

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:  
MEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
AS COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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Abstract: Men's experiences with sexual violence are an understudied subject within sociological literature. Despite some past research endeavors that have focused on men, little is known regarding the ways that men college students grapple with their lived experiences with sexual violence. Using a sample of 29 active men college students, semi structured interviews were conducted in order to investigate the ways in which men conceptualize their experiences with sexual violence in their own words. Results indicate that masculinity is intimately connected to sexual violence victimhood, as men can consider themselves victims, but in very distinct ways. Masculinity also acts as a sort of 'buffer', in that many men who were interviewed for this research describe their experiences with sexual violence in ways that are similar to women's experiences, but they also express difficulty in accurately framing these experiences using linguistic framing mechanisms. Additionally, men's sense of their masculinity after their experiences with sexual violence can have profound impacts on subsequent sexual behavior. Future directions for research are also explored.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence, or the forcing and manipulating of someone into unwanted sexual activity without their explicit consent (NSVRS 2010), is a serious issue facing many people today (Ward et al. 1991, Konradi 2017). The exploration of gender norms, and how these norms relate to sexual violence, has been engaged in by academics for many years; past scholars have examined how the complex relationship between hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and gender identity relate to instances of sexual violence (Pinar 2001), in addition to the ways that the American legal system has failed in sexual violence cases time and time again (Flowe et al. 2007, Remick 1993). Over the last few years, researchers have turned their attention to college campuses, spurred, in part, by several prominent sexual violence cases at U.S. universities. Many of these cases have embroiled the respective institutions in fallout from cover ups and lengthy court proceedings, as well as negative public perception(s).

Researchers have identified several factors that have influenced how sexual violence has come to be prevalent among college students, most notably the existence and reproduction of rigid gender norms. Perpetrators of sexual violence typically rely on traditional understandings of gender norms when engaging in such behaviors (Armstrong

et al. 2006, Berger et al. 1986, Bryden and Grier 2011). This is one of the most important facets of contemporary sexual violence literature, as many scholars have tied sexual

violence on college campuses back to larger cultural discrepancies regarding gender and hegemonic masculinity. Other academic inquiries suggest that the impetus for sexual violence is largely based on the ways that men and women perceive gender norms differently, and how these discrepancies in perception effect behavior. In some cases, this can lead to gendered formulations of power that may incite sexual violence (Uggen and Blackstone 2004). These norms, perpetuated by masculine ideas, foster the notion that those who subscribe to these masculine ideas have the right to attempt to dominate in all social arenas, in addition to other people. This idea of hegemonic domination (Connell 1995, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) is socialized to many people, particularly young men, at a very early age, and manifests itself in sexual encounters in which appropriate behavior protocols are vague between all parties. When these protocols, or ‘scripts’, have not yet been established, people typically rely on their socialized experiences to engage in hegemonic practices that can lead to sexual violence.

Despite research that attempts to show how providing young people with concrete sexual scripts has the potential to mitigate issues regarding sexual assault (Krahe et al. 2007), sexual violence is still prevalent. Feminist theorists, such as Butler (1990) and Connell (1995), have argued for years that women are often viewed as subordinate to men in a variety of social settings (employment, the home, political landscapes), and that hegemonic practices aid in this process. Sexual violence is a distinctly gendered process, and the research conducted here facilitates a deeper, more nuanced sociological discussion related to masculinity; this discussion is predicated on the connection that



masculinity has to sexual violence victimhood, as men can be considered victims, but in very distinct ways. Masculinity also acts as a sort of ‘buffer’, in that many men who were interviewed for this research describe their experiences with sexual violence in ways that are similar to women’s experiences, but they also express difficulty in accurately framing these experiences using linguistic framing mechanisms. Additionally, men’s sense of their masculinity after their experiences with sexual violence can have profound impacts on subsequent sexual behavior. In this sense, masculinity again acts as a buffering mechanism, in that men who perceive their masculinity to be under duress through experiencing sexual violence will attempt to ‘redeem’ their masculinity by avoiding sexual contact, or ‘reestablish’ their masculinity by seeking out multiple sexual partners. This research, and these aforementioned findings, highlight ways that men who are current college students describe as well as come to terms with their own experiences with sexual violence. Masculinity plays a central role in the ways that these men conceptualize their experiences, in that it impacts the influencing and mitigating of the use of specific linguistic terms to describe this experiences, in addition to the ways in which men seek out subsequent sexual partners after their sexually violent experiences. Hegemonic masculinity is pervasive regardless of gender identities, and hegemonic ideologies do not exclude men from being victims of sexual violence. Cultural as well as individual mechanisms create gendered norms that, in turn, allow sexual violence to occur.

There is a lack of research that explores the ways that men experience and grapple with being a survivor of sexual violence. This research is proposing to fill that gap by

engaging with the lived experiences of men who are survivors of sexual violence within a collegiate settings by asking the following central questions(s):

*1) How do men experience being the survivor of sexual violence while attending a college campus?*

*2) How do those lived experiences coincide with or differ from traditional conceptualizations of gendered norms and masculine ideologies?*

In Chapter II, literature is explored that examines how sexual violence is related to sociological conceptualizations of power, studies of sexual violence within collegiate contexts, and finally, the ways in which previous research (the little that exists) has examined men's experiences with sexual violence; this includes minority men's experiences, as well as the ways that men seek professional treatment. Chapter III describes the data and methods underlying the semi-structured interviews with 29 men college students, including recruitment tactics and data analysis strategies. Next, Chapter IV explores the ways that men college students describe their experiences with sexual violence in their own words; this includes how men discussed the ways that they felt like victims but also simultaneously grappled with the implementation of victimizing linguistic frames, as well as the ways that men framed their experiences with sexual violence in terms of how they perceive women's sexually violent experiences, and also the effects of sexual violence on future sexual behavior. Additional findings also explore the consequences that men faced as a result of their experiences with sexual violence, and

how these consequences are framed within several broad social contexts. Finally, Chapter V will discuss these findings within the context of broader sociological literature as well as the importance of this study for facilitating a more holistic approach to understanding sexual violence, discuss limitations of the work, and offer potential directions for future scholarship.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Sexual Violence and Power*

To begin, it is important to understand sexual violence, and why it can happen to any person. The notion of sexual violence as it relates to how power is situated between different social actors is key to beginning to understand the ways that men come to experience and conceptualize their experiences. This research is focused on the ways that men experience sexual violence as it relates to being a man who is a current college student; as such, discrepancies in power between individuals is key to exploring these concepts.

Sexual violence can be largely attributed to the ways that distorted gender norms effect the behavior of social actors; some scholars have asserted that this is facilitated by a gendered formulation of power (Uggen and Blackstone 2004). Sexual violence is characterized by the power that gender norms bestow upon those who occupy certain gender identities. In this way, a gendered formulation of power exists through these norms, in that particular genders hold more sociocultural power than others. This is evident in Uggen and Blackstone's (2004) work. Uggen and Blackstone argue that, "A woman's authority does not immunize her from sexual harassment, at least within a cultural context in which males hold greater power and authority." (Uggen and Blackstone 2004: 83). Uggen and Blackstone's work on sexual harassment indicates that,

despite woman occupying positions of power in the workplace, their risks of experiencing sexual harassment are not vanquished. Similar to women who occupy supervisory positions, men who report doing more housework (10+ hours/week) are also more likely to report being a victim of sexual harassment. This suggests that there seems to be some sort of relationship between gender expression and risk of sexual violence that also includes men's risk, yet this risk remains unclear.

Sexually violent acts can be labeled differently depending on who is the perpetrator and who is the victim. This labeling process is often mediated through stratified power structures (gender, race, sexuality, etc.) and has had significant impacts on how sexual violence can be socially conceptualized (Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999). These labels often dictate how both men and women think about sexual violence, particularly rape, from a sex-based as well as power-based perspective. Particularly, men are more likely than women to situate aggressive, sexually violent acts not only from a purely sexual perspective, but also as a way to both obtain and display power to a sexual partner (Anderson and Swainson 2001). This can have powerful ramifications for the ways that men not only experience sexual violence, but also in the ways that they deal with it after it has occurred. More recent scholarly inquiries have also examined how college students engage in social events on their respective campuses safely (Luke 2009). Women's risk of sexual violence while attending college can also be discussed through the ways that colleges define and codify what sexual violence entails within the confines of their respective organization(s), and the manner in which it is handled institutionally; many colleges construct sexual violence, in terms of what victimhood looks like, in explicitly gendered terms (Wies 2015).

Contemporary academic work has investigated other facets. Among these are the relationship between past physical abuse and sexual relationship power amongst black women (Ahuama-Jones et al. 2017), the correlations between sexual violence, ‘chemsex’ (the consumption of illicit substances to foster sexual interaction between individuals), and hegemonic masculinity in terms of understanding power dynamics in such interactions (Aliraza 2018), and how sexual violence acts as a mechanism of inequality reproduction for marginalized social groups (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018). The ways that gender and its impact on power dynamics within sexual encounters has been investigated by past scholars. Some scholars have explored power from the ‘sexual double standard’ perspective that exists between men and women, in that culturally constructed norms present men as ‘aggressive sexual initiators’ and women as ‘passive gatekeepers’ of sex within specified relational constraints (Hunt 2014). Power as a social construct impacts several aspects of both women as well as men’s experiences with sexual violence; by investigating and exploring the ways that these discrepancies in power dynamics affect women, we can also see the ways in which these same issues inform men’s experiences as well. However, additional academic investigation is needed regarding the ways in which a multitude of dynamics affect men’s experiences as survivors of sexual violence, particularly as college students.

### ***Sexual Assault and College Campuses***

Past research suggests that around 25% of college aged women will experience some degree of sexual violence during their college careers (Amar et al. 2014). However, similar rates for men’s experiences are harder to identify. Sexual violence is unique within the context of college campuses for a number of factors; one of the most

prominent reasons for this is the pervasive notion of ‘hookup’ culture that exists primarily on college campuses.

Currier (2013) implements qualitative interview data in order to argue that ‘hooking-up’ is an extremely popular form of sexual encounter on college campuses. Within this ‘hookup’ culture is a lack of a clear definition of what ‘hooking up’ means for all parties involved in the sexual encounter, with women and men showing no significant gender differences in their struggle to define what constitutes a ‘hookup.’ Currier calls this struggle ‘strategic ambiguity’, and asserts that it benefits those with more power in sexual interactions, in that men use this ambiguity of what constitutes ‘hooking up’ to overly inflate their sexual prowess with women, and in turn demonstrate their prowess to other men. This demonstration of sexual prowess is key to maintaining hegemonic masculine displays, in addition to a basic tenant of hegemonic masculinity overall, but this pressure may also contribute to an increased risk of sexual violence, as men feel pressure to pursue ‘hooking up’ in order to solidify their masculinity. This notion of sexual pressure, and its ties to men, masculinity, and the idea of ‘hooking up’ are deeply connected to men’s experiences with sexual violence. Within the collegiate setting, men feel pressured to demonstrate their masculinity by engaging sexually with multiple partners (Weiss 2010). But this pressure that is tied to their sense of masculinity can also facilitate unwanted sexual encounters, and additionally lead to men’s sense of their own masculinity suffering damage as a result.

Scholars have, in some cases, attempted to discuss ‘hooking up’ within the context of a more multifaceted lens (Allison and Risman 2014), but these inquiries are largely predicated on examining ‘hooking up’ within very particular contexts (primarily

the examination of women's experiences), and exclude other understudied groups, particularly men who experience sexual violence within a college setting.

Colleges are also a unique context due to a culture of use and misuse of alcohol that permeates many campuses. Alcohol is a common component of many sexual violence cases (Fagen et al. 2011; Greathouse et al. 2015, Tyler, Schmitz, and Adams 2017), as a large number of college students report being the victim of unwanted sexual attention while consuming alcohol (Krebs et al. 2009). In many cases, alcohol is a tool that is used by those who occupy positions of power and those who subscribe to hegemonic masculine ideologies to take advantage of people who are more easily dominated when they are under its influence. In this way, alcohol acts as a link between those who occupy positions of power and those who engage in hegemonic masculinity; in this way, alcohol can illicit subconscious hegemonic tendencies. One case study suggests that up to 20% of college women may report unwanted sexual contact while consuming alcohol during their freshman year of college; however, similar statistics for men remain unclear (Mouilso et al. 2010). Other studies have shown that the social context (i.e., whether a college student attends a party or goes to a bar) in lieu of specific incidents of heavy drinking, is more likely to be associated with engaging in sexual violent acts (Testa and Cleveland 2016).

Alcohol consumption, in some studies, does seem to be related to sexual violence experiences among gay and bisexual men; Particularly, past research suggests that bisexual men seem to be at a higher risk for alcoholism, and have a higher probability of experiencing sexual violence perpetrated by women, as opposed to gay men (Hequembourg et al. 2015). Future research can greatly benefit from the inclusion of



understudied populations in examining sexual violence as a broad issue related to college students. This call to examine men as survivors of sexual violence is in no way meant to diminish or mitigate the experiences that women have with sexual violence on campuses – far from it. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that sexual violence on college campuses affects a variety of persons, regardless of gender identity or expression, and regardless of institutional setting. The inclusion of men’s experiences can be implemented in the hope of understanding sexual violence in a more holistic manner.

### ***Men’s Experiences with Sexual Violence***

#### *Men’s Experiences*

Sexual violence has been politically, legally, and theoretically constructed in such a way that largely excludes men from consideration (Weiss 2010). This includes criminal conceptualizations of sexual violence; as of 2010, the FBI defined rape as “the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.” (FBI 2004). Socialized norms impact formal definitions of sexual violence as well, in that by ascribing sexual violence to men’s nature, envisioning men as survivors of such violence requires a conscious “bracketing” of preconceived notions about both sexual violence and gender (Weiss 2010). Socialized expectations of “real” men are counterintuitive to victimization, therefore men who are victims struggle to receive legitimacy in their formalized claims of being survivors of sexual violence. Much of this can be attributed to notions of hegemonic masculinity; hegemonic masculinity acts as a regulatory mechanism, in that it fosters gendered behavior that encourages the domination of others (Connell 1995), but also does not exclude men from being victims of sexual violence (Cook and Hodo 2013).

In this way, hegemonic masculinity can be adopted by men as well as women as a tool to dominate other people, including men, through sexual violence.

In addition, men are less likely than women to report being a victim of sexual violence (Turchik 2011, Weiss 2010). Roughly three percent of all men in the United States (about 3 million people) have reported being the victim of some sort of sexual violence, regardless of the gender of the alleged perpetrator (Cook and Hodo 2013). By the most conservative estimates, one percent of all men in the United States have been raped or sexually assaulted by a woman at some point in their lives; because of rampant underreporting by men, some researchers estimate that this number may be as high as five percent (Cook and Hodo 2013). In a study of 302 men college students at a Midwestern U.S. university, 51% reported experiencing some sort of sexual violence since the age of 16 (Turchik 2011). Additionally, past scholarship suggests that men who have sex with men experience rates of sexual violence at rates consistent with, and in some cases, higher than those documented among women (Finneran and Stephenson 2013).

Additionally, there seem to be noteworthy similarities between both men's as well as women's sexual violence experiences. For example, men report sustaining physical injuries at rates that are consistent with women's reports, in addition to similarities between time and location of the event, relative levels of resistance reported, and the fact that overwhelmingly, the sexually violent episode is usually perpetrated by one individual (Weiss 2010). Weiss's work examined several other pertinent similarities between both men and women's sexual assault experiences, noting how many men reported experiencing 'date rape' by women who they felt would not take no for an answer:

Yet based on assumptions that men, by nature, need and want sex, and because of persistent cultural scripts regarding (hetero)sexuality that cast men as sexual initiators and women as gatekeepers responsible for restraint, men's incidents may seldom be acknowledged as 'real' crimes. (Weiss 2010).

Several men noted in Weiss's work that they felt powerless to repel unwanted sexual advances from others, particularly women, because of dominant gender stereotypes regarding men as the instigator and women as the recipient of sexual advances.

Past academic work has briefly investigated the relationship between masculinity and the reporting of surviving sexual violence by men. Masculinity, especially hegemonic masculinity, can manifest itself as a mechanism of the prevention of reporting sexual assault and rape of men, particularly when the alleged assault is perpetrated by women. Men have reported difficulty coming forward when they are survivors of sexual violence, because of culturally constructed notions of what it means to be a man (Cook and Hodo 2013). In the context of the 'male perpetrator and female victim paradigm,' men are reluctant to come forward or identify themselves as victims of sexual violence. Sampling biases within sociological and criminological studies exist as well, and may further underestimate the number of men who are survivors of sexual violence (Stemple and Meyer 2014).

Additional studies have also examined the link between masculinity and victimhood. Some men, when subjected to different forms of violence, will not completely reject the label of 'victim', but instead subtly modify it so that it still coincides with their overall sense of self. In this way, men can still be 'masculine', and yet also acknowledge that they experienced some sort of act that did enable them to be a victim (Åkerström, Burcar, and Wasterfors 2011). It seems that masculinity can act as a

sort of 'shield' that some men can use to simultaneously protect their sense of self and also acknowledge that they were subjected to unwanted experiences.

Little academic work has investigated the relationships that men have had with their own sexual violence experiences. Masculinity is often seen as a key orienting framework through which men's sexual violence experiences are understood (Stanko and Hobdell 1993). Particularly, the concept of being a 'victim' of any form of sexual assault or sexual violence is in many cases seen as being incompatible with contemporary notions of what it means to be a man (Hlavka 2017). In this way, masculinity can act as a barrier to reporting sexual violence as well as enabling paths towards effective treatment options, especially for young men (Hlavka 2017).

One key aspect of the experiences that men have with sexual violence is mediated through the trauma that these experiences produce in those who live out such occurrences. McGuffey (2008) argues that when faced with sexual trauma, some men react with gender affirming behaviors as a way to combat negative stereotypes about sexual violence survivors; this reaffirmation is particularly salient as its focus is on the reconstruction of a sense of masculinity identity for oneself, but more importantly, for others' consumption (McGuffey 2008). Additional work suggests that these reaffirmation processes may be under duress in contemporary society. When patriarchal structures are challenged in contemporary social landscapes, men can retreat back to traditional notions of masculinity; the experience of enduring sexual violence may exacerbate these notions (Hunt 2008). Much of the argument that Hunt is making can relate to the ways that some men discuss and conceptualize their own sexually violent experiences; some men

interviewed discuss the challenges that they face in making sense of their own experiences with sexual violence.

Some past research has explored men's experiences with their own sex lives; particularly, how men use sex as a way to construct their own masculine identities. Prominent scholars such as Pascoe (2005), have described the ways that men use language as well as social interaction to reinforce their own sense of masculinity to themselves as well as others. This notion can be grounded in subsequent work as well; The concept of 'bud-sex' has emerged as a way that (predominately rural) men have engaged in sexual relationships with other self-described 'heterosexual' men as a way to reinforce their own heterosexual masculinity. This idea is related to heterosexual men's own construction of their masculine identities, in this case using sex as a mechanism of heterosexual reinforcement (Silva 2017). In this way, Pascoe's (2005) work and later on Silva's (2017) work echo the same sentiment; men are constantly constructing their sense of their masculinity through active participation with others.

Silva's (2017) work can also facilitate an interesting notion. In many cases, the ways that men react to being a victim of sexual violence in subsequent sexual experiences, and the effects that these experiences have on their own masculinity construction, remains unclear. In some cases, the victim of a trauma (regardless of gender) can experience issues that can last long after the sexually violent event has occurred (Allen 2004); such issues can be sexual as well, which can include arousal dysfunctions, as well as fear regarding sexual initiation (Van Berlo and Ensink 2012).

### *Sexual Assault Among Minority Men*

Many gay men are at a heightened risk of experiencing unwanted sexual contact or sexual violence perpetrated by other gay men (Hickson et al. 1994). Some scholars suggest that when gay men are victims of sexual violence, it is usually perpetrated by straight men as an act of power. However, this notion is often debated amongst scholars. In a survey of 930 gay men, Hickson and colleagues (1994) find that roughly one third reported being sexually assaulted or raped at some point in their lives by another gay man (Hickson et al. 1994). Other research endeavors suggest that two thirds of adult gay men have experienced some form of sexual violence (Hequembourg et al. 2015). Gay men are also at a heightened risk of experiencing sexual violence during adolescence, yet the impact that these experiences have on various adult outcomes is debated (Brady 2008).

### *Men's Experiences with Sexual Violence Treatment*

Past research has explored, to some degree, men's experiences with formal treatment options, such as counseling and therapy sessions, as survivors of sexual violence. However, the majority of these scholarly investigations tend to focus on straight men, and largely excludes gay men's experiences. Prominent past work suggests that the key to successfully discussing sexual violence as a serious issue facing men is by doing so using other men as a sort of solidarity mechanism, in order to facilitate trust and openness amongst men in anti-rape groups:

...most of the men in our study emphasized how 'having men talk to other men' was one of the key and most effective components of the groups. We also asked them if it made a difference if the information was given by females or males. They all gave several reasons why men would be more receptive to hearing these messages from other men as opposed to women. (Piccigallo, Lilley, and Miller 2012).

Piccigallo, Lilley, and Miller's (2012) work seems to suggest that effective treatment for men who have experienced sexual violence can be maximized by the implementation of single-sexed support groups, in addition to the discussion and eventual behavioral shifts in men's opinions on sexual violence experienced by other men. Other past research has found comparable results within similar contexts (Foubert and Marriott 1997, Davis 1999). Additionally, men seem to be more likely to use crisis counseling as well as a host of other treatment options related to sexual violence experiences when they are presented to them within the context of a specialized sexual assault treatment center (Du Mont et al. 2013).

Men have experienced sexual violence in a host a multifaceted ways, but there is a paucity of academic research that explores how men conceptualize their own lived experiences with sexual violence as college students. This research aims to fill that gap.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to understand men's experiences with sexual violence as college students. Given the exploratory goal of this research, the PI conducted in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with men sexual violence survivors (n=29). This method allows researchers to give some guidance to the participant, but they are also open enough to allow participants to be semi self-directed (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2010). Given the sensitive nature of this study, semi-structured interview questions were used, in order to allow the participant to have some control over the interview process.

#### *Confidentiality and Sensitivity*

Reliving sexual violence can be difficult in an interview setting. Multiple confidentiality measures were taken in order to maximize participant privacy and comfort. Participants filled out an initial applicability screening form when they contacted the PI in reference to involvement in the study, in order to determine that all appropriate criteria were met for research participation. In addition, participants were read and given a copy of a pre-interview consent form, to ensure that they were fully aware of the parameters of the study, and that their responses would remain secure during the duration of the data analysis phase of the research. As a facet of this consent form, participants were asked to give oral consent, in lieu of written consent, as an added layer of protecting the participant's identity. Upon completion of the interview, participants



were given a comprehensive list of campus, community, and national counseling, victim advocacy, and crisis-related resources that the participant could contact if they felt the need to do so. In addition, all sensitive data (participant lists, consent forms, interview transcripts, audio-recorded data) were kept on a password protected computer or in a locked filing cabinet; both of these were stored within a locked office, and identifying information will eventually be destroyed at the end of the study.

This type of inquiry is inherently sensitive in nature. However, research that examines the relationship between participant safety and the discussion of sensitive subjects (trauma, violence, etc.) suggests that many participants who have been victims of traumatic events view engaging in research that delves into their experiences as personally beneficial (Newman, Risch, and Kassam-Adams 2006). In this way, this research is designed to not only benefit this broad field of study, but to benefit the participants of this study as well. During the interview process, many participants echoed this sentiment.

### *Sampling and Analysis*

The topic of this study made recruitment difficult; as such, the PI was able to conduct 29 interviews with men survivors of sexual violence who were college students. The collection of 29 interviews for this project provided rich data that was able to be analyzed and dissected for prominent themes and subthemes. During the Summer of 2019, the PI obtained IRB approval to posted recruitment flyers at multiple locations on a Mid-Southern University's campus. Additionally, recruitment flyers were posted in three popular coffee shops in the area in which the Mid-Southern University is situated.

The PI sought and was granted permission by the IRBs at two additional large Mid-Southern Universities to post recruitment flyers on their respective campuses as well. One of these universities is public, the other private. Recruitment flyers were also posted in two coffee shops in a large city in which the private Mid-Southern University is located as well as one coffee shop on the public Mid-Southern University's campus in a smaller college town (it should be noted that neither of these endeavors provided the PI with any participants). A second round of flyers were posted in late August of 2019 around the original Mid-Southern University's campus. While this process did yield a small number of participants, the PI chose to engage in electronic recruitment, in the hope of obtaining additional respondents. The PI also created a website [sociologyproject.com] that was intended to aid in recruiting participants who felt more comfortable contacting the PI via electronic means.

The PI chose to implement electronic recruiting methods during the Fall of 2019, in order to potentially boost participant involvement in the research. As such, additional IRB approval was sought and granted to recruit prospective participants via email. A randomly selected sample of 5,000 Mid-Southern University students (both undergraduate as well as graduate students) were selected to receive an IRB approved email recruitment message. In total, three waves of email recruitment went out (October 2019, December 2019, and February 2020). Each wave was composed of 5,000 randomly selected men students that was determined by the Institutional Research and Information Management Department for each wave of email recruitment. During these three separate email waves, recruitment flyers were also posted to four separate academic electronic mailing lists (i.e., 'Listsers') in the hope that members of these Listsers would share

the recruitment flyer with their respective organizations and institutions of which they were members. Additionally, individual scholars at various universities across the United States were also invited to share the recruitment flyer with their organizations and contacts, in the hope of maximizing overall recruitment.

In total, these recruitment efforts yielded 29 men participants. Four participants were recruited via flyer, one participant was recruited via Listserv, and twenty four were recruited via email waves. Of the 29 participants, 28 were current students of the Mid-Southern University, and one was a student at a university on the West coast of the United States. Roughly half of the sample of men verbally identified as heterosexual, the remaining men identified as gay or discussed their sexual experiences with other men. One participant identified as asexual, and one participant identified as a trans man.

Recruitment materials invited men who were college students (undergraduate or graduate) and who were over the age of 18 to contact the PI via e-mail or phone. Once initial contact was made, the PI determined that all participant criteria for this study was met through an electronic applicability form. The PI scheduled interviews based on the prospective participant's available schedule. Most interviews took place within one week of initial contact. The prospective participant was ultimately allowed to dictate the location and time of the interview, in order to make the respondent feel as comfortable as possible. Of the 29 interviews that the PI conducted, roughly half were conducted in person, and half via telephone. Of the interviews conducted in person, all were recorded on the Mid-Southern University's campus. Before the interviews were conducted, the participants were made aware that their responses were strictly confidential, and would be deidentified during the transcription process to protect their privacy. Participants were

also made aware that the study did not have any sort of financial compensation attached to participation.

Interview questions were constructed in such a way as to maximize the ability to obtain meaningful, robust answers/data, and to investigate the relationship(s) between masculinity, stigmatization associated with sexual violence, and how survivors conceptualize their lived experiences with sexual violence within their college experiences. This was accomplished by incorporating questions that allowed the participant to feel comfortable within the interview, but also probe when appropriate to gain meaningful answers. Interview lengths varied; the shortest interview was just over nineteen minutes long, the longest interview lasted almost ninety minutes. On average, each interview was roughly thirty-five minutes long.

All of the in-person interviews took place in the PI's office, as the participants requested a private, quiet location on campus for ease of access and close proximity to familiar surroundings. The in-person interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The phone interviews were recorded using a voice recorder app that captured the entire phone conversation. Both digital recorder as well as phone call audio files were then transferred to the PI's password protected computer inside a locked office. These files were then uploaded to an audio transcription service online called Rev, where they were transcribed verbatim and delivered to the PI through an encrypted, secure delivery process.

Once the 29 audio files were transcribed, the PI went through and 'cleaned' each individual audio file, in order to redact any sensitive or identifying information. Typical information that was redacted included the names of people, locations that the participant

had or currently lived, in addition to the names of institutions and organizations. Pseudonyms were also attached to each ‘cleaned’ transcription using an online random name generator, in order to provide each participant with an additional layer of privacy. During this cleaning process, initial, open coding was conducted, in order to investigate the broad, thematic elements of the participants’ respective responses. Several prominent thematic elements regarding the participant’s lived experiences with sexual violence began to emerge during this process.

After the interview transcriptions were cleaned and initial open coding was completed, more focused, formal coding procedures and analysis was implemented using MAXQDA Qualitative Data Analysis software. Data was sorted thematically in accordance with emergent themes during the transcription and analysis process. An initial open coding process took place, in which interview transcripts were read and reread several times to identify and code for overarching thematic elements that dominated participant discussions. Next, more focused coding took place to hone-in on and develop these initial open codes with more nuance and focus, by breaking down these initial open codes with subthemes that dominated the broad thematic elements of each section. From this multifaceted process, a variety of themes and subthemes emerged regarding men’s experiences with sexual violence. The coding process was especially important, because this analysis sifted through the transcriptions to analyze relevant words, phrases, and notions that indicated how men live with experiences of sexual violence, how these experiences relate to their college experiences, as well as societal gender norms, identity, and masculinity.

This research aimed to provide more academic depth to an understudied population – men who experience sexual violence. The project is exploratory in nature, so there may be issues of generalizability in terms of the data collected, as there has been very little research conducted that is similar to this project. Another limitation is that the large Mid-Southern University, the primary site for data collection, is located in a rural area, and participants will most likely all come from the same geographic region. A large, public university may bring some additional diversity, however, as larger universities tend to draw students from a wider array of locations. Although the recruitment was open to all university students over the age of 18, college aged students (those typically between the ages of 18 and 25) will most likely be the one who are being studied, which limits the age range of the proposed project. Although this research project does possess some shortcomings, this project holds academic merit that can benefit sociological inquiries as a whole.

#### *PI Positionality and Disclosure*

The PI took great care to note his own positionality within the context of this research. As a cisgender conforming, white, heterosexual male, the PI attempted to be as cognizant as possible regarding the experiences that the participants discussed, and how the PI's own positionality may have influenced the interview dynamics. Through this endeavor, the open-ended, semi-structured interview process was critical to building rapport with participants and enabling them to feel comfortable with the interview.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The Findings chapter will be devoted to examining overall conceptualizations of Experiences. This will be done by exploring coding themes and subthemes that include discussing what happened to each man (Experiences with Sexual Violence), and how each man made sense of what happened to him (Making Sense of Sexual Violence).

This chapter will also explore a broad discussion of Consequences This will focus on an in-depth analysis of the ramifications that each man discussed as a result of his experience with sexual violence (Consequences of Sexual Violence), the ways that men discuss and negotiate their own sexual violence experiences within the context of their perceptions of women's experiences with sexual violence (Sexual Double Standard), and finally, the ways in which men discuss and frame their own survivorship as people who have experienced sexual violence within broader social contexts (Men as Survivors of Sexual Violence). These themes encapsulate the different ways that the men interviewed for this research subjectively discuss and position their own experiences with sexual violence, particularly as active college students. They also examine the ways that these men have dealt with such experiences with sexual violence in relation to overarching societal conceptualizations of gender, masculinity, and identity. It should be noted here that these discussions regarding sexual violence may be difficult for some individuals to read.

## EXPERIENCES

The men interviewed for this research actively discussed their own subjective experiences with sexual violence in detail. The importance of discussing this experience for participants, as a means of bearing witness to their own lived experiences, became a central aspect of the overall interview process. The following section highlights the various ways that men, in their own words, subjectively discuss their experiences with sexual violence. Although men's experiences differed, two patterns emerged surrounding men's victimization: first, the situational influence of partying as a backdrop to many men's experiences with sexual violence, in addition to the presence and influence of alcohol use in their experiences, and second, how sexual pressure to engage in certain behaviors, as well as discrepancies in power, impact experiences.

### *Experiences with Sexual Violence*

#### *Partying and Alcohol*

The majority of the men interviewed were relatively open and forthright in recounting their own experiences of sexual violence. Several of the men discussed the ways that their own experiences played out in detail in relation to partying or alcohol related circumstances. It is important to note that several of the following excerpts from interview transcripts contain graphic discussion(s) of sexual assault in detail. Henry, a bisexual man, discusses his experiences with sexual violence:

Yeah. So, we watched that movie, and at the end of it, I kissed her. That was, essentially, all I was comfortable with that night. I kissed her, and she said, "Oh, does this mean you like me?" And, I thought, probably, and I told her, "Yes, definitely." And then, she started pouring drinks. One of the last things I remember of the night is her saying, "Hey, {Name of participant}, can I suck your dick?" And, I said, "No."



And then, at some point in the night, I blacked out, and I woke up in her bed, and she told me that we had slept together. I have no idea what happened in the intervening time, and I don't remember if I said yes, or if I said no, or if it doesn't even matter because I was so drunk that I couldn't make an informed decision about consent. But, I regretted it the day after.

Additionally, Harold, a straight man, recounts his experiences with sexual violence:

Well, it happened in multiple experiences really, but it would usually end up being me at the parties, I get pretty drunk, and then some girl takes an interest in me, and then she wants to drink with me and keep up with me, and just basically stays by me, making sure I keep getting even more and more liquored up, to where eventually I just feel like, "All right, well it's time for me to go to sleep. I need to go." One way or another they'd be like, "Hey, let me help you." I'd be like, "No, I'm fine. I can get to the bedroom myself. It's cool.

...yeah, it just ended up, they would get me drunk. I would be wanting to go to bed, and then they'd end up in bed with me... They started trying to flirt and get close, start kissing and everything like that, then I would be like, 'Look, this is a party. Our friends are literally out there right now. We're supposed to be friends. I don't want this to happen. I don't want this to get weird or anything like that.'

Many of the men whose experiences were similar to both Henry and Harold discussed similar events. Both of these men discuss the inclusion of alcohol as a key contributor to their unwanted sexual experiences. The social identification of alcohol as facilitating factor seemed to also be tied to the notion of 'partying', within which several men discussed their experiences occurring. John, a gay man, discusses the interplay between alcohol and partying when his sexually violent experience occurred:

During the party I had been dancing and this guy had started kind of dancing with me and we were kind of just kind of, there was some sort of connection back and forth. But I mean at the end of the night he started to say, 'Do you want to leave with me?' I walked away. That was the last of it. Right before I was about to leave, people were starting to leave and I was kind of alone. Out of nowhere this same guy surprised me and pushed me up against a wall and stuck his hands down my pants and started kissing me. It was not warranted. It was very forcefully and aggressive. At the time, I felt powerless. I was... In less than a minute that it happened I did not know what to do. I was paralyzed...

Several participants, such as John, prefaced the discussion of their experiences with acknowledging that the presence of alcohol may have had an impact of their assault/violent event transpiring. For several of these men, the presence of alcohol within the socially constructed idea of ‘partying’ seemed to play a role in their experiences. Some of the men interviewed expressed remorse or frustration for consuming alcohol at these social events, as they assumed that, had they not been inebriated, the sexually violent event would not have occurred. Pete, a straight man, discusses this specific notion in detail:

The next thing that happened is I wake up and...can't really move my arms and our neighborhood friend {Person's name}, tall, white, gay male, kind of big so he's strong, he was giving me oral sex. I was on my back and he on top. I remember saying, "Stop," or trying to say, "Stop," and I think I had been drinking so much, there wasn't much I could do and I put my hand up, "Stop," and he was, just to be completely open, he was going to town. I was aroused, but I woke up aroused and that's not, I don't know. What can I say?

He's doing that. I can't stop him. I just laid there once again in this, "Well, you're an idiot," thinking this is my fault...

The notion that Pete felt somehow responsible for this event, because he was consuming alcohol at the time when it occurred, is coupled by a sense of anger towards other persons that were present, and their seeming inability to stop the sexual assault from occurring.

Pete delves into this notion in more detail later in the interview:

After he leaves, I wait a minute and I walk outside my room and one of my roommates is ducked in a corner like he was on a computer and the other two had left. And I said, "Hey, did somebody let {Person's name} in? What was that about?" I was furious. And he said, "I don't know what you're talking about." I think I stopped living there about a month after that and these same three friends, who I called them my friends, I harbored this hate in my heart for a long time

thinking that they thought this was a funny prank. Because they had to let him in the apartment. They allowed this to happen.

The feelings of resentment that Pete expresses because he believes his friends could have tried to prevent his sexually violent encounter, but did not, has lasting consequences; he later recalls ending his friendship with the other men who were also at the party.

Other participants explored their experiences with sexual violence as it related to alcohol differently. Walter, a gay man, discussed meeting a potential sexual partner in person after chatting with another man on the social networking and dating app Grindr, which he described as “an app that mostly gay men use, but there's some other people on it. And it's for hooking up, basically. People say it's for dating, it's not. It's for hooking up.” Walter proceeded to discuss his initial meeting with a potential sexual partner, and the ways that Walter’s match asked to engage in sexual acts that Walter was uncomfortable with. Afterwards, Walter reported that he was unaware, until after the two men had had sex, that his partner was intoxicated:

So, that happened, it was pretty brief...And then at that point, I'm just like, ‘Okay, I'm ready to go home.’ But I just stayed, did what I needed to do, things wrapped up. Then I realized, after that had happened, as the rest of the things were going on, he was kind of stumbling around and stuff. And so I realized, ‘Oh, my gosh, he's drunk right now.’ And I think that was part of it, too, was, [I] didn't realize that that was going to be the situation coming into it, so that was kind of a violation of consent, and then of course, the actual act itself.

Because Walter’s match was intoxicated, he was *retroactively* uncomfortable engaging in sexual contact with him. Most participants knew about the presence of alcohol before a sexual event took place. Walter’s experiences differ, in that although he initially

described his hookup as less than ideal; he only frames his experience as unwanted *after* he finds out that his hookup is intoxicated:

Because I showed up and he was acting normal, and then as things were going on he was kind of stumbling around, almost fell over at one point. And he was like, 'Oh, I've had a little to drink.' And I was like, 'Oh, okay, I didn't know that. Good to know, I probably would not have come over.' So that happened. After that I left, didn't really talk again after that.

Because Walter was unaware of his match's inebriation, this shifts the balance of 'power' between both parties, as both men are not in the same frame of mind. Because of this, Walter's discussion of his experiences encapsulates the ways in which sexual pressure and power discrepancies can facilitate unwanted sexual encounters for some men; this will be explored in the following section in more detail.

### *Sexual Pressure and Power*

Many men discussed this idea of 'pressure' within the context of their experiences, specifically related to feeling pressured by their partners to have sexual relations that they were not comfortable partaking in. Ronald, a straight man, discusses this in detail:

It was just like, like what are you doing? She's like, 'Oh I just thought it'd be nice.' I'm like, we never talked about this. I'm like, that's so weird. And then she felt really bad and like then somehow spun it around till I was a bad guy and saying she's like, 'Hey this is your fault.' I'm like, what do you mean this is my fault? So she ended up pressuring me to [have] sex even though I didn't want to have sex with her. And then I had to drive her home, which was like, it's even more awkward.

Similar to Ronald, other participants discussed the ways that they felt obligated to engage in sexual acts because of how they believe men have been socialized to desire and engage

in sex, regardless of the pressure that they may feel from others. Harold, a straight man, delved into this notion in detail, noting that he was chastised by his men friends when discussing his unwanted sexual experiences with a woman, because he felt pressured into engaging with her sexually:

Whenever I talk to my guy friends about not really wanting to get physical with girls, they're just like, 'Bro, why? Why? She wanted to smash. Why didn't you smash?' I'm like, 'I just don't want to do that.' They're like, 'Are you gay?' I'm like, 'No, I just don't want to get physical with someone I don't know.'

Harold's friends effectively scolded him for not wanting to sexually engage with a woman he had met the same day, even though he tells them that she was pressuring him to have sex with her. Much of this reaffirms sentiments related to Pascoe's (2005) 'compulsive heterosexuality', or the notion that men attempt to exhibit dominance over others through their everyday discussions of sexual prowess, as well as Hunt's (2014) work on men's sexual scripts. Harold's friends even go so far as to question his sexuality, and disregard his feelings of being pressured as an affront to his masculinity.

Other men have discussed similar notions regarding pressure from sexual partners, but have recounted feeling pressured in relation to *hypothetical* discussions with their men friends. Derrick, a straight man, discusses this idea in detail as he recounts unwanted touching from a woman acquaintance:

Like I felt awful, but most guys my age were like, would have been excited for all that shit... 'cause you have a bunch of, like horny teens and shit. And so like a girl touching you like that, like wow, theoretically would be sick. But it just felt like super invasive and was awful. And so I couldn't go to any of my friends about it.

The perceived chastising that Derrick believes he would receive from his men friends echoes many of the points that Stern and Greenbaum (2015) allude to, in that many men described that they felt pressured to engage in different sexual scenarios. Derrick's situation, similar to other men's experiences related to sexual pressure, is centered on feelings of obligation to engage with another person sexually because of the dominant discourse surrounding men's supposed sexual desires. In the case of both Harold and Derrick, both men experience sanctioning from other men, whether this sanctioning occurs from real or imaginary peers, because of their challenging of established norms related to the ways that many men conceptualize the interplay between masculinity and sexuality.

Some participants discussed the pressure that they felt in relation to their interpretation of dominant gender norms. Bob, a straight man, discussed his experiences with a woman with whom he became intimate, but did not want to have sexual intercourse with:

And we just kept, well she kept, pushing past those kinds of things that were the positions reversed I would say, 'I can't do that, that would be kind of rapey.' She paid no heed to that, just kept pushing past them. So I mean, personally, as the person that was on the receiving end, I don't... I mean, we did end up having sex. It wasn't great. I felt really gross afterwards. I felt pretty... That kind of gross. That's how I felt afterwards.

Bob notes that in his mind, if the positions that he and his woman friend occupied had been reversed, then he would feel that he was unfairly pressuring her to have sex, which he felt constituted rape, this further situates Hunt's (2014) work, and the idea of the 'sexual double standard' regarding established sexual scripts within the context of Bob's comment.

Additionally, other participants recalled feeling sexually pressured to engage in unwanted acts as a result of their partner's physical size. Walter, a gay man, discussed this in detail, as he recounted experiencing the feeling of being trapped within a sexual encounter because of his partner's stature:

And then he was like, 'Oh, but you said you would, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.' And I was like, 'I said I'd think about it, but I never told you it would happen.' And so we're going back and forth, and for context too, I'm a smaller guy as you can see, and I'm laying down and he's sitting on top of me. And this man is probably like 250, 300 pounds. Much larger than I am. And he's like, 'We should do it, I really want to. I really want this.' And I was like, 'No, I really don't want to do that.' And then he grabs my genitals and starts trying to force it to happen.

The first story I told you before, I was more so just uncomfortable. Obviously it was breaking my boundaries and all that, but I didn't really feel unsafe or anything like that. With this one, I was very much so, for a few seconds like, 'Am I going to have to fight this person? This person weighs at least twice me, taller than me. I don't think this is a situation where I win. Where is this going to go?'

Although Walter was the only man to discuss this notion of pressure as a function of physical size related to his potential sexual partner, this conversation is important, as it demonstrates the ways that men have experienced sexual violence in more nuanced ways. Masculinity as it relates to power and pressure are not merely ideas that exist within the realm of the mind, they have very tangible, physical attributes that manifest in many ways, in this case, in the physical size that Walter describes here. Sexual pressure, masculine ideology, and power can all work simultaneously to create impactful scenarios that can have lasting effects for individuals such as Walter.

Some men also discussed their experiences with sexual violence as it related to pressure that they felt as a result of the statuses that they occupied, and the pressure that was exerted on them by those who occupied higher positions of authority within their social networks. Louis, a straight man, discussed his experiences with unwanted sexual

contact with a woman superior that he worked with. Although Louis's memory of his assault was somewhat "foggy" because he was under the influence of alcohol at the time, he remembered "sitting on the couch. And then she got on my lap and then initiated making out, that kind of stuff." After passing out in the bedroom, he later woke up to his boss "putting a condom on me and lubricant. Then she initiated sex and I was like still kind of drunk because it was pretty early. So I just made the decision to myself, I was like, 'Well, the sooner we get this over with, the sooner I can leave'". Afterward, Louis reflected on this encounter, and recalled that, "I don't really feel like I can say no. I didn't really consent. It's because this person had power over me and I felt coerced."

In Louis' case, the feeling of powerlessness and sexual pressure in relation to a woman superior elicits unique discussions regarding gender roles and positions of power that are in many cases at odds with prevailing notions of masculinity. Louis goes on to discuss that he felt he could not say no to sexual contact with his superior:

I think from her perspective she saw it as casual sex. I never said no, per se. It was more that I felt like I couldn't say no/I was wasted. I kind of expressed remorse to her about it, but I didn't really couch it in the language of assault, because I don't know. It just felt like it wasn't really worth pursuing. I was like I know that sexual assault allegations are very damaging to people's careers and ... I don't know... and I don't know what it's like when men come out as being assaulted. I have no idea. That conversation very rarely happens.

In Louis' case, the threat of potentially damaging his superior's career, coupled with a lack of knowledge of the appropriate social scripts regarding the discussion of his sexual assault as a man, ultimately prevented him from discussing his unwanted sexual experiences with anyone (Bethel 2018).



While female perpetrators of sexual violence are generally in the minority in incidents overall, they are significantly more likely to engage in sexual violence on college campuses against men, as opposed to against women; Men victims who are assaulted by women perpetrators are more likely to experience those assaults by older women (Budd, Roque, and Bierie, 2017). This seems to be indicative of Louis' experiences as well.

### *Making Sense of Sexual Violence*

The participants in this research project discussed the myriad ways that they tried to grapple, come to terms with, and ultimately understand their experiences with sexual violence after it had occurred. For many men, what they experienced was “unsavory”, but they did not situate their experiences as assault or rape until much later. These linguistic discussions, coupled with conversations that explored the ways in which men questioned their own subjective interpretations of their experiences with sexual violence, profoundly influenced the interviews. In addition, men participants alluded to their self-described ‘epiphanies’ that they had regarding their experiences with sexual violence. In this section, thematic elements discussed follow these aforementioned paths regarding language men used to describe their experiences, as well as the variety of ways that men attempted to make sense of their sexual violence experiences later on.

### *Linguistic Framing*

Some interviewees avoided the terms ‘assault’, ‘rape’, or ‘victim’ when describing their experiences. Because they viewed their sexual encounters as relatively benign or commonplace, at least initially, they were reluctant to use such ‘strong

language'. Some men prefaced their discussion by noting that "many other cases are [more] severe than mine", despite later discussing that they came to terms with the fact that they were raped or assaulted. Anthony, a straight man, discussed this initial hesitancy to use particular terms when exploring his own experiences with sexual violence:

At the time I felt a little bit invalidated that this was something that happened, but I felt more that I should view it as an unsavory sexual encounter. Something that was not really great, and not that I wanted to do again, but I would not have called it rape. It was like I was uncomfortable sort of pushing that definition towards this was sexual assault, or some kind of crossing my boundaries. I felt that I really tried to kind of stress with myself that it wasn't a big deal. That it was something that I could move on from, which was damaging. Right? But that was definitely the mindset following that it was something that was not 'a big deal.'"

When asked why he was hesitant to use such terms, he explained:

Anthony: "Well, I mean really just because that's strong language. It situates me as a victim, which I internally didn't really feel like. I mean I felt like a stupid teenager, but I didn't feel victimized. Right? I felt that I had participated in something that I didn't necessarily want to do, but that was kind of pressured into doing, convinced or coerced into doing."

Past work regarding notions of 'coerced consent' seem to echo these points, as research suggests that consent can be given, but when this consent is coerced by one party, it is rendered invalid (Stappenbeck 2020).

This disconnect may be tied to subjective interpretations of one's own masculinity; men are socialized to be strong, tough, and self-reliant, as many of the men who were interviewed noted when asked about what the term 'masculinity' means to them. Their experiences with sexual violence were, in many cases, in direct opposition to these socialized norms regarding masculinity (Åkerström, Burcar, and Wasterfors 2011).

By admitting that something happened that was not fully in their control, these men would have to concede that they were indeed a victim of sexual violence, and therefore concede a part of their own masculine identity. Some men interviewed did discuss their loss of control within the context of their experiences, but the majority discussed their experiences while at the same time attempting to limit the incorporation of victimizing language.

Other men echoed sentiments similar to Anthony's subjective interpretation of his experiences. Brandon, a gay man, discussed the difficulty that he had linguistically processing the unwanted sexual contact that he experienced from a shopkeeper, stating: "Sometimes I'll talk to someone who will have a very strong opinion on what constitutes rape or not, and very much victim blaming." Brandon then says that he is often unable to delve into this topic further because of this, and "I don't share the details of what happened, but that person will sometimes say things that will make me realize that they would consider me to not have been raped or sexually assaulted or anything of that nature." He adds, "And then other times I feel like I'm being pulled into a pool of people who have dealt with far worse sexual assault than I have. And I don't want to overstate what my experience is, and I feel like there's not always language or ways to discuss it." These difficulties that Brandon experiences have even spilled over into his personal life, as he indicates that "now being in a relationship, I even struggle talking about it with him." Many of the men interviewed seemed to be unaware of how to best describe their experiences using specific linguistic frames, as Brandon goes on to note:

Yeah. What did I experience? I mean, what I experienced was not a, there's, there's all these different words, but it was not rape in the sense of, um, a lot of experiences, what people define as rape, not as intense as that. Um, and it was

definitely unwanted sexual touching and it was an unwanted sexual experience. Um, but I didn't have to deal with a lot of the other consequences that people have to deal with that there's not the severity, but yet I still call it rape. They wouldn't just call it actual, you know, sexual assault maybe, but it didn't feel like an assault. Um, and so yeah... the language is very challenging.

Some participants seemed to grapple with the terms 'sexual assault' and 'rape', in that if one didn't feel that he was raped, he couldn't have been sexually assaulted. Eric, a trans man, delves into this idea of "blurry language" while discussing his experiences with unwanted sexual contact with a man he considered to be a friend:

But I didn't raise it as, I was still seeing a therapist at the time too, but I didn't feel comfortable talking about it, because I was afraid it wouldn't be taken seriously. So then I just sort of had to think about that for a while, but because I hadn't told anyone, I didn't really know how to process it. And then I thought for a long time that it didn't even count as assault because it wasn't rape... So I didn't really know that there was a word for that.

The hesitancy to incorporate the term rape as a descriptor of men's experiences may stem from earlier discussion of the link between men's subjective interpretation of their own masculinity. For many of the men that were interviewed, they felt categorically excluded from what they perceived to be as a holistic discussion related to sexual violence that encapsulates all possible experiences, such as Eric's experience with unwanted kissing; this notion further clouds the prominent sociological discussion regarding the 'male perpetrator and female victim' paradigm that is prominent within contemporary discourse, as many of the men interviewed here describe situations that are counterintuitive to this notion. Several of the interviewees noted that because they self-identified as men, they felt that this identification precluded them from inclusion within a broader 'sexual violence victim' paradigm. The idea of being a victim or a survivor of

sexual violence and also identifying as a man seems to be, for many of the men interviewed for this research, categorically at odds with one another (Åkerström, Burcar, and Wasterfors 2011).

Some participants, when probed to explain their linguistic choices to describe their experiences, brushed off the question rather quickly, such as Harold, a straight man, before wanting to move on to other aspects of the interview: “I have talked to friends that haven't had those kinds of experience, and they were like, ‘Bro you were straight up molested.’ I was like, I mean I don't want to use those words, but I could say it wasn't consensual. That's my answer to that.” However, some men took this discussion of linguistic framing, and the ways in which it seemed to be at odds with their self-identification as men, more seriously. This was encapsulated when Henry, a bisexual man, discussed his struggle with this issue, noting that “at the time of it, I didn't think much of it. I don't know. I didn't think of it as sexual assault. I didn't think of it as rape. I didn't think of it as any of that.” When probed by the interviewer as to why he didn't consider using specific language to describe his experiences with unwanted sexual contact with a woman, Henry offered a poignant response:

Because my narrative doesn't fit with the narrative. Because my narrative ... I guess, going back to the point of the study, I am a man. How could I possibly have been raped? How could I possibly have been assaulted? I don't feel like my narrative fits with what the experience of rape is for everyone else that I've talked to.

Henry's conceptualization of his identity as a man renders him as unable to see himself as a victim of sexual violence. This discrepancy between being able to subjectively identify oneself as a victim of sexual violence and at the same time identifying as a man seems to

have lasting effects on the ways in which men are able to process and situate their own assault experiences. Dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity (i.e., Henry's idea of what constitutes being 'a man') seems to mitigate the ability that these men have to see themselves within the context of sexual violence survivorship (MuGuffey 2008).

However, not all men that were interviewed struggled with the language associated with their experiences with sexual violence. Some men were quick to point out the ways that they interpreted their own experiences with a concrete understanding of what had happened to them.

Frank, a straight man, discussed his unwanted sexual contact with a woman while intoxicated:

So I believe it'd be considered an instance of date rape... there was a girl that I met there who was very, very interested in me, but I was not interested in her at all. She was not my type...we ended up having sex...the morning after or after she took me home, I just like... I felt disgusted with myself the whole time. I don't know why I slept with her.

Frank's description contrasts many of the other men's hesitancy to use sexual violence related language when discussing their experiences. However, later in the interview Frank explained that he "never really took [his] experience seriously" until a friend "pointed out that technically that was date rape." He clarified, "At the time I was just disgusted with myself...I chose to drink and, like, in my drunken state I consented to sex. So I felt completely responsible for it. I still feel like I am somewhat responsible for it." Frank's ideas regarding the notions of self-blame and responsibility paint an important picture that will be discussed in detail in future chapters.

### *Questioning Sexual Violence Experiences*

Several men during the course of the interview process recounted the various ways in which they were left with questions after their experiences with sexual violence had occurred; these questions occupied a variety of facets. Anthony, for example, described his assault as a “phantom kind of experience.” He recalled “waking up the next morning and getting in my car and driving home,” but only remembered “brief moments” during his assault. One prominent subtheme that arose during the interview process was the difficulty that many participants had situating their encounters linguistically as sexual violence, but also with difficulty coming to terms that the events transpired in the first place.

Additionally, some men questioned, in hindsight, why they didn’t do more to stop their assault. Daniel, a gay man, discusses unwanted sexual contact from a family member when he was in high school:

I dunno. I think there's a lot of anger towards myself... You know, it's kind of like victim blaming, right? I mean, it's just so easy. Like I'm in control of my body, I'm in control of the things that happened to me. Why didn't I do something, you know, like, why wasn't I more insistent...

This questioning of why one didn’t do more to stop an unwanted sexual encounter directly relates to the ways that men perceive their masculinity as being ‘damaged’ or ‘degraded’ after the unwanted encounter has occurred. The feelings that Daniel describes here relate to several ways that men react to experiencing sexual violence. This reaction to feeling as if one’s masculinity has been ‘degraded’ will be explored in more detail in future sections.

A few of the men who were interviewed discussed the ways that their experiences with sexual violence made them question their own sexual identity as a result of their

encounters. Gerald, a straight man, describes the experience of unwanted sexual touching by a foster brother: “I think for a long time, a couple of things happened. In one way, it left me kind of questioning my own sexuality.” Sean also discusses the ways that unwanted sexual contact has caused him to question his identity as a straight man:

And from that point on, I just started questioning a lot of things about my sexuality. Why me? Why of all people does this have to happen to me? It played [a lot with] my psyche... And questioning whether I'm gay, straight, bisexual, whatever. It makes me question that a lot.

Taken together, both men explain the ways that their unwanted sexual encounter in their lives have impacted (and in Sean’s case, is still currently impacting) their own subjective conceptualization of their sexual identity. Past research has been engaged in related to this notion (Han et al. 2013), but much of the experiences that these men are discussing have been largely ignored in sociological inquiries; Han’s work specifically focuses on links between childhood/adolescent sexual assault and potential for assault to occur in adulthood, and ignores sexual violence and subsequent ramifications that occurs primarily in adulthood. For both men, these events have caused them to question who they find themselves sexually attracted to, which some men discussed in relation to their own sense of their masculinity. The first thing that Sean mentions, when asked about the ways that he reflects on what masculinity means to him, is: “I think of a guy that's straight.” This connection between sexuality and masculinity underscores the ways in which many of the men interviewed for this research relate their experiences with sexual violence to their own ideas regarding masculinity, and the manners in which they have impacted each man’s lives in myriad ways.

*“Epiphany” and Sexual Violence Experiences*



Finally, roughly one quarter of the men who participated in these interviews discussed the ‘epiphanies’ that they had when trying to make sense of their sexual assault experiences after they had occurred. Several of the men interviewed discussed the fact that they did not come to understand their experiences as sexually violent until discussing them with other individuals, which facilitated an ‘epiphany’. Henry, a bisexual man, discusses how he had an ‘epiphany’ regarding his own experiences with sexual violence:

But, at the time, I didn't think of it. I just thought, ‘oh, I did something dumb. Whatever.’ And, I went on with my life. And then, my senior year [of high school], we were watching a video that discussed sexual assault, and I realized how indescribably uncomfortable I was about everything that was happening, and I realized that every single box that they ticked, that they talked about in the example, had happened to me. And then, towards the end of the class, I almost started sobbing.

Other participants discussed the same ‘epiphany’ that they had through alternate lenses; Eric, a trans man, discussed his realization that his unwanted sexual encounter with a friend may have been more serious than a miscommunication of intent “So when I stopped drinking as much and when I was able to be a little happier, it made me think about things in a new light, like maybe it wasn't just a misunderstanding between friends. That wasn't okay.” Eric’s ‘epiphany’ regarding the severity of his experience, while similar to Henry’s, is different in that it occurred after Eric indicated that he curtailed his alcohol consumption. The notion of reframing a past experience as sexually violent, for many men, seemed to facilitate a variety of different outcomes. For men like Henry and Eric, their epiphanies seem to correspond to subsequent negative experiences (emotional turmoil, degradation of friendships), but for other men who were interviewed, some of their epiphanies led to, in their minds, more positive experiences. Paul, a straight man,

discussed the ways that coming to terms with his experiences with sexual violence enabled him to engage in activities that he might not have if he hadn't had an 'epiphany':

Growing up and becoming more educated, going to college, being in the field of psychology, just knowing how little it's talked about in males, and how little they want to speak up. And I don't know, it just kind of felt like it was really important to try to be involved, and help make a change in a way.

While some men discussed their revelatory experiences as generally negative, men such as Paul discussed these experiences in a different manner, noting that he would not have participated in his interview if he had not come to view his experiences as sexually violent after they occurred (This point does potentially omit some respondents from participation in this research who have not have similar realizations). Additionally, other men discussed their 'epiphanies' as a function of physical space; men like Louis, a straight man, noted that they only had revelations regarding the situation of their experiences as sexually violent after they from the state in which they occurred:

But then, I don't know, I would say some time in the fall after I'd moved to {Name of state}, I like kind of got back in the swing of things, started to think about it more... It's kind of when it dawned on me what it actually was. I was able to define it in my head as why it didn't sit right... Like why it didn't feel like other sexual encounters I've had.

The notion of experiencing a revelation as to the severity of one's sexually violent experience through the introduction of physical space coupled with the passing of time, although only noted by one participant, nonetheless provides valuable insight into the nature of how individuals can process and reprocess the same unwanted sexual encounters within a multitude of different contexts.

Lastly, some men recalled their ‘epiphanies’ related to their reconceptualization of their experiences with sexual violence as they related to the impacts that they had on their future patterns of behavior. For men like Wayne, a gay man, these ‘epiphanies’ were related to the impacts that their experiences with sexual violence had on their subsequent sexual interactions; particularly, the frequency with which they pursued intimate relationships. This notion will be discussed in length in the next section.

## CONSEQUENCES

While the previous section focused on how men came to understand their own experiences as meaningful, this section focuses on the subsequent impacts of sexual violence. These consequences ranged in scope, from discussions of men's coping strategies and professional counseling endeavors, to the impact that their sexual violence experiences had on their college careers, and finally to the ways in which their sexual contact with ensuing partners was affected after their sexually violent encounters.

The ways that men negotiate their own sexual violence experiences will also be explored, in that many men chose to compare and contrast how they perceive their experiences compared to women's experiences with sexual violence. Finally, the ways in which men discuss and frame their own survivorship as people who have experienced sexual violence within broader societal contexts will be analyzed, in terms of how survivorship affects participant's conceptualizations of themselves as men, in addition to notions of camaraderie of experience with other survivors, and how being a survivor relates to overt discussions of one's own masculinity.

### *Consequences of Sexual Violence*

#### *Seeking Help and Coping*

More than half of the men interviewed described coming to terms with their own experiences through the use of formalized therapy, and the positive experiences that that has on their lives. David, an asexual man, discussed what led him to initially begin counseling sessions: "Um, honestly I suppressed it for a long time. I didn't talk to anyone about it, honestly. Nobody knew about it...I finally broke down to my mom...she started

having me go to therapy.” Like David, John, a gay man, delves into the ways in which participating in therapy helped him regain his confidence:

I went to counseling for about two months after the event, and really being around people that were safe, that made me feel safe. For a while right after it happened I was in denial. I was very... I am actually a very prideful person. At the time I was maybe... for about the first two or three days afterwards I said, ‘Oh, that didn't happen to me. That's not true.’ But then slowly after I started talking to my friend and then my counselor, I started to see myself as ‘I'm damaged.’ I saw myself in a negative light that I slowly got over and realized that by thinking that way that man still had power over me. In a way it [counseling] boosted my mental health to where I no longer saw myself as necessarily as weak as damaged. I saw myself as strong and empowered and more confident.

In addition, Zane, a gay man, also described the benefits of therapy within the context of their racial/ethnic identity; Zane felt that talking about mental health problems was stigmatized in Asian communities, but still found it cathartic to “talk about your feelings in general to somebody who will provide the environment that’s safe” and judgment-free.

Taken together, these cases elucidate the ways that the majority of the men interviewed here benefit from formal therapy. Many men like those discussed in detail here described an ‘interim’ period in which they did not discuss their experience with sexual violence, and then eventually went to seek formal counseling. Some men discussed an initial hesitancy to seek out counseling, as they did not feel that it would be a worthwhile endeavor, or that it was something that other people (in many cases, their parents or significant others) wanted them to do. Jeff, a straight man, delves into this in detail: “I had never talked about it with anybody, and until my wife was really ... she pushed me, and then we started seeing just a therapist together and it all came out.” Jeff’s, as well as other men’s initial reluctance to seek out professional help was mirrored

by many men who participated in these interviews. For these men, participating in counseling sessions would ground their experiences with sexual violence as being real, and many men discussed their initial hesitancy to validate their experiences with sexual violence as having actually occurred (as was noted in the previous section when discussing linguistic framing, and the ways in which many men questioned their own subjective interpretation of experience). However, despite this initial hesitancy, many men have had positive experiences with formal therapy.

But not all of the men who participated in this research shared sentiments similar to John and Zane. Although many men described their experiences with counseling or therapy as being generally positive, some were not as effusive in their praise of formal mental health resources. Some men described their negative experiences in terms of their interactions with their counselor or therapist. Anthony, a bisexual man, explains:

There are times when I have gone to a counselor and sort of sat in the room, and had the counselor sort of not really know where to take it. That I am sort of feeling catatonic and nonresponsive. And that along with the struggles were just within myself that it wasn't that I didn't have things to talk about, but that in that situation I just shut down. It would feel like I was losing an hour of time. That I wasn't really getting anything back out of that. Whereas when you first began counseling, it can be really exciting to sort of have this open, honest experience. But after being sent to counseling for months, you can become sort of desensitized to that environment. That would probably be one thing that I struggled with.

Anthony's counseling sessions eventually lost their power to impact meaningful change over time. For Eric, his dissatisfaction stemmed from his therapist's ignorance of queer issues:

I actually don't like therapy. That's obviously not what this [interview] is, so I feel safer because I like just talking about things and then I could figure out if it's something that I needed to work through therapy... I felt like the person that was

advertised as being the gay authority at the counseling center didn't know enough. So I thought, 'Okay, maybe you have some safe zone training, or maybe were also queer in some way but you don't know anything about the trans community.' And so that's a little frustrating... Because everyone's like, 'Well, talk to him. He knows, he's the person you should go to for these things.' I was like, 'Great, I will. I can do that. I'm in a PhD program, I know how to do research.' And I looked up all this stuff, and I was like, 'He is the answer.' And he wasn't.

Eric felt that he was isolated because he was a man who had experienced sexual violence, and then felt that sense of isolation again, because when he sought counseling to deal with his sexually violent experience, he felt that his therapist did not have the resources to treat him effectively. Eric goes on to say:

Well, I don't want to know anything about my therapist. I don't want that. That's too much for me. I'm an introvert. I can only do so much. But, they need to know more about me maybe as a person. And also, having a clearer background knowledge of every part of my demographic.

For Eric, effective therapy is *inclusive* therapy; Eric is asserting that for him, it is not enough to simply know about his experiences with sexual violence, he also wants a therapist who knows about him as a person. This sense of connection was a prominent theme amongst men who expressed less than desirable experiences with formal therapy. Other men had somewhat different critiques centered on the feeling that the therapy sessions were too 'business-like', and that the therapist was only interested in the patient as a source of potential income. Louis, a straight man, explains in detail:

I mean, my critique of those services, because I've seen them a couple of times, is they kind of tend to go one of two ways. Either they want to medicate you, or they want it to be this ongoing thing...I've gone to two different people. One person I saw when I was an undergrad, and the other person I saw actually just this year in the Spring, that was an ongoing thing for a couple months. For both, it just felt like they just want you to keep coming back. They're not really teaching me skills to cope with life on my own. They're just like, 'Come to my nice cozy office

where I have the Zen gardens and talk to me about your problems.’ I mean, it's nice that they're a good listener. That's kind of the big benefit is that they listen really well. But I wish that they would do more in terms of identifying where your mental health problems are coming from and how you can try to work towards curbing things or stopping them before they grow to be bigger problems.

Formal therapy, despite being used as a tool for healing, still exists within a system that is predicated on perpetuating inequality in order to thrive; some men described feeling like a ‘commodity’ in a sense, who are being used to generate an ongoing source of income for those within the mental health care sector. This Marxist (1987) sense of impersonality was also discussed by other participants as well, in that a general feeling of being treated as another ‘cog in a machine’ was a critique that some participants recounted. Bob, a straight man, discussed this in relation to a specific person with whom he interacted at a counselor’s office. For Bob, he reports that he had much more successful encounters with counseling interns, rather than fully vested and institutionalized counselors themselves:

With the non-interns, it's been poor. With the interns, it's been great...The only time I've really talked about this with a counselor, it was actually one of the interns at university health services, and she actually ended up crying the whole time I was talking. I told her basically what I just told you, went into a little bit more detail because I had been talking to her all summer at that point. We had more of a rapport built up. A lot more trust. I was a lot more comfortable, so went a lot more into where my emotions were at.

Bob’s discussion relates back to Louis’ point regarding the feeling of being used for a continuous stream of income by the counselor; in Bob’s case, this is indicative of professional counselor, but *not* by the intern counselor. This further illustrates the points Louis made regarding the institutionalization of mental health practices as a commodity for profit, as those who were full vested within the system seem to, at least from Bob’s



vantage point, care less about their patients as human beings, and more about potential profits that they stand to generate.

Many men who participated in this research delved into several of the tactics that they have employed in order to cope with their sexually violent encounters. For more than half of men interviewed, this came in the form of formal therapy or counseling sessions. But other men described more informal coping strategies that they have employed, with varying degrees of success. The overwhelming majority of men described seeking out friends, significant others, and family as their most trusted informal coping mechanism. Brandon, a gay man, delves into the list of prominent people in his life that he seeks out for social support:

There's a whole bunch of different people actually. Um, so I have, I have friends, so I, I have a group of friends that are on a group chat, um, from basically high school. Um, and then I have my mom. Um, now I'm in a relationship and so my boyfriend as well as a really good friend that from {Name of city} actually that I keep in touch with.

Paul, a straight man, echoes sentiments similar to Brandon's:

My mom passed away my senior year of high school. I started living with my aunt and uncle, who I'm not super close with, we see each other on the holidays and every once in a while. But we weren't super close so I wasn't super comfortable sharing stuff with them. Primarily I do rely on friends and things like that to talk to.

Reliance on friends and family, particularly close friends, is one of the primary coping mechanism that almost all of these men engage with in order to deal with their negative sexual encounters. Several men spent a considerable amount of time discussing the ways

that these relationships played a vital role in their recovery from sexual violence. Zane, a gay man, illustrates this point clearly:

I talked about the second experience and first experience to a few of my friends, childhood friends, and we worked through that...Most of my friends are actually at home, so then it will always be like a long distance phone call, FaceTime, anything like that, but they're my safety net. They know that if I'm reaching out at a very odd time, then it probably means that something's going on and I just need to be talked down from it.

Zane and Brandon both illustrate what many other men who were interviewed also convey, in that there is a general sense of seeking out friends as a source of coping with sexual violence in lieu of or in addition to formal, institutionalized therapy sessions.

Furthermore, men discussed their desire for specific coping strategies, framing them from a more group-oriented vantage point. These discussions centered on hypothetical coping strategies that some men felt would aid them in their overall ability to deal with their experiences with sexual violence. Harold, a straight man, explores some of these hypothetical notions:

I mean yeah...it's almost like a group, but it's to where you can link up with people who have also had those experiences, maybe around your same age or whatever, to where you can talk about that. I don't know, I just never talked to anyone who's had that same kind of experience. I think that might be able to help to see if some of the things, and some of the effects that I think might be the cause of that, could be paralleled with them, and how they're dealing with this, or if it is some of my coping mechanisms are not related to that and are related to something else.

What Harold is unknowingly advocating for is group therapy sessions in which men who have all shared similar experiences come together to support one another. This is something that, although not many men within this sample discussed, is nonetheless

important. Some men focus on therapy, while other men focus on friends and family, and still others gravitate towards group therapy sessions to cope with their sexually violent experiences. Regardless of the strategy, almost all men frame their recovery in some way that is predicated on the inclusion of other people as a key factor related to their coping mechanisms. This framing seems to be at odds with fundamental masculinity structures (Connell 1995), which does not discuss masculinity in a way that is predicated on its overt dependence on others for its survival.

Finally, a few of the participants discussed additional, albeit less common coping strategies. Ronald, for example, turned to new hobbies after his sexually violent experience:

At the time I'd say it put me through a lot of depression. A lot of stress...So kind of all of that building together wasn't a great mixture of stuff. I definitely stopped enjoying things I used to do...but I also learned how to do different things. Um, one of which was art. So stopping soccer because of my depression also led me to find something I'm very passionate about and that I'm very good at. Which is photography. And so I'm kind of, it's like a double edged sword. I'm like, I'm super thankful for it, but I'm also like, that sucks.

Similarly, Sean, a straight man, sought camaraderie through collegiate intermural sports. He explained, "I've had some trouble [in the past] with keeping friends because of my experiences... It's helped me, because I do actively work out and play sports."

Both Sean and Ronald discuss alternative means through which they find effective coping strategies. It seems for these men, the inclusion of established activities as well as the engagement in new endeavors serves their recovery efforts more so than relying on close friends and family for guidance and support alone. This inclusion solidifies the notion that for men who experience sexual violence, there is no 'one size

fits all' approach to effective coping strategies; multiple avenues with the potential for healing must be explored in order to maximize recovery efforts.

### *School Impacts*

Several of the men within the sample discussed the ways in which they felt their experiences with sexual violence impacted their college careers, as all participants were in various stages of completing either an undergraduate or graduate degree at the time that their interview took place. For the majority of men interviewed, they did not report that their experiences with sexual violence had any major negative impacts on their academic careers. This finding was surprising, as college is traditionally seen as a transitional period in one's life that can be easily impacted by a variety of disparate phenomena.

Many men downplayed the ways that they believed their experiences with sexual violence had impacted their college careers up to the point that the interview took place. Some men discussed this in relation to their age, such as Daniel, a straight man, who explained the significance of being “ a much older collegiate student. [I'm] in my thirties...I still don't think those, I don't think those experiences affected college for me.” Daniel described himself as an older, non-traditional students, and because his experience occurred when he was in his teenage years, he believes that the separation between the sexual violent event(s) and his current college endeavors renders them disconnected. Additionally, some men described school as the means through which they channeled their negative experiences with sexual violence. Zane, a gay man, explores this notion further:

...whatever happened to me through sexual violence only impact me personally and how it affects my relationship with other people, but nothing in terms of, like, school because school is basically my getaway and what I excel at. That's something that I would basically do all the time if I wasn't doing any other stuff.

This sentiment expressed by Zane was echoed by several other men, in that they viewed or conceptualized school broadly as a refuge within which they could retreat from the pain caused by their experiences with sexual violence. Other men like Henry, a bisexual man, recount similar feelings:

At {Name of University}, I don't think it has affected me that much because most of my work here has been much more focused. It has not felt overwhelming... I haven't gotten to a point at {Name of University} where I feel overwhelmed with anything, at least school wise, I have not felt like it has affected me at {Name of University} yet.

Paul, a straight man, expresses perspectives similar to those of Henry and Zane:

I wouldn't, I don't think I would say they've impacted it a lot. If I could think of a way I would say, trying to be an advocate, and being a psychology major. And wanting to try to be more educated on those things, and really wanting to do well in my psychology courses. And I guess in that sense, maybe it might have impacted school, but I can't think of much else.

Henry and Paul allude to the ability that most men within this sample discuss throughout the interview process: participants seem to be able to compartmentalize their experiences with sexual violence in a manner that did not directly impact their collegiate careers. In the case of Paul particularly, he discusses the ways in which the experiences he had may have a tacit impact on his course of study, but beyond that, he suggests that he has not been negatively impacted. This seems to support previous work that suggests that men,

particularly gay men, often compartmentalize facets of their identities in order to maintain a consistent understanding of one's sense of self (Tillapaugh 2013).

Although most of the men within this sample did note how relatively little their experiences with sexual violence impacted their collegiate careers, few men did note that they felt some negative repercussions within their academic endeavors. Brandon, a gay man, recounts the ways that his experiences with sexual violence degraded his ability to trust others, and therefore his ability to engage with his peers in college wholeheartedly:

I don't trust the faculty around me to get me through this program...and I also have very much catastrophic thinking. So I'm always convinced that I'm going to fail or I'm not going to be able to graduate or I'm not going to get a job afterwards or things aren't going to work out...grad school's already hard enough and then I'm adding this, this catastrophic thinking on top of it that just, kind of weighs me down. And it has prevented me... [from] being positive and having healthy relationships that I could have in the program.

This discussion of the loss of trust Brandon feels within his academic career is particularly salient. Although some past research does investigate the broad relationship between trust and sexual violence using very specific parameters (Tamburello, Irwin, and Sherman 2014), Brandon's investigation of this connection is unique, as it seems negative consequences related to sexual violence can permeate a variety of arenas of one's life. Although this example is rare within the sample of men interviewed for this research, it is nonetheless noteworthy.

### *Subsequent Sexual Contact*

Throughout the interview process, several men discussed the ways in which their experiences with sexual violence impacted their ensuing intimate encounters. These findings suggest that men followed one of two paths: some attempted to *redeem*

masculinity by actively avoiding intimate contact with other people for a relatively long period of time, while others attempted to *reestablish* masculinity by actively seeking out as many intimate partners as possible immediately after their sexually violent event occurred.

For roughly one third of the men who were interviewed, actively avoiding intimate relationships after their sexually violent event was common. Anthony, a bisexual man, says that his sexual experiences after his sexually violent encounter were “tough for me for a couple of years” and that he “did not try to have any kind of sex with anyone” because he was “uncomfortable with the idea of becoming that intimate with somebody else in a way that I was not before the incident.” Anthony delves into the ways that this impacted his subsequent sexual experiences, noting that after his experience with sexual violence, “I was definitely really turned off with the idea. I did not really want to pursue a girlfriend, boyfriend. I was not interested in sex.” Anthony’s description of the impact that his experience with sexual violence had on his desire to pursue sexual partners is particularly salient, as it is counterintuitive to prevailing notions of masculinity. For many of the men within this sample, they equate masculinity with sexual prowