form of SVPP, women are more likely than men to intervene as in acts of sexual violence in general, however, they are more likely to intervene on behalf of friends or people known to them whereas men are more likely to intervene

on behalf of strangers in emergency situations (Banyard & Moynihan, 2011 & Bennett et al., 2014, & Moynihan et al., 2015). Men are significantly less likely than women to intervene if they know the perpetrator personally (Hammock et al., 2022). This may be partially attributed to the influence of the all-male peer group in college settings which often legitimizes sexual violence as a means to achieve hypermasculinity and reinforces the perception of sexual violence perpetrators as a monstrous other who exists outside of their peer group (Katz, 1995).

Additionally, research suggests that regardless of program attempts to alleviate bias, many men who participate in SVPPs, particularly in mixed gender groups, perceive the programming as portraying men only as harm causers and women only as victims (Berkowitz & Orchowski, 2022; Hammock et al., 2022 & Leone & Parrott, 2019). This indicates that the demographic make-up of the audience is also a factor in receptiveness towards SVPP and that there are strengths and limitations to the male-only audience approach.

Women's elevated rates of intervention may be partially explained by the fact that individuals who have experienced sexual or relationship violence, most often women, are more likely to intervene as a bystander than those who have not experienced sexual and relationship violence (Bloom et al., 2024). Interestingly, Diamond-Welch and colleagues (2016) found that women's acceptance of bystander intervention strategies as a legitimate form of prevention decreases as they age, while men's perceptions of legitimacy increase as they age. This may be a result of many women's recognition that sexual violence persists despite increased awareness and strategies presented by SVPPs.

Race has also been demonstrated to have an effect on reception towards SVPP and implementation skills and strategies, such as bystander intervention. Brown, Banyard, and Moynihan (2014) found that Black undergraduate men were more likely to respond positively to

bystander intervention training and were more likely to intervene than White men. Importantly, Black men in the study emphasized that they were more likely to intervene because they felt greater support for intervention from their Black peers. In general, racial and ethnic minority groups have been shown to be more receptive to SVPPs and supportive of the strategies they present than their White counterparts (Diamond-Welch et al., 2016). People of color are also more likely than White individuals to experience retaliation in response to intervening and are more likely to act while in the presence of other supportive POC peers (Hammock et al., 2022). When White bystanders do intervene, they are more likely to do so on behalf of other White individuals than people of color and are more likely to attribute blame to people of color who experience victimization, particularly Black women (Burns et al., 2019; Diamond-Welch, 2016; Katz et al., 2017; Murrell, 2021; Shorpp, 2023).

Overall, research suggests that effective SVPPs must take into account the impact of many factors such as education frequency, modality, audience composition, and bias in the how programming is presented and received. While this literature review focused primarily on the experiences of men and women, research suggests that queer students' experiences of SVPP and consent-based sex education are often insufficient, non-inclusive, and even harmful (Charest et al., 2016; Bonar et al., 2022 & Thiessen et al., 2021).

Chapter 3 - The Current Study

The research that has been done regarding SVPP suggests that the evidence supporting the efficacy of such programs in reducing campus sexual assault rates is mixed and highly nuanced. Some factors that have been shown by the literature to affect the efficacy of SVPPs include modality, format, frequency of information dissemination, gender composition, and comprehensiveness of the material. There are many forms of SVPPs, however, the most common are male-based prevention programs, bystander intervention programs, and consent-based prevention programs. Many programs incorporate elements of each of these three main types. While there is some evidence to suggest that SVPPs have some effect on reducing rape myth acceptance and victim blaming attitudes and behaviors, there is little evidence supporting the longevity of these effects. To better understand which SVPPs programs are able to initiate long-term change, it is important to understand why some students are positively impacted by SVPPs while others are either left unchanged or come to hold even more adverse attitudes towards the topic of sexual violence and those it affects. To contribute to this body of knowledge, the purpose of the current study is to address the following research questions:

1. What factors most influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming?
2. What topical areas of sexual violence prevention education are of the greatest interest to this college student sample?
3. What proportion of college students in this sample have sexual violence victimization experiences?

These questions were addressed using quantitative survey methodology, a notably reliable practice in sociological research due to its ability to provide precise and causal explanations for

social phenomena and behavior (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). Quantitative methodology undoubtedly has limitations, however, it can reveal patterns, correlations, and causality between variables. The dependent variable in this study, receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming, will be examined relationally to the following independent variables:

1. rape myth acceptance
2. ambivalent sexism
3. empathy
4. knowledge of sexual consent
5. sexual violence victimization experience
6. perceived campus safety

Study Hypotheses

In examining these factors, a set of hypotheses were developed to be tested through quantitative statistical analysis. As a key fixture of quantitative methodology, hypotheses are formed to provide a theoretically sound statement regarding the expected outcome or relationship between a dependent and independent variable which will later be tested (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). The following section provides an overview of these hypotheses and theoretical frameworks for their construction. First, there are consistent findings in the literature that indicate that those who hold high levels of rape myth acceptance are more likely to hold negative perceptions of sexual assault victims and to engage in victim blaming behavior. Sexual violence prevention programs often seek to challenge and dismantle tightly held beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that manifest from rape myth acceptance. While some are open to and welcome challenges to their present beliefs and attitudes, many demonstrate resistance and seek

to avoid challenging situations and encounters (Kania & Cale, 2021; O’Leary et al., 2022; Walfield, 2021). As such, the following hypothesis is presented in this study:

H¹: *Respondents who report higher levels of rape myth acceptance will demonstrate low receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention.*

Similarly, research suggests that those who hold ambivalent sexist views are also more likely to engage in victim blaming and, for men with hostile sexist beliefs specifically, there is a strong association between hostile sexism and sexual violence perpetration (Abrams, 2002; Angelone et al., 2018; Begany & Milburn, 2002; Hill & Marshall, 2018; Kazmi & Rauf, 2024; O’Leary et al., 2022; Russell & King, 2020 & Vidal-Fernandez & Megias, 2014). Thus, this study presents the following hypothesis:

H²: *Respondents who demonstrate higher levels of ambivalent sexism will demonstrate lower levels of receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming.*

Next, research suggests that those who have lower levels of empathy are also more likely to engage in sexual violence perpetration as well as to hold negative perceptions of those who experience sexual assault. Specifically, lower levels of empathy have been demonstrated to be associated with increased propensity for victim-blaming as well as sexual violence perpetration (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Levitan & Vachon, 2021 & Stephens & George, 2009). Given these findings, this study presents the following hypothesis:

H³: *Respondents who demonstrate higher levels of empathy will demonstrate higher levels of receptiveness toward sexual violence prevention programming.*

Next, the literature demonstrates consistent support for the positive effect of consent-focused sexual health education that is comprehensive and sex positive on the development and maintenance of supportive attitudes towards sexual violence victims and towards sexual consent in general. (Kalke et al., 2018 & Mark, Corona-Vargas, & Cruz, 2021). As such, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H⁴: *Respondents who demonstrate higher levels of knowledge regarding sexual consent will demonstrate higher levels of receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming.*

Additionally, research demonstrates that students who do not trust their institution to respond to misconduct or to prioritize student safety are less likely to report safety concerns or seek institutional support. Institutions that cultivate trust among members of the campus community often provide clear and accessible policies and reporting structures as well as provide opportunities for safety-based trainings and environmental safeguards. As such, this study poses the following hypothesis:

H⁵: *Respondents whose perceptions of personal safety on campus are higher will also demonstrate higher levels of receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming.*

H⁶: *Respondents who demonstrate higher levels of sexual violence victimization experience will also demonstrate higher levels of receptiveness toward sexual violence prevention programming.*

Lastly, the literature consistently finds that there is a positive association between participation in college Greek life and Athletics and victim blaming behaviors and risk of perpetration, particularly for those involved in male-only organizations and teams (Martin, 2016; Moylan & Javorka, 2020; Roebuck & Komanduri, 2016; Scramm, Swan, & Williams, 2017; Spencer et al., 2024). As such, this study will test the following hypotheses:

H⁷: *Greek Life membership will be associated with lower levels of receptiveness toward sexual violence prevention programming.*

H⁸: *Varsity athletics team membership will be associated with lower levels of sexual violence prevention programming.*

H⁹: *Women and gender non-binary students will demonstrate higher levels of receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming than men.*

To test these hypotheses, this study collected data from a survey sample of 614 undergraduate students at a mid-sized Midwestern university. The data from this study were analyzed primarily using multivariable regression procedures. The following section provides an overview of this study's methodology.

Chapter 4 - Methods

Given that federal regulations such as Title IX, The Jeanne Clery Act, and the Violence Against Women Act require that sexual violence response and prevention efforts to be disseminated and advertised broadly across large and diverse student bodies at federally-funded higher education institutions, a quantitative approach is useful in revealing objective and generalizable findings that may be applicable to broader populations and prevention programming audiences (Stockemer & Bordeleau, 2023). Additionally, quantifying the relationship of the correlates listed above to the receptiveness target as well as providing an estimate of the strength of those relationships may present straightforward and clear implications for the practical application and utility of this research for institutions of higher education facing a myriad of staffing, temporal, and fiscal constraints and fluctuations.

The Study Site

The data obtained for this study were collected from a sample of undergraduate students who were currently enrolled at Kansas State University (K-State) during the Fall of 2025. Though, K-State has campus locations in the Kansas cities of Manhattan, Olathe, and Salina, data was only collected from the Manhattan campus as it has the largest student population of the three sites and is the centralized administrative location for the university's sexual violence prevention and response services.

According to Census data, Manhattan, Kansas has a population of between 54,000 and 55,000 with K-State's student population of roughly 22,000 including both undergraduate and graduate students, marking a substantial demographic factor in the overall city population. Given the student population as well as Manhattan's proximity to the Fort Riley base, 42% of Manhattan's population falls between 20 and 34 years of age. Census data also indicate that

Manhattan's population is primarily white (75.4%) with those who identify as Latino (9.3%), multiracial (8.3%), and Black (4.5%) following behind. Regarding gender demographics, Census data show that the Manhattan population consists of 50.9% men and 49.0% women. Official statistics regarding the gender non-binary population of Manhattan were not readily available at the time of this study.

Given the substantial contribution of the K-State student population to the broader Manhattan population, K-State's undergraduate student population demographics are highly reflective of those of the broader Manhattan community. Overall, as of Fall 2025, the K-State undergraduate student population was 16,555. The population is primarily white (78.9%) followed by Latino (9.7%) and multiracial (4.2%). The undergraduate population consists of 51.8% women and 48.2% men. The K-State Colleges with the highest numbers of majors are Arts & Sciences, Engineering, and Business Administration followed by Health and Human Science and Agriculture.

Approximately, 20% of the K-State undergraduate population are active in the university's Fraternity and Sorority Life across 35 chapters. Of the undergraduate population, 37% participate in the university's varsity sports, which is significantly above the median of 22% of the undergraduate population across Big 12 institutions. Approximately 27% of K-State's undergraduate population live in college owned residences such as residence halls and honors' houses. Though all fraternity and sorority houses, while affiliated with K-State, are independently owned and operated.

Study Site History

Though convenience and the principal investigator's proximity to the site and those affiliated with it were elements in its selection for data collection; K-State has a unique and

dynamic history of sexual violence prevention and response initiatives that have informed present-day initiatives and responses. An understanding of the trajectory and development of these initiatives and how they have been shaped and informed by the experiences and actions of sexual violence survivors, survivor allies and advocates, and institutional organizations and administration is helpful in contextualizing the data collection and analysis procedures and results for the present study.

K-State's Center for Advocacy, Response, and Education (CARE), formerly known as the K-State Women's Resource Center or Women's Center, was established in 1973 to provide free and confidential outreach and educational resources relating to sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual harassment. The Women's Center was initially organized and run by volunteers to educate the campus community on the evolving state of gender roles as well as rape prevention initiatives and tactics. It eventually evolved the meet advocacy needs presented by the student population in addition to its education and outreach offerings. In 2015, CARE led the "It's On Us" campaign which garnered interest and participation from K-State members as well as the broader Manhattan community.

In 2016, a high-profile civil suit was filed against K-State by two former students who alleged that K-State had violated their Title IX rights and that university officials had demonstrated "deliberate indifference" to their claims that they had experienced sexual assaults at two different off-campus fraternity houses. This lawsuit was dismissed in 2017 by the plaintiffs after a federal court determined that Title IX did not apply as the fraternity events where the assaults occurred were not considered within the institution's geographic or programmatic jurisdiction.

A perpetrator, Jared Gihring, was named by one of the plaintiffs as well as another former student who claimed she was raped by him. Gihring was expelled from K-State University in 2016 and was later found guilty of one of two counts of rape by a Riley County jury and was later sentenced to 155 months of incarceration (KMAN News, 2017). His attempts at appeal in 2019 and 2024 were both denied. In the wake of this lawsuit, the campus community, led by K-State's Interfraternity Council, held a four-hour rally in 2017 to bring attention to the lawsuit and the desire of the campus community for K-State to increase and improve its response to sexual violence both on and off-campus.

In 2019, K-State implemented the inaugural Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention Specialist as an addition to the CARE staff. With the addition of this role came events such as the “No More: Resource and Empowerment Fair and Rally,” “Wildcat Walk: To End Sexual Violence,” and the creation of the “Wildcats Make A Pact,” an off shoot of the widely used Bringing in the Bystander program. In 2021, another rally organized by CARE and Wildcats Against Sexual Violence began at the University’s Anderson Hall lawn and ended on the front lawn of former K-State President Richard Myers. As in 2017, rally participants were seeking to draw attention to the ongoing problem of campus sexual violence, the need for permanence of the sexual violence prevention specialist position, and general dissatisfaction with administrative response and action on the matter.

In response, K-State authorized the dissemination of a Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey, a project co-facilitated by CARE and K-State's Applied Human Sciences Department, which provided valuable insights into student experiences with sexual violence and highlighted the fact that K-State's rates of sexual violence were comparable to national rates despite efforts put in place to address the issue. After careful review and consideration of the survey results, K-

State joined 21 other higher education institutions across North America to become a member of the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)'s Culture of Respect Collective. Through this process, K-State representatives, officials, and administrators were provided with an assessment of their campus sexual violence prevention and response initiatives and efforts and were informed of gaps and recommendations for improvement in the areas of: survivor support, clear policies, multi-tiered education, public disclosure, schoolwide mobilization and on-going self-assessment.

Presently, K-State's CARE continues to offer free, confidential, and voluntary advocacy and education services to K-State students, faculty, and staff to assist them with safety planning, navigation of University policies and procedures, emotional support, and many other offerings. The sexual and relationship violence prevention specialist position was transferred from CARE to the Morrison Family Center for Student Wellbeing to support broader wellbeing education and outreach initiatives. At the time of this study, sexual and relationship violence prevention has been subsumed under duties of the Prevention Coordinator who also oversees substance abuse and suicide prevention.

Presently, in addition to CARE and the Morrison Family Center for Student Wellbeing, K-State's Civil Rights and Title IX, formerly the Office of Institutional Equity, oversees the University's policy prohibiting discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment and is tasked with investigating allegations relating to these matters including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. Together, these three organizations are responsible for the oversight and implementation of a significant proportion of K-State's sexual violence prevention, response, and outreach initiatives in partnership with other campus and community organizations.

Permissions

The Internal Review Board (IRB) at the principal investigator's (PI) institution approved this quantitative study prior to the collection of online survey data which took place during the Fall of 2025 (IRB Approval # 13066). Survey respondents were provided with necessary information regarding the purpose of the study regarding the minimal risk of harm associated with participation, the steps taken to ensure respondent anonymity, and the possibility that data collected may analyzed for future studies and publications. Prior to beginning the survey, respondents were required to provide or revoke their consent to participate in the study with the knowledge that consent to participate may be revoked at any point with no adverse consequences to them.

Research Design

Survey research was selected as the optimal data collection method for this study which required an examination of respondents' attitudes, behaviors, and opinions related to sexual violence and relational interaction to answer the research questions. In general, survey data are typically used in social science research to collect descriptive information about a population's characteristics and to test hypotheses regarding the nature of the relationships of variables. There are several notable advantages to the survey research method including respondent anonymity, cost and time effectiveness, and the ability to collect data from a large population on a broad range of topics (Creswell, 2009).

Despite these advantages, there are also significant limitations to survey research including issues with survey question interpretation, low response rate, response fatigue, and decreased potential to contextualize and capture subjective experiences (Coughlan, Cronin, & Ryan, 2009). Social desirability bias, or the tendency for survey participants to respond in a way

that they believe would yield approval from others including peers and research investigators, is another potentially significant limiting factor particularly in studies examining contentious, complex, and emotional topics such as sexual violence (Bergen & Labonte, 2020).

Though survey research is limited in its ability to capture social behaviors under real conditions, survey data provide valuable demographic information and insights into respondents' perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes, which past studies have demonstrated, are factors that have emerged as prominent influencing receptiveness. As a result, survey research was selected as an optimal method of data collection for the present study. Additionally, given the potentially contentious and sensitive nature of the topic of sexual violence and the present study's examination of sexual violence victimization experiences, the application of survey research methodology will allow for respondent anonymity and may potentially lessen the influence of social desirability bias on respondent participation.

Sampling Procedure & Data Gathering

Data for the present study were collected from an undergraduate student sample from Kansas State University during the Fall of 2025. An email invitation to participate in this study was sent to all 13,856 undergraduate students who were identified by the institution's Office of the Registrar as meeting the study eligibility requirements of being 18 years old or older and enrolled in classes at the K-State Manhattan campus at the time of participation. Each eligible student was sent an email invitation that included an informational flyer which detailed the general information about the study's purpose, participant time expectation, eligibility requirements, and a personal survey access link. Survey respondents were provided with a digital consent form and were required to answer an age verification question prior to starting the survey. If a respondent either declined to consent to participate or answered that they were not 18

years old or older, they were directed to the end of the survey, and their response was not recorded. Respondents were provided with a list of K-State campus support services and resources at the end of the survey due to the potentially distressing nature of the survey questions.

Additional recruitment efforts included campus wide distribution of flyers in high student traffic areas as well as the secondary distribution of study information by the principal investigator's professional and personal connections in K-State's Fraternity and Sorority Life, Student Programs and Involvement, K-State Athletics, the Morrison Family Center for Student Wellbeing among other student facing campus organizations. The flyer was also distributed by members of the PI's dissertation committee as well as other faculty members of the Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, Philosophy, Psychological Sciences, Music, Theater, and Dance departments, the College of Health and Human Sciences, and others. Some students were presented with the opportunity to receive extra credit in exchange for their participation in this study. Students who were enrolled in a course in which extra credit was offered in exchange for participation in this study but did not wish to participate were offered an alternative extra credit opportunity.

After data cleaning procedures, which reduced the initial sample size due to either the provision of no survey answers or only answers to demographic information, the total sample used for final analysis was 614. Eligible participants were sent a personal survey access link through Qualtrics and were not required to provide their name or student identification number to preserve the anonymity of their responses. Participants were informed that the survey would likely take between 30 and 45 minutes to complete.

Recruitment materials informed respondents that they would be offered a monetary incentive through a chance to enter a raffle to win one of several \$20 cash prizes. Respondents who opted to participate in the prize raffle drawing were directed to a separate Qualtrics survey upon completion of the main survey which allowed the PI to collect students' personal information, such as name and email address, for the purposes of the raffle drawing while maintaining the anonymity their survey responses. An overview of the characteristics of the sample population is presented in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

The Survey Instrument

The following section will provide an overview of the variables to be measured in this study beginning with the dependent variable receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming. This study examined the relationship between the dependent variable and seven independent variables: empathy, rape myth acceptance, ambivalent sexism, perceptions of campus safety, knowledge of sexual consent, and sexual violence victimization experience. Several demographic measures were also captured for analysis in this study. A description of these measures follows below.

Demographic Measures

Respondents were asked to provide demographic information related to their age, racial and ethnic identity, gender, sexual orientation, first-generation status and undergraduate classification, as well as Greek life and varsity athletics membership. The most common age for sexual violence victimization for women is between the ages of 12-24, however college women between the ages of 18 and 24 are three times more likely to experience sexual assault than women generally (RAINN, 2024). It is important to not assume that all students are traditional and fall within the typical college age range while still seeking to capture their perceptions,

attitudes, and experiences. Thus, respondents were asked to enter a numerical interval to indicate their age. After data collection, this variable was recoded so that 1 = 18-20, 2 = 21-24, 3 = 25-30, 4 = 31-45, and 5 = 46-75.

Respondents were asked to identify their undergraduate student classification ranging from freshman (1) to senior (4). Research suggests that first-year college women are at the greatest risk for sexual violence victimization, and first year students in general are the most common target for sexual violence prevention programming. Respondents were also asked to indicate their status as a first-generation college student. The literature regarding the influence of the first-generation college experience on their experiences and perceptions of sexual violence is sparse. First generation students often do not have the privilege of the social capital necessary to prepare for the unique conditions and risks of the college environment (Marco-Bujosa et al., 2024 & Roska et al., 2020). This may place them at a greater risk for victimization. Inclusion of this demographic factor may provide further insight into these unique experiences and social positions. To measure this, respondents were asked to respond ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a statement regarding their first-generation student status. Next, respondents were asked to indicate if they were a transfer student by selecting “yes” (1) or “no” (2).

Respondents were also asked to indicate their racial identity as race continues to be frequently linked but still understudied factor in sexual violence and sexual violence prevention particularly as it relates to issues of victim blaming, perpetrator prejudices, and institutional response (Davis, 2023; Franklin & Garza, 2021 & Johnson et al., 2023). These categories were initially constructed according to the 2024 Census categories to include White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, Middle Eastern or North African, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Respondents to this survey were

overwhelming White (80%), thus a dummy variable was created which denoted 0 and “non-white” and 1 as “white.”

Lastly, respondents were asked to indicate their gender identity and sexual orientation. While the role of gender has been widely explored by research, it is important to include it to confirm the link between gender theory and quantitative data as well as to continue to affirm and expand upon the findings of previous studies. Initially, respondents were asked to identify their gender identity as belonging to one of the following categories: man = 1, woman = 2, non-binary/gender queer = 3. A dichotomous variable was created to note respondents’ transgender status (1= yes, 2= no).

Respondents were also initially asked to identify their sexual orientation according to the following categories: straight/heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, fluid, none of the above, or prefer not to respond. Due to low frequencies of pansexual and fluid respondents, this variable was collapsed into the following categories: straight/heterosexual (1), bisexual (2), gay/lesbian (3), and none of the above (4) (e.g. pansexual, asexual, etc.).

Both athletic team participation and fraternity and sorority life participation have been demonstrated by research to be associated with higher levels of rape supportive attitudes, sexual violence victimization, and rape proclivity, particularly among men (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000; McCrae et al., 2023; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Given this higher risk, these groups are often targeted by higher education institutions and organizational mandates to receive sexual violence prevention training. Understanding the factors that may influence these group members’ receptiveness to these materials may inform how programming should be approached to return a successful outcome. Fraternity and sorority life membership was captured using a dichotomous variable using 1 to indicate membership and 2 to indicate non-membership. Similarly,

participation in varsity athletics was also captured using a dichotomous variable using 1 to indicate varsity team membership and 2 to indicate no varsity team membership. Respondents' living proximity to campus was assessed by asking respondents if their local residence was located a comfortable walking distance from the University and was coded 1 = yes and 2 = no.

Dependent Variable Measure

Receptiveness Towards Sexual Violence Prevention Programming

For the purposes of the current study, receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming may be understood as the degree of willingness an individual has to receive ideas, information, and suggestions regarding the issue of sexual violence and sexual violence prevention efforts, even if these ideas are contradictory to one's own. Individuals who are receptive to ideas are more likely to seek out new sources of information, retain knowledge gained, and evaluate information in a factual and objective manner. Despite the facts associated with sexual violence, due to the persistence of rape myths and the politicized nature of gender-based violence trends and solutions, it is often perceived to be a contentious and controversial topic among the general population.

The issue of receptiveness has been explored in a variety of contexts to better understand how educational information is received by populations and leads to change. The purpose of the current study is to examine the factors that influence receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming among first-year college students who are at an elevated risk for sexual violence, particularly within the first semester. Receptiveness is not synonymous with persuadability or gullibility, nor does it necessarily equate to attitudinal or behavioral change. While these changes are perhaps an ideal outcome for many sexual violence prevention programs, it may be equally as important to understand what factors influence or interfere with

students' ability to consider information and engage with content that may be challenging or contradictory to their beliefs, opinions, and perceptions which is often the first step in addressing this challenging topic.

A self-constructed, six-item, scale was developed to measure receptiveness to sexual violence prevention. The scale was constructed by the PI based on a review of the literature regarding SVPPs which identified common outcomes many preventionists seek to achieve with their programming. Respondents in this study were asked to rate their level of interest in learning about the following topics: forms of sexual violence, sexual consent, the impact of sexual violence on those who experience it, tips for survivor support, bystander intervention techniques, and the relationship between sex and substance use. The internal consistency of this measure was high and yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of .912. The face validity of this scale, or the degree to which the scale measured what it was intended to measure, was confirmed by the PI's dissertation committee. For this scale, respondents were asked to rate their level of interest in the six topic areas listed above on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "not interested at all"(1) to "very interested" (5). A mean composite scale was created to determine an overall receptiveness score with higher mean scores indicating higher levels of receptiveness overall.

Independent Variable Measures

Empathy

Empathy for the purposes of this study may be understood as the capacity to share, understand, and respond with care to the emotional needs and affective states of others (Hudson-Fledge et al., 2020). Research suggests that there is a significant relationship between empathy and sexual violence perpetration as well as victim blaming attitudes among college students (Davis, 2023). To measure empathy, this study adapted five items from the Basic Empathy Scale

(Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Notably, the internal consistency of the empathy measure was low and yielded a Cronbach's Alpha score of .64. Using only a portion of the items in the Basic Empathy Scale is acknowledged as a limitation of this study and was considered and interpreted cautiously in evaluating the findings of this study.

Despite the limitations of the empathy measure in this study, empathy is an important variable to consider for college student populations, particularly for first year students due to the fact that college is often their first exposure to others who have different beliefs, perspectives, and experiences. College acts as a key site of cognitive empathy development as students learn to engage with one another. To measure this variable, students were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree with statements related to their ability to recognize distress in others as well as the degree to which they are emotionally affected by others' stories of suffering.

Perceptions of Campus Safety

Campus safety refers to a broad and complex system of processes and procedures that are developed and implemented by an institution to ensure that physical, mental, and environmental safety of those who are involved in campus programs and activities is maintained. Campus safety initiatives may include fire evacuation planning, inclement weather sheltering procedures, the placement of emergency call boxes, crisis intervention, and awareness campaigns. As it relates to criminal safety issues, The Clery Act requires federally funded institutions to implement campus safety initiatives to ensure the provision of timely warnings of criminal threats, publicly accessible security reports, and transparent and accessible pathways to institutional reporting and support services (Clery, 2025).

Respondents' perceptions of campus safety were measured using a 6-item scale. Items for this scale were partially self-constructed based on a review of the literature (Patton & Gregory, 2014; Schafer, Lee, & Giblin, 2016; Maffini & Dillard, 2022). Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on with six statements pertaining to their perceptions of safety around other members of the campus community as well as their perceptions of the University's availability of resources and trustworthiness in responding to general misconduct and sexual assault.

The internal consistency of this measure was high and yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of .798. The face validity of this scale, or the degree to which the scale measured what it was intended to measure, was confirmed by the PI's dissertation committee. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the six statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). A mean composite scale was created to determine an overall perception of campus safety score with higher mean scores indicating higher perceptions of campus safety.

Knowledge of Sexual Consent

Initially, this study sought to measure sexual health awareness, which can be understood as the degree to which a person has factual and comprehensive knowledge of a wide range of topics relating to sexuality including but not limited to contraception, sexually transmitted infections, body image, consent, and the overall positive and negative consequences of sexual expression. To measure this variable, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with sixteen statements relating to their knowledge of consent, sources of sexual health information, perceptions of the significant of sexual violence in sexual health education, and degree of comfort in discussing the topic of sexual health. These measures were captured using sixteen

items adapted from the Sexual Health Awareness Scale (SHAS) which was created by Kashyap and colleagues in 2022 to assess individuals' baselines of knowledge relating to sexual health and wellbeing.

During the data analysis stage, however, the scale intended to measure sexual health awareness did not reach an acceptable level of internal consistency. As such, the initial scale that included all original items was deemed unsuitable for analysis in this study. To preserve at least some of this data, seven items from the original scale that were related to knowledge of sexual consent were combined in a composite score. Isolated from the other items, this subscale yielded a fair internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha score of .71 and was included in the analysis. This development suggests that sexual consent and sexual health may not be suitable to be measured jointly and may require unique measurement.

Rape Myth Acceptance

Rape myth acceptance describes the degree to which an individual accepts false but widely held beliefs about acts of sexual violence, perpetrators, and those who experience sexual violence. The scale used in this study to measure rape myth acceptance adapted thirteen items from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Subtle Version (IRMA-S) created by Thelan and Meadows (2022) who adapted the original IRMA (Payne et al., 1999) and IRMA 2011 (McMahon & Farmer, 2011) to account for the increased awareness of the social undesirability of rape myth acceptance among more socially aware populations, such as college students.

Adapting items from IRMA-S for use in this study was intended to reduce the risk of social undesirability bias and increase the clarity of the statements posed for student who are often limited in their participation time and attention and who are often concerned with providing the “right” answers to questions that may be perceived as contentious or controversial. The

internal consistency of this measure was high and yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of .852. The face validity of this scale, or the degree to which the scale measured what it was intended to measure, was confirmed by the PI's dissertation committee. To measure rape myth acceptance, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the thirteen statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). A mean composite scale was created to determine an overall rape myth acceptance score with higher mean scores indicating higher levels of rape myth acceptance. Due to skew, an inverse transformation was performed on the index.

Ambivalent Sexism

Ambivalent sexism is an ideology that includes both hostile and benevolent perceptions of women and femininity that uphold a gendered patriarchal social structure in which the needs and perspectives of men are dominant (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Research consistently finds a relationship between ambivalent sexism and higher levels of rape myth acceptance, gender-based violence perpetration, and victim-blaming. The scaled used in this study to measure ambivalent sexism adapted eight items from Glick and Fiske's (1996) Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). Empirical evidence consistently supports the reliability and validity of this scale to measure sexist attitudes and has also shown the ASI to be applicable in cross-cultural contexts. Similar to the IRMA-S, the ASI's ability to capture both blatantly hostile sexist attitudes as well as more subtle benevolent sexist attitudes is ideal in reducing the risk of social desirability bias among college students who often seek approval from peers and faculty members.

The internal consistency of this measure was high and yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of .924. The face validity of this scale, or the degree to which the scale measured what it was intended to measure, was confirmed by the PI's dissertation committee. To measure ambivalent

sexism, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the eight statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). A mean composite scale was created to determine an overall ambivalent sexism score with higher mean scores indicating higher levels of ambivalent sexism.

Sexual Violence Victimization Experience

Sexual violence victimization experience was also a primary measure of this study and can be described as an individual's experience any form of non-consensual sexual act or behavior that occurs on a broad spectrum ranging from unwanted physical touch to image-based sexual abuse. Research suggests that individuals who experience sexual violence are at an elevated risk of revictimization (Anderson et al., 2020; Neilson et al., 2018; Stepleton et al., 2019) as well as secondary trauma resulting from poor interactions with other individuals and institutions to whom they disclose their victimization experience. Given the increased rates and risk of sexual violence on college campuses, particularly for women and gender non-conforming individuals, it was deemed essential to examine the association between sexual violence victimization experience and college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming.

A self-constructed six-item composite scale measuring sexual violence victimization experience was constructed. These items were partially adapted from the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss et al., 2007). When tested for internal consistency, this scale yielded a fair Cronbach's alpha score of .78. The face validity of this scale, or the degree to which the scale measured what it was intended to measure, was confirmed by the PI's dissertation committee. To capture victimization data, respondents were asked to indicate if they had experienced a number of non-consensual behavior including unwanted touch, substance-facilitated sexual assault, and image-based sexual abuse. Respondents with higher mean values on the sexual violence

victimization indicated experiencing higher degrees of victimization experience. If respondents indicated that they had experienced a particular type of sexual violence, they were also asked if they had experienced that type of sexual violence than once in their lifetime, within the past year, and while they were enrolled at K-State to better contextualize the data.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data that were collected in this study were analyzed using SPSS. The data were cleaned through labeling, recoding, and transformation procedures. Descriptive statistics were generated to provide a general overview of the central characteristics of the sample population. Stepwise multivariate regression modeling was conducted to isolate the effects and statistical significance of each independent variable on the dependent variable using a forward selection approach which gradually introduced each independent variable separately to determine the varying levels of statistical significance of each of the variables.

Due to the potential of multicollinearity to negatively affect the ability of individual variable effects to be isolated, a test of multicollinearity was conducted to determine the variance inflation factor of each variable. The following two chapters of this dissertation present the results of the data analysis and a subsequent discussion of the substantive significance of these findings. The concluding chapter of this dissertation will present an overview of the policy implications of these findings, recommendations for future research directions, and acknowledgement of study limitations.

Data Protection

To ensure minimization of harm to study participants, all participants were presented with an informed consent form at the beginning of the online survey. The informed consent forms were reviewed and approved by the institution's IRB (approval #13066). The consent

forms provided potential participants with information regarding the purpose and scope of the present study as well as an overview of the minimal potential risks of study participation. Potential respondents were informed that their participation is voluntary, and withdrawal from the study was possible at any point during the survey with no risk of repercussions. Potential participants were given general information regarding the type of data that was to be collected by the survey.

For example, participants were told broadly that they will be asked questions about their perceptions of gender norms, their knowledge and experience of sexual health education and consent, their personal and secondary experiences with sexual violence victimization, and about their interest in learning about sexual violence. Each potential participant was provided with a personal survey access link which ensured that their survey may only be completed once and that their institutional identification numbers were not saved. The survey questions were evaluated and determined that they pose no identification risk. Data was stored on an encrypted external media or will be kept in secure storage units on campus. Data will be discarded after future analyses and publications.

Chapter 5 - Results

Sample Characteristics

The survey captured data relating to the respondents' personal identities. Sample demographic characteristics are displayed in Table 4.1. below. The data show that the sample population was mostly White (80%), mostly women (67%), and mostly heterosexual (70%). A small portion of the sample population identified as transgender (4%). As expected, the average age of the sample population was 20 years old with most of the population falling between the ages of 18 and 20 (66%), though the ages of the survey respondents ranged from 18 years old to 64 years old. These data generally correspond with demographic data reported by Kansas State University in 2025 which reveals that the University's undergraduate population is mostly White (78.9%) and between the ages of 18 and 20 (91.3%). The University reports that the undergraduate population consists fairly evenly of women and men (51.8% and 48.2%) but does not provide data regarding non-binary and genderqueer students.

In addition to personal characteristics, data relating to the respondents' student statuses and institutional affiliations were collected. The data show that approximately 20 percent of the sample population were first-generation students and 16 percent were transfer students. Data reported by K-State indicates that 25 percent of the undergraduate population are first-generation students. Nearly the entire sample (99%) reported that they had taken at least one college course in-person on the Manhattan, Kansas campus, and most reported that they resided a comfortable walking distance from campus (85%). There was a relatively even distribution of reported student classifications among the sample population though freshmen comprised the largest percentage (30%; sophomores = 25%, juniors = 24%, and seniors = 22%).

Table 5.1 Sample Population Characteristics

Variables	N (%)	Variables	N (%)
Gender		Student Classification	
Woman	414 (67.8%)	Freshman	183 (29.8%)
Man	155 (25.4%)	Sophomore	152 (24.8%)
Non-binary/genderqueer	36 (5.9%)	Junior	146 (23.8%)
Transgender		Senior	133 (21.7%)
Yes	27 (4.4%)	Transfer student	
No	582 (94.9%)	Yes	96 (15.7%)
Prefer not to answer	4 (0.7%)	No	518 (84.4%)
Race/Ethnicity		Taking in-person class	
White	487 (79.8%)	Yes	610 (99.3%)
Non-white	127 (20.7%)	No	4 (0.7%)
Sexual Orientation		Residing on or close to campus	
Straight/heterosexual	423 (68.9%)	Yes	522 (85.0%)
Gay/lesbian	109 (17.8%)	No	92 (15.0%)
Bisexual	27 (4.4%)	Fraternity or sorority member	
Fluid/Queer	55 (9.0%)	Yes	95 (15.5%)
Age		No	519 (84.5%)
18-20 y/o	406 (66.1%)	Varsity student athlete	
21-24 y/o	177 (28.8%)	Yes	22 (3.6%)
25-30 y/o	16 (2.6%)	No	592 (96.4%)
31-45 y/o	13 (2.1 %)		
46-75 y/o	2 (.3%)		
First generation student			
Yes	133 (21.7%)		
No	471 (76.7%)		
Unsure	10 (1.6%)		

Further, the data reveal that members of fraternity or sorority groups and varsity athletics represented a relatively small percentage of the sample population at 15.5 percent and 3.6 percent respectively. Of those who did indicate belonging to a fraternity or sorority group, 5% lived in a sorority or fraternity house. Respondents who indicated participation in varsity athletics reported participation in cheerleading (25%), baseball (19%), rowing (19%), soccer

(13%), and cross country (13%). Data provided by Kansas State University in 2025 reveals that roughly 20% of the student body is comprised of fraternity and sorority life members and 37% is comprised of student varsity athletes. This indicates that there was relatively low participation in the survey from varsity athletes relative to the reported undergraduate student athlete population.

Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate correlations indicate that empathy ($r = .431$; $p < .001$), rape myth acceptance ($r = .392$; $p < .001$), ambivalent sexism ($r = -.347$; $p < .001$), knowledge of sexual consent ($r = .254$; $p < .001$), sexual violence victimization experience ($r = -.139$; $p < .001$), and degree of perceived campus safety ($r = .008$; $p < .05$) demonstrated a statistically significant association with the outcome variable, receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. The strongest associations were observed between the outcome variable and the predictors empathy and rape myth acceptance, though the associations were relatively moderate in strength. As expected, bivariate analyses demonstrate that respondents who reported higher levels of empathy also reported higher levels of receptiveness to sexual violence prevention.

Interestingly, a positive relationship was also observed between the predictor rape myth acceptance and the outcome variable suggesting that respondents who report higher levels of rape myth acceptance also report higher levels of receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. Additionally, findings demonstrate that those who reported lower levels of sexual violence victimization experience reported higher levels of receptiveness. Also notable was the observation of a negative relationship between ambivalent sexism and the outcome variable, meaning that lower levels of ambivalent sexist attitudes are associated with increased receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. Though weak, the positive association between degree of perceived campus safety and the outcome variable indicates that respondents

who felt safer on campus were more likely to be receptive to sexual violence prevention programming.

One-way ANOVA tests were conducted to determine the association between the dependent variable and the non-binary categorical variables gender, student classification, race, and sexual orientation. Of these categories, there was a statistically significant difference in the mean of the dependent variables for at least one of groups in the categorical variables gender ($p < .001$), student classification ($p = < .05$), and sexual orientation ($p = < .001$). Of these variables, gender had the strongest effect on the dependent variable ($n^2 = .099$) followed by sexual orientation ($n^2 = .049$) and student classification ($n^2 = .021$). There was not a statistically significant association between the dependent variable and age ($n^2 = .009$) or race ($n^2 = .010$). A series of independent t-tests were conducted to assess the association between the dependent variable and the dichotomous variables measuring first-generation student status, Varsity athletics team membership, and fraternity or sorority membership. None of these tests yielded a statistically significant result.

Sample Sexual Violence Victimization Experiences

The first research question posed by this study was: *what proportion of participants have experienced sexual violence victimization?* To address this question, survey respondents were asked to provide information regarding their own experiences with sexual violence, as shown in table 2 below. Respondents provided information related to their personal experiences of sexual violence and relational proximity to others who had experienced sexual violence or had been accused of sexual violence. Of the total sample, a majority (55%) indicated that they had experienced at least one form of sexual violence ranging from unwanted touching to rape with unwanted touching and non-consensual image sharing being the most reported by the responding

sample at 83.8 percent and 42.1 percent respectively. The sample reported relatively low levels of experience with drink spiking (10%) though they indicated slightly higher rates of someone engaging in sexual contact with them while they were too intoxicated or high to make clear decisions and judgements (37.4%).

Of those who reported sexual violence victimization experience, 37.9 percent reported experiencing revictimization, 23 percent reported experiencing sexual violence victimization in the past twelve months, and 22 percent reported experiencing sexual violence victimization while enrolled at K-State. Respondents who indicated that they had experienced sexual violence while they were enrolled at K-State were also asked to identify the physical location of their experiences. Of the respondents who answered this question, 14.2 percent indicated victimization occurred at an off-campus residence while other reported that their experience occurred at a bar or restaurant (9.3%), a K-State dorm or residence hall (8.4%), or a fraternity or sorority house (4.6%).

A substantially smaller percentage of respondents indicated that they experienced sexual violence victimization at a university-sponsored event or activity (1.9%) or in a K-State classroom (1.2%). Some respondents provided qualitative answers to this question (n = 21). These data revealed that respondents had experienced sexual violence in many different University contexts including instructor office hours, raves, university sanctioned trips, and study abroad programs, house parties, and online platforms like Snapchat. One respondent disclosed that they had been assaulted “in the car of a fraternity’s DD (designated driver).” Others shared that they had experienced sexual violence in campus locations such as the student union, parking lots, and museums.

In addition to being asked about their own sexual violence victimization experiences, the survey respondents were asked to indicate if someone in their personal life had been impacted by sexual violence. A majority (66%) of the sample population indicated that they knew someone who had experienced sexual assault. When asked to indicate the type of relationships they had with this person or persons, 34 percent identified a relative or family member, followed by a close friend (26%), a casual friend (18%), an acquaintance (13%), and a current or former intimate partner (9%).

Of the respondents who indicated that they knew someone who had experienced sexual assault, 49.2 percent indicated that someone they knew had shared the story of their victimization with them personally. Of those who indicated that they had listened to another's story of sexual violence victimization, 80 percent responded that they felt comfortable in providing emotional support to that individual. Though 68 percent also reported that they found hearing the story to be emotionally taxing or distressing, 90 percent did not indicate feeling negatively about having the story shared with them. After hearing a story of sexual violence victimization, approximately 47.1 percent of the respondents indicated that they felt confident in their ability to direct the individual to other resources and sources of support while 21.9 percent indicated that they felt neither comfortable or uncomfortable providing direction, and 30.9 percent were not comfortable providing direction.

Survey respondents were also asked if they had knowledge of anyone directly known to them again ranging from a relative to an acquaintance who had perpetrated or had been accused of perpetrating sexual assault. Of the total sample, 38 percent (n=235) provided a response to this question. Of the respondents, the majority (60%) indicated that they were not aware of anyone they knew directly as perpetrating or as being accused of perpetrating sexual assault. Of those

who did indicate that they knew someone who had perpetrated or had been accused of perpetrating sexual assault, the majority identified an acquaintance (17%) followed by a relative or close friend at a comparable eleven percent.

Table 5.2 Sample Sexual Violence Victimization Experiences

Victimization Type	**Total	More Than Once in Lifetime * _n (%)	Past 12 Months * _n (%)	While Enrolled at K-State * _n (%)
Have you ever been kissed, fondled, or rubbed without your permission	285 (83.8%) *** n = 34	196 (68.77%)	100 (35.0%)	110 (38.5%)
Has someone ever engaged in sexual contact with you when you were too intoxicated or high to make informed decisions or clear judgements?	127 (37.4%) *** n = 18	49 (38.5%)	39 (30.7%)	38 (29.9%)
Have you ever had your food or drink spiked or otherwise been given a mind-altering substance without your knowledge?	34 (10%) *** n = 33	16 (47.1%)	12 (35.3%)	23 (67.4%)
Has someone attempted to make sexual contact with you while you were asleep or unconscious?	93 (27.4%) *** n = 64	49 (52.7%)	39 (42%)	38 (40.9%)
Has someone shared a nude or intimate photo, recording, or video of you without your permission?	143 (42.1%) *** n = 52	88 (61.5%)	43 (30.1%)	37 (25.9%)
Has someone ever engaged in sexual intercourse with you without your permission?	128 (37.6%) *** n = 20	68 (53.1%)	39 (30.5%)	48 (37.5%)

*denotes percentage out of total respondents who indicated that they had experienced the particular type of sexual violence victimization

** Total out of 340 respondents who indicated that they experienced at least some form of sexual violence

*** denotes number of respondents who indicated that they were “unsure” if they experienced the particular form of victimization. Values were not included in the final sexual violence victimization composite scale predictor variable analyzed in regression modeling procedures.

Sexual Violence Victimization & Help-Seeking Behaviors

The second research question posed by this study was: “*what help-seeking behaviors did those who experienced sexual violence victimization engage in?*” To address this question, survey respondents who indicated that they engaged in some help-seeking behaviors were asked to identify the sources from which they sought support to address their needs after experiencing sexual violence victimization. These results are displayed in Table 4.3. below. Among those who

responded to the question (n = 313), many reported that they sought support from a friend or peer (44.7%) followed by a family member (16.9%) and a private-practice therapist (15.3%).

Table 5.3 Sources of Support For Those With Victimization Experience (n = 313)

Sources of Support	N	* %
Police/law enforcement	22	7.0%
K-State's Center for Advocacy, Response, & Education (CARE)	18	5.8%
K-State's Lafene Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)	15	4.8%
A medical service provider (on or off campus)	11	3.5%
A private-practice therapist	48	15.3%
A parent or family members	53	16.9%
Friend/peer	140	44.7%
A hotline or helpline	8	2.6%
Another K-State staff or student services professional	13	4.2%
I don't remember if I sought support	14	4.5%
I did not seek any support or resources	150	47.9%

*Percentage of respondents who provided answers to this question

At relatively smaller rates, respondents indicated that they sought support from law enforcement (7%), K-State's CARE (5.8%), K-State's Lafene CAPS (4.8%), and from other K-State staff members such as instructors, coaches, and student support representatives (4.2%). Of the respondents, 3.5 percent indicated that they sought on or off-campus medical support after their assault while a very small percentage responded that they had sought support from a hotline or helpline (2.6%). Some respondents indicated that they could not recall if they sought support after their experience (4.5%) while a notable 47.9 percent indicated that they did not seek support or resources at all. Some respondents provided qualitative responses to this question. Several noted that it took them several years to seek support or that they had only partially disclosed their story. Other respondents stated that they had sought support from intimate

partners, pastors, and coworkers and managers. One respondent stated that they had utilized resources that were provided during their participation in a depression study.

Areas of Interest

The third research question posed in this study was: *what topical areas of sexual violence prevention education are of the greatest interest to the study participants?* To address this question, survey respondents were asked to rate their level of interest, ranging from not interested at all to very interested in the following six topical areas: the relationship between alcohol and sex, the spectrum of sexual violence, sexual consent, the effects of sexual violence victimization, bystander intervention strategies and techniques, and tips for providing support to those who experience sexual violence. The topics that generated the greatest education interest among the sample population were bystander intervention strategies (n = 505) and techniques for providing support to those who may experience sexual violence victimization (n = 495). The sample population indicated lower levels of interest in learning about the different forms of sexual violence (n = 341) and about the relationship between alcohol and sex (n = 300).

Predictors of Receptiveness

The fourth research question posed in this study was: *what factors most influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming?* To address this question, a stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. This statistical approach uses forward and backward approaches to add or remove predictor variables to determine which predictors have the strongest combined effect on the dependent variable. The variables were added into regression models in an iterative factor based starting first with primary predictor variables (model 1), followed by demographic variables measuring student status and university

affiliation (model 2), and, finally, demographic variables measuring personal identity were added to construct model three (model 3). The results of these models are presented in Table 5.4.

Model #1: Primary Predictors

Model one was developed through the progressive addition of the primary predictor variables according to expected theoretical relevance in the following order: rape myth acceptance, ambivalent sexism, sexual violence victimization, degree of perceived campus safety, knowledge of sexual consent, and empathy. This model was statistically significantly predicted approximately 27 percent of the total variation in the outcome variable ($r^2 = .278$; $p < .001$). Regarding individual predictors, rape myth acceptance ($p < .01$) ambivalent sexism ($p < .01$), and empathy ($p < .001$) were statistically significant. Empathy was the strongest predictor in the model in terms of relative magnitude ($B = .357$).

In accordance with the study's hypotheses, it was positively associated with receptiveness. While rape myth acceptance was the second strongest in the model, it too demonstrated a counterintuitive effect by producing a positive relationship with the outcome variable ($B = .162$). Finally, the findings indicated that as ambivalent sexism increased, receptiveness to sexual violent prevention education decreased ($B = -.149$). Counter to the study's hypotheses, prior sexual violence victimization, perceived campus safety, and knowledge of consent were not statistically significant.

Table 5.4 Multiple Regression Models for Receptiveness To Prevention Programming

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>	
	<i>β</i>	S.E.	<i>β</i>	S. E.	<i>β</i>	S.E.
Primary Predictors						
Rape Myth Acceptance	.162	.885***	.144	.883*	.138	.873*
Ambivalent Sexism	-.149	.051**	-.162	.050**	-.079	.052
Sexual Violence Victimization	-.056	.128	-.037	.129	-.009	.130
Perceived Campus Safety	.062	.050	.086	.051*	.106	.051**
Knowledge of Consent	-.017	.285	-.024	.286	-.466	.284
Empathy	.357	.063***	.354	.064***	.322	.064***
Student Demographics						
FSL Membership			.027	.100	.033	.101
Athletics Membership			.018	.198	-.005	.199
First-Generation Status			.075	.079*	.065	.079
^a Sophomore			.063	.101	.067	.099
^a Junior			.104	.102*	.133	.105**
^a Senior			.144	.104**	.215	.136***
Personal Demographics						
^b Age 21-24 y/o					-.080	.109
^b Age 25-30					-.055	.227
^b Age 31-46					-.068	.247
^b Age 46-76					.042	.572
^c Female					.150	.093***
^c Non-binary/Genderqueer					.138	.176**
^d Gay/Lesbian					.103	.096**
^d Bisexual					.007	.170
White/non-white					-.008	.089
Adjusted R ²	.269		.283		.314	
Significance Values	* p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001					

Notes:

a. reference category: freshman

b. reference category: 18-20 years of age

c. reference category: men

d. reference category = heterosexual/straight

After the inclusion of all six predictor variables in model one, demographic variables relating to respondents' university statuses and affiliations were added to construct a second model in the following order: fraternity or sorority membership, participation in a varsity athletic team, first-generation student status, and student classification. The freshman student classification group was left out of analysis as a reference group in this model as it is the largest

category in the sample ($n = 183$). Relative to this group, juniors ($B = .133, p < .01$) and seniors ($B = .215, p < .001$) were more likely to report higher degrees of receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming. Overall, the inclusion of these student demographic variables in model two resulted in an increase in the adjusted r^2 value from .269 in model one to .283 in model two. Notably rape myth acceptance became insignificant after the inclusion of the student classification variables in model two. In this model, empathy and senior student classification remained significant while degree of perceived campus safety gained significance at the .05 level. The variables of fraternity and sorority life membership, participation in varsity athletics, and first-generation student status did not achieve significance throughout the construction of model two.

Model #3: Personal Demographics

Next, demographic variables measuring personal identity were added to construct model three in the following order: age, gender, sexual orientation, and race. The male, heterosexual, and ages 18 to 20 variables were excluded from the model as reference categories. After the inclusion of these remaining demographic variables, there was an increase in the adjusted R^2 value from .283 in model two to .314 in model three with the most noticeable increases occurring with the introduction of the gender and sexual orientation variables into the model.

Notably, after the inclusion of the gender variable into the model, the strength of the association between rape myth acceptance with the outcome variable decreased, though it retained significance at the .05 level. After the inclusion of the sexual orientation predictor, rape myth acceptance retained significance, but ambivalent sexism did not. The addition of the gender predictor in model three resulted in a change in the adjusted R^2 value from .291 ($p < .001$) to .308 ($p < .001$), and the addition of sexual orientation into the model resulted in an increase in the adjusted R^2 value from .301 ($p < .001$) to .315 ($p < .001$). These results indicate that the

inclusion of gender and sexual orientation predictors significantly improved the overall fit of model three. The inclusion of the final predictor, race, in the third model did not meaningfully improve the overall fit of the model.

The results also reveal that individuals who identify as women ($B = .150, p < .001$) or as non-binary ($B = .138, p < .01$) demonstrated higher degrees of receptiveness to sexual violence prevention relative to men. Individuals who identified as gay or lesbian reported higher levels of receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming relative to those who identified as heterosexual ($B = .103, p < .05$).

The final model, which included all primary predictors, university-affiliated demographics, and personal demographics explains 31.4 percent of the variation in receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention. The variables that retained a significant association with the outcome variable in the final model were rape myth acceptance ($<.05$), degree of perceived campus safety ($<.05$), empathy ($<.001$), student classification ($<.001$), and gender ($<.05$). Of these, empathy, identifying as a woman, and being an upperclassman were the strongest predictors of receptiveness towards sexual violence, thus answering the last research question.

Chapter 6 - Discussion

Campus-based sexual assault remains a well-documented and persistent criminological phenomenon. The effects of sexual violence victimization on the lives of those who experience it are complex and may be emotional, physical, financial, and academic (Furlong & Hinnant, 2024; Howard et al., 2019; Loya, 2015; Molstad et al., 2023; Sawyer et al., 2025). For higher education institutions that rely on student wellbeing and satisfaction to maintain positive retention, and graduation rates, the potentially catastrophic effects of sexual violence victimization on students' matriculation experiences and capacity for academic success is of considerable concern. Guided by federal law, such as the Jeanne Clery Act and the Campus SaVE Act, federally funded institutions such as K-State seek to address the problem of campus based sexual assault through the establishment of sexual violence response and prevention programs and initiatives. While a significant body of research has been developed to evaluate prevention programming and to determine best practices, the processes and mechanisms through which sexual violence prevention education is received by student audiences remain in need of empirical study and specification.

The present study addressed this gap the literature through a quantitative examination of the factors that influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. Receptiveness as defined in this study is understood as an individual's willingness to receive ideas, information, and suggestions, even if the information is new or potentially contradictory to their previously held beliefs. Understanding what factors influence college students' receptiveness to new and potentially challenging or contradictory ideas about sexual violence may inform practitioners' approaches to program development and facilitation while also helping them to anticipate potential points of contention or confusion. Based on theoretical

contributions made to the sexual violence and prevention bodies of literature, this study initially identified five primary predictors of receptiveness for examination: rape myth acceptance, ambivalent sexism, knowledge of sexual consent, degree of perceived campus safety, and empathy. Personal and student demographic factors such as student classification and participation in fraternity or sorority life were also considered.

To collect the data for this study, a survey was distributed to all 13,856 undergraduate students who were over the age of eighteen and currently enrolled in courses at K-State's Manhattan campus. Of the initial 702 respondents, a final sample of 614 responses were retained for analysis. Quantitative analyses were performed to examine the sample population's victimization experiences and post-assault help-seeking behaviors, preferences for sexual violence programming subject matter, and the factors that most influence their receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. The following sections will contextualize the results of this study within the existing body of literature and provide an overview of the interpretation and implications of the findings.

Sexual Violence Victimization Experiences & Help-Seeking Behaviors

First, to better understand and contextualize the results of the multiple variable regression analysis of the factors that influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence programming, it was pertinent to collect information about the sample population's experiences with sexual violence victimization and help-seeking behaviors. The results of this study show that approximately 55 percent of the total sample population ($n = 340$) has experienced at least some form of sexual violence ranging from image-based sexual abuse to rape. Of the total sample population, 22 percent indicated that they had experienced sexual violence while they were enrolled at K-State. Among those who reported experiencing sexual assault while enrolled

at K-State, most reported experiencing unwanted touching, groping, or fondling (80%) followed by non-consensual intercourse (35%). This percentage of students who have experienced sexual assault while enrolled at K-State is slightly higher than the national average of 13%, however, these findings should not necessarily be interpreted as indicating that K-State's rates of sexual assault are uniquely high. The relatively low response rate in this study (5%) and the possibility that those who have experienced sexual assault were more likely to participate in the study must be considered.

In accordance with previous studies, of those who reported experiencing sexual assault while enrolled at K-State, many indicated that their assault occurred at an off-campus location (23%) such as a residence, bar, or restaurant. Of those who reported on-campus assaults, 15 percent indicated that their assault happened in a residence hall or at a fraternity or sorority house. These results are consistent with previous studies that have found that as institutions seek to increase oversight of student organizations and residences in an attempt to enforce substance use policies and to reduce interpersonal violence and other safety concerns, parties are being hosted at off-campus locations to avoid institutional detection. These results suggest that institutions should not attribute decreases in occurrences of sexual assaults on campus property to a genuine reduction in sexual assaults among the student population. Thus, it is important for institutions to maintain relationships and information sharing practices with local police agencies and property management companies to capture sexual violence incidents that occur outside of the institution's jurisdiction. Additional policy implications for these results are presented in subsequent sections.

The most reported form of sexual violence victimization reported by the sample population was unwanted touching, groping, or fondling (83.8%) followed by non-consensual

image sharing (42.1%). This finding lends support to other studies that have found the rates of technology-facilitated sexual violence, cyberaggression, and image-based sexual abuse to be substantially escalating among young people (Henry & Powell, 2018, Howard et al., 2019, Melander & Marganski, 2020). When asked the location of their sexual assault, four respondents who provided qualitative responses stated that they had experienced sexual assault in an online context, with one respondent identifying the Snapchat application specifically. Sexual violence prevention and response programs and services must expand and adapt to account for sexual violence that occurs in online contexts particularly through applications and platforms widely used by college students such as Snapchat, Yik Yak, Tik Tok, and Instagram.

In accordance with the findings of previous studies, the present study found that revictimization experiences were common among the respondents who indicated that they had sexual violence victimization experience (37%). Research suggests that individuals who experience sexual assault may be more likely to engage in substance abuse or unsafe sexual activity, often as maladaptive coping strategies (Anderson et al., 2020; Scoglio et al., 2021; Fereidooni, Daniels, & Lommen, 2024). As explicated in the review of literature, the college environment presents a plethora of opportunities for these activities such as binge drinking, substance use, and unsafe sex practices. Research also suggests that those who experience sexual assault during critical periods of socioemotional development, like childhood and adolescence, may normalize sexual violence as inevitable or may associate sex with pain which may make it more difficult to distinguish between consent and coercion (Filipas & Ullmann, 2006 & Rogers et al., 2023).

Unfortunately, victims of substance-facilitated sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse are likely to experience disbelief of their experience by others (Anderson et al., 2020;

Maiorano, Travers, & Vallieres, 2023; Wager, 2019). Disbelief from others as well as victim-blaming may negatively impact their own ability to recognize their experience as an assault and may perpetuate feelings of hopelessness and blame. Negative social reactions to sexual violence victimization may also reinforce victims' perceptions of sexual violence as inevitable and increase self-trivialization or minimization of sexual violence experiences. The effects of victim-blaming and expressions of disbelief on victims' help-seeking behaviors and perceptions of their own victimization experiences are essential elements of sexual violence prevention programming and education.

Uncertainty regarding sexual violence victimization experiences was observed among respondents in the present study. When asked to indicate if they had experienced particular forms of sexual violence, many respondents indicated that they were unsure. These responses were counted as missing data in the regression analysis due to ambiguity of interpretation, however, these results should not be entirely excluded from examination as this could mean that they were truly unsure if the act happened or that they were unsure that what happened to them could actually be classified as sexual assault. Research suggests that many individuals who experience sexual violence do not identify or recognize their experience as an act of sexual violence (Cleere & Lynn, 2013; Koss, 1989; Wilson & Miller, 2016). This common phenomenon, known as unacknowledged rape or sexual assault, is particularly common among victims of alcohol or drug-facilitated sexual violence as they often do not recall the details of their experience and have a greater propensity for self-blame, particularly when encountering victim-blaming behaviors and attitudes from others (Blayney, Hequembourg, & Livingston, 2021; Johnstone, 2016; Littleton et al., 2017).

Additionally, while scholars and practitioners recognize expanded definitions and classifications of sexual violence, colloquially, sexual violence is often defined narrowly as rape and other forms of physical sexual assault. As such, it is not surprising that respondents in this study indicated that they were not certain if they had experienced assault, particularly if they were asleep or unconscious or if the interaction occurred in a digital or online context. Beyond uncertainty, some respondents expressed apparent indifference or ambivalence towards their experiences of sexual violence. For example, though one respondent indicated that they had experience both unwanted touch and sexual contact when unconscious or asleep with at least one of these incidents occurring at a fraternity or sorority house on campus, when asked to provide a qualitative response to a question regarding resource seeking, they stated that they “did not seek help, was consensual.”

Another respondent who also indicated experiencing image-based sexual abuse as well as sexual contact while they were too intoxicated to make sound judgments stated that they “lowkey don’t care that much.” Hoxmeier, O’Connor, and McMahon (2023) found in their study of sorority women's experiences of sexual violence victimization that sorority women are more likely than unaffiliated women to minimize their victimization experiences and have overall significantly lower rates of disclosure. These authors theorize that this is because sorority women are at an elevated risk for substance-facilitated sexual violence and may be more likely to normalize sexual violence experiences as an expected part of the college and Greek life experience.

The results of this study also revealed some key findings regarding help-seeking behaviors employed by those who reported sexual violence victimization experience. First, in accordance with the existing literature, the data revealed that the highest percentage of

respondents (45%) who indicated that they had disclosed their experiences of sexual violence victimization did so with friends or peers (Illes et al., 2021; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012; Wesenberg et al., 2024). Despite many respondents' indications that they had disclosed their experiences of sexual assault to someone else, an equally high percentage (45%) of respondents reported that they did not disclose their experiences to anyone at all.

This finding is consistent with previous studies and statistics that contend that most college student sexual assault victims do not disclose their victimization (Alaggia & Wang, 2020; Edwards et al., 2023; Sabina & Ho, 2014; Tillman et al., 2010). Interestingly, students who have experienced revictimization are less likely to disclose their experience even to their friends and peers and are overall substantially less likely to disclose their victimization relative to those who experience victimization for the first time (Stepleton et al., 2019). Thus, it is important for re-victimization and the compounded feelings of shame associated with it to be discussed and destigmatized when addressing disclosure in sexual violence prevention programming.

Areas of Educational Interest

The present study also examined the degree of interest the sample population had in learning about different commonly addressed subject areas in sexual violence prevention programming. As expected, the subject areas that generated the highest degree of interest among respondents were bystander intervention and strategies for peer support. The subject of the relationship between alcohol and sex generated the least interest among the study participants. Given the consistent findings regarding the role of peer relationships and interactions, particularly in the matter of sexual assault victimization disclosure, this study's finding that there is elevated interest in intervention and support strategies among college students is promising.

Interestingly, these findings also suggest that college students may be more receptive to sexual violence prevention subject matter that address the victimization of others than subjects that address the potential for personal victimization. This finding may lend support to the Just World hypothesis which describes the tendency of many individuals to believe that if they are a morally good person or behave in ways that they believe are morally good or acceptable, they will not experience suffering or victimization. Research has confirmed associations between just world beliefs and victim-blaming (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2021; Twardawski et al., 2025). Twardawski and colleagues (2025) found that the association between just world beliefs and victim-blaming of sexual assault victims was stronger if the person was a stranger or acquaintance to the person administering judgments.

Similarly, bystander intervention literature consistently finds that individuals are more likely to intervene on behalf of those known to them rather than strangers or acquaintances. While the finding that students in this study expressed interest in bystander and support strategies on behalf of others is promising, it is important to consider that students may demonstrate less interest in subjects that highlight their own potential for victimization because they do not believe they are at risk.

Predictors of Receptiveness to Sexual Violence Prevention Programming

The overarching purpose of this study was to determine which factors most strongly influence college students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. The results of the multivariable regression analysis of these factors yield some useful information and insights. First, in support of the existing literature, the results of this study indicated that students who possess higher levels of empathy are more likely to be receptive to sexual violence prevention programming. Out of the predictors included in the final model, empathy yielded the

strongest effect on the receptiveness outcome variable, confirming its magnitude and significance as an essential building block of sexual violence prevention. This finding supports existing literature that identifies empathy as a key factor in victim-blaming attitudes and behaviors as well as sexual violence perpetration (Dvir & Nagar, 2022; Hudson-Fledge, et al., 2020; Maes, Van Ouystel, & Vandenbosch, 2023; Taccini & Mannarini, 2025).

Interestingly, student classification, namely being a junior or senior in college, emerged as the second strongest predictor of receptiveness in the final regression model. This finding supports the initial study hypothesis that predicted that students of lower student classifications would be less likely to be receptive to sexual violence prevention programming. Interestingly, the results of this study also revealed that respondent age was not a significant predictor of receptiveness in any of the regression models. Taken together, these results indicate that the progression of a student's age, or maturity, does not fully explain the increase in their receptiveness to prevention programming. It is possible that juniors and seniors may be more receptive due to a variety of factors such as exposure to new ideas throughout their college journey, increased knowledge of campus and community resources, and stronger social connections, or stronger perceptions of the need to serve as a mentor, leader, or role model for newer students. Juniors and seniors may also seek opportunities for training related to safety and wellbeing as these trainings and skills associated with these trainings may be deemed important when entering the job or internship market.

As expected, gender retained a significant association with receptiveness in the final model with women and non-binary students' indicating significantly higher levels of receptiveness than men. As suggested by existing literature, it is likely that women and non-binary individuals demonstrate higher levels of receptiveness to sexual violence prevention

overall and relative to men because they are more likely to be aware of their increase vulnerability to victimization. Research also suggests that women in particular are more likely to engage in bystander intervention, so it is not surprising that women are more likely than men to seek out opportunities to build these skills through prevention programming.

Men on the other hand are less likely than women to be receptive to sexual violence prevention programming, potentially because they are less likely to perceive themselves as at risk for victimization and are less likely to engage in bystander intervention behaviors, particularly when under the influence of alcohol (Leone & Parrott, 2019; Murphy et al., 2016; Schipani-McLaughlin et al., 2020). Researchers have also found that men may be resistant towards sexual violence prevention programming because they expect or perceive that they will be told that men are the root cause of sexual violence while also embracing rape myths and sexist behaviors and attitudes (Brockdorf et al., 2023; Mennicke et al., 2021; Orchowski et al., 2020; Russell & King, 2020; Yule et al., 2022). While men are statistically more likely to perpetrate sexual violence, it is important to educate them on their capacity to also be victimized, most often by other men. It is also important to highlight the potential importance of their intervention in unsafe situations, particularly when intervention requires the confrontation or addressment of another man's behavior, as men are more likely to comply with other men's directives.

The variable ambivalent sexism did not retain significance in the final regression model. This finding was unexpected; however, it may be at least partially explained by the introduction of gender in third model. After determining that there was not multicollinearity between the ambivalent sexism and gender variables, it became evident that when controlling for gender, there was no direct relationship between ambivalent sexism and receptiveness to sexual violence prevention. This suggests that ambivalent sexism likely served as a proxy variable for the much

stronger gender variable in the simpler regression model which was affected by omitted variable bias and overestimated the influence of ambivalent sexism on the outcome variable. Thus, when the gender variable was added to the more robust model, ambivalent sexism became redundant in terms of variance explanation. While ambivalent sexism was not determined to significantly influence receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention when accounting for gender, research consistently reaffirms its impact on rape myth acceptance (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012), victim-blaming (Valor-Segura, Exposito, & Moya, 2011), and sexual violence perpetration (Renzetti, Lynch, & DeWall, 2018).

Surprisingly, the results of this study revealed a positive association between rape myth acceptance and receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention. This finding was unexpected and did not conform to the findings of previous studies. One explanation for this finding may be that individuals who espouse rape myths may be curious to see if their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions are deemed accurate or if their peers espouse similar views. Similarly, given that college student population that was sampled for this study, it is possible that students may be more willing than the general population to accept that their presently held beliefs may be inaccurate or unpopular and may be more likely to seek opportunities for knowledge development and growth. It is also possible that these results may be influenced by social desirability bias and that while individuals felt comfortable providing honest responses to the survey questions related to rape myth acceptance, they may have felt less comfortable expressing honest disinterest in learning about topics related to sexual violence. Based on these findings, it cannot be assumed that those who espouse rape myths are necessarily disinterested in sexual violence prevention programming or resistant to receiving prevention messages. Overall, this is an unexpected finding that may have some positive implications.

As expected, a positive association was observed between degree of perceived campus safety and receptiveness to sexual violence prevention. It is not surprising that students who feel safer around their fellow students on campus and who trust the institution to respond to misconduct and safety threats may be more receptive to institutional efforts towards violence prevention. Importantly, students from minority populations demonstrate higher levels of institutional distrust and lower perceptions of safety among other members of the campus community. (Chugani et al., 2021; Gartner et al., 2025; Maffini & Dillard, 2022). In seeking to engage minority students in sexual violence prevention and response programs and services, institutions must also work to capture and address their concerns regarding safety and the capability and willingness of the institution to protect their interests. Recommended strategies for increasing perceptions of campus safety for the general student population are presented in subsequent sections of this chapter.

While many of the variables achieved significance in the final regression model, several others did not. It was initially hypothesized that sexual violence victimization experience would be positively associated with receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. However, this variable remained insignificant across all three regression models. This finding lends support to other sexual violence victimization literature that urges caution in overestimating the influence of victimization on victims' motivations, behaviors, attitudes, and decisions (Mardorossian, 2014; Nissim-Sabat, 2009; Stewart, Smodis, & Forth, 2021). While the effects of trauma and victimization should be considered, these experiences do not negate individual autonomy or the influence of other characteristics and experiences such as rape myth acceptance and degree of perceived campus safety that emerged as significant in this study. The

significance of trauma and victimization in predicting victims' subsequent attitudes and behaviors should not be presumed.

It is also possible that sexual violence experience may moderate or mediate the associations between other factors and receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming. For example, research suggests that individuals who experience sexual violence, particularly if they experienced victim-blaming behaviors and responses from others after disclosure or a perceived loss of autonomy, may adopt and internalize rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes (Kilimnik & Humphreys, 2018; Lathan et al., 2023; Rollero, Moyano, & Roccato, 2023; Sall et al., 2024). Thus, it cannot be presumed that prior victimization experiences necessarily increase receptiveness to sexual violence prevention or response programs and services or that prior victimization immunizes victims from rape myth acceptance or victim blaming attitudes. Recommendations for identifying and addressing the needs of sexual violence victims in terms of sexual violence prevention and response programming are explicated in subsequent sections.

Fraternity and sorority membership as well as varsity athletics team membership also did not achieve significance in any of the three models. This finding is not consistent with existing literature; however, there was very low participation from members of these groups in this study, which may at least partially explain the insignificance of these variables. Thus, this finding should be interpreted with caution. Knowledge of consent was also not associated with the outcome variable in any of the three models. The scale measuring knowledge of consent was self-constructed for this study; thus it is likely that the scale constructed for this study requires further refinement to capture the concept with greater precision.

There is consistent empirical evidence to support the importance of consent education in effective sexual violence prevention programming and that increased knowledge of consent may

decrease perpetration risk, particularly among men (McLaughlin et al., 2023; Salazar, Vivolo-Kantor, & Schipani-McLaughlin, 2019). In general, studies examining young peoples' attitudes towards sexual consent have found that most view consent quite favorably (Javidi et al., 2020; Lee & Wong, 2025). While knowledge of consent did not appear to exert a meaningful influence on students' receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention in this study, there is overwhelming evidence that suggests that clear understanding and consistent practice of sexual consent is a vital aspect of sexual violence prevention programming and relational wellbeing (Javidi et al., 2020; Klement et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2013 & Setty, 2022).

Final Thoughts

The subject of sexual violence is highly emotional and often uncomfortable and distressing. The politicization of sexual violence and the nexus of gendered power dynamics and inequities at its center are manifested through persistent and seemingly immutable rape cultures across institutions of higher education. Rape cultures reinforce gendered power dynamics by normalizing sexual violence as an inevitable and minimizing harm. These cultures are reproduced through victim-blaming, the propagation of harmful rape myths, the pursuit sexual conquest and entitlement, objectification, and silencing of those who experience sexual violence in pursuit of individual and institutional preservation. These conditions create what one plaintiff in the Baylor rape scandal described as “a hunting ground” on which an incalculable number of students whose lives are irrevocably changed.

Limitations & Directions for Future Research

While the present study provides valuable insights and research developments, it also presents some limitations and directions for future research. First, the present study collected data from a convenience sample population with a 5 percent response rate. As such, the results of

these studies cannot be generalized to the broader population of college students, though the generalization of the results may be extended to institutions with of similar size and demographic makeup as the institution from which the data for this study was sampled. Despite the low response rate, the number of respondents ($n = 614$) was sufficient to gain statistical power. Further, while relatively low, a 5 percent response is not uncommon for college student surveys. As expected, based on reported K-State demographics, this survey captured relatively low diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Thus, racial and gender minority populations were underrepresented in this study and results regarding these demographic populations may not be representative.

Similarly, within the body of campus sexual assault and sexual violence prevention literature, a large proportion of contributing studies have assessed sexual violence victimization and risk among students who are active in Greek life or varsity athletics. Despite recruitment efforts, there was relatively low participation from these population in this study. As such, it was not possible to meaningfully examine the association between membership of these common collegiate social groups and receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming. To gain clearer and more meaningful insight into this relationship, future scholarship may seek to sample these population specifically with more targeted recruitment strategies such as partnerships with the NCAA and national fraternity or sorority chapters.

While findings regarding these particular populations are revealing and substantially applicable to institutions such as K-State in which 20 percent and 37 percent of the student body population are involved in Greek life and varsity athletics respectively, sexual violence risk and experiences for students participating in other activities such as band, debate, and theater are

understudied. Expanding analyses and exploration into these other facets of student life may reveal new areas and mechanisms through which rape culture is reproduced or challenged.

Aside from data collection limitations, as noted in Chapter Four of this dissertation, there are also limitations regarding the survey instrument and statistical measures. For example, this study utilized only a portion of the Basic Empathy Scale to measure empathy among the sample population. As a result, the truncated measure yielded a fairly low internal consistency. Future studies may seek to develop a more expansive measure of empathy as it relates to sexual violence specifically. Similarly, the initial measure of sexual health awareness was discarded from use in this survey due to low internal consistency and only measures of knowledge of sexual consent were able to be retained. Future research may seek to determine to what degree sexual health and consent can be measured jointly and even practiced jointly in prevention. While both are important topics for education and research, each may require unique research and application approaches.

Similarly, though it was outside the scope of this study, the influence of educational modalities and student modality preferences on students' receptiveness to sexual violence prevention programming was considered. Students who may be willing to receive information in an online setting may not necessarily be equally receptive to receiving information through an in-person training or lecture. Further, it is important for practitioners and researchers to consider the potentially differing needs, preferences, and restraints that students who participation in intuitional programs, activities, and events in fully in-person, hybrid, or fully online capacities when implementing sexual violence prevention and response programs and services.

Another area for potential future research study is examining more closely the knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences students who are entering college for the first

time are bringing with them. In prevention work, it is commonly stated that preventionists should know their audience and “meet them where they are.” A key to meeting college students where they are in terms of sexual violence prevention may be found in identifying and exploring the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of young people in middle school, high school, or even elementary schools. Many primary and secondary schools are seeking to engage children and adolescents in educational programming regarding sexual health, consent, and healthy relationships. To further support this recommendation, research suggests that approximately 20 and 30 percent of teens experience dating violence before college and an estimated 27 percent of girls and 6% of boys experience sexual violence before the age of 18.

This study was also limited in its ability to capture the role of technology and technology use in sexual violence victimization, perpetration, and prevention practices. Future research should explore how online apps and platforms are used by students to seek and receive information regarding relationships and sexual health. Though it was deemed to be outside the scope of this study and excluded from in-depth analysis, data was collected on students’ information seeking habits.

Some respondents who provided qualitative information regarding their sources of information for relationship and sexual health indicated that they engaged in “independent research” online ranging from general browser searches, social media platforms, kink forums, and fan-fiction websites. One respondent stated the following: “I read fan-fiction which is generally very specific on what is or is not okay in regards to sex and consent.” Identifying students’ sources of information and how they use them may be useful in developing sexual violence prevention programming that also addresses digital and media literacy and issues of

disinformation to ensure that students are receiving accurate information from evidence-based sources.

Lastly, an unexpected finding of this study indicated that students who had experienced higher levels of sexual violence victimization demonstrated decreased levels of receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programming. Future research studies may seek to examine sexual violence victims' attitudes towards prevention programming as well as to identify their potentially unique needs or barriers they face in receiving prevention programming after sexual violence victimization. Future research may also seek to better specify the mechanisms through which victimization experience either maintains or changes attitudes towards elements of sexual violence such as consent, bodily autonomy, and rape myths.

Policy Implications

To begin to challenge rape cultures and to reclaim these campus hunting grounds as safe havens for personal and scholastic expression, discovery, and autonomy, institutions must recognize that they are not unique or isolated in the challenges they face. Students should know about an institution's sexual and relationship violence prevention and response services before they need them. The existence of these programs and services is not a marker of shame but rather a marker of an institution that is accountable to past, present, and future members of the campus community. The results of the present study reveal several key policy recommendations for institutions in pursuit of effective and meaningful sexual violence prevention and response programs and initiatives.

First, the results of this study demonstrate a moderately strong positive relationship between students' degree of perceived safety on campus and their receptiveness to sexual violence prevention. This indicates that a student who feels safe around other members of the

campus security, secure enough to walk around campus, and confident in the ability and willingness of the institution to address safety concerns when they arise may be more likely to be receptive to sexual violence prevention programming. There are innumerable strategies that institutions may employ to increase students' perceptions of campus safety. These strategies may include University-required and guided environmental inspections of common areas, campus buildings, including residence halls and Greek housing, to ensure that there is proper lighting, clearly marked exits and maps, and bluelight emergency stations.

The names of campus buildings should be clearly visible and marked and common areas should include spaces where informational flyers can be shared or posted to guide students to resources. Further, as demonstrated by this study and others, a central factor in student safety and harm reduction is the establishment and enforcement of clear and accessible policies guiding behavior and conduct, such as drug and alcohol amnesty policies. Similarly, institutions may increase students' perceptions of safety through the establishment of as well as clear and accessible reporting structures to address incidents of misconduct or threats.

Importantly, 23 percent of respondents who reported experiencing sexual assault indicated that their assault occurred at an off-campus location. Additionally, this study found that 83 percent of students who experienced sexual violence sought support from non-University sources including family members, private therapists, medical service providers, and peers. Taken together, these finds highlight the importance and utility of collaborative relationships between the institution and the broader community in overcoming jurisdictional barriers and the strong likelihood that University support services will not be the primary or first source of support that students seek. These relationships can be built and maintained through the development of task forces, coalitions, and partnerships in which stakeholder institutions and

organizations may share resources and maintain knowledge of the services, policies, and support opportunities each offer. One such program, the *SAFE Bar Network*, works to connect higher education institutions across the nation with local bars in their area to educate bar owners and staff about campus and community resources and support services as well as bystander intervention practices and environmental safety.

Next, given the findings of this study that of the victims who had experienced sexual assault and shared their story with another person, most shared their experience with a friend or peer. This indicates that peer-to-peer interactions may present an impactful and effective opportunity for sexual violence prevention programming expansion. While this may mean the establishment of a peer-to-peer sexual violence prevention program, this may also include the implementation of gender-based violence trainings and continuing education for student leaders such as team captains, section leaders, student government representatives, residence hall council leaders, or fraternity or sorority chapter officers. Within these student-led organizations, it may be pertinent to assign the task of sexual violence prevention work and efforts to a certain leader or to establish a prevention or wellbeing leadership role under which sexual violence prevention may be subsumed.

Lastly, the findings of this study support those of previous researchers that sexual violence revictimization is a common occurrence. Unexpectedly, the results of this study suggest that individuals who have experienced sexual violence demonstrate low levels of receptiveness towards sexual violence prevention programs. The theoretical implications of this finding were discussed above, however, this finding also calls forth some policy implications. To support these individuals requires the collaborative effort of preventionists and response providers such as therapists and advocates. The topic of revictimization and trauma as a risk factor should be

discussed with victims seeking support with the knowledge that victims may have faced victim blaming and that their experience may have altered their self-perception and feelings of autonomy. It is possible that due to changes in self-image and negative or dismissive societal reactions to their victimization, some who experience sexual violence may have their rape myth and victim blaming beliefs and attitudes reinforced by their own victimization.

In conclusion, though highly publicized, the occurrence of campus-based sexual assault at Baylor University is not unique and is not isolated. The findings of this study largely affirm a plethora of others which suggest that campus-based sexual is a multifaceted and magnitudinous social problem that affects the wellbeing and safety of campus communities. Despite significant and good faith attempts by institutions to implement wide-reaching and effective sexual violence prevention and response programs in accordance with federal guidelines and regulations, the rates of campus-based sexual violence remain steady. Many undergraduate students experience sexual violence during their matriculation. This finding is reflected in the experiences of 55% of students who responded to the survey who indicated that they had experienced some form of sexual violence with experiences ranging from non-consensual image sharing to non-consensual penetration. The effects of sexual violence victimization are immense and far-reaching impacting not only those who directly experience harm but also the institution at large.

While lawsuits are often costly and highly publicized, they are just one of many manifestations of institutional harm. Each year, many institutions lose students to dropping out, academic dismissal, transfer, or extended absence resulting from sexual violence victimization. Clearly, institutions of higher education that are concerned with maintaining retention and graduation rates must also concern themselves with supporting those who experience sexual harm, dismantling campus rape cultures, and harm reduction. The findings of this study suggest

that many college students across the demographic spectrum recognize sexual violence as a problem and are receptive to learning about their potential to contribute to the solutions, particularly in supporting victims and in learning and employing bystander intervention strategies.

Effective sexual violence prevention programming must address and challenge rape myths and gender-based biases that minimize and trivialize sexual violence and the harm it causes. It must also cultivate opportunities for students to develop and practice empathetic listening and interaction. Effective sexual violence prevention programming should also be positioned within the broader context of campus safety and violence prevention rather than an isolated issue. Students should be informed of the role of environmental safety, crisis response and threat management, and clear and accessible reporting structures and conduct policies in maintaining safe campuses and the occurrence and persistence of sexual and gender-based violence as a threat to overall campus safety.

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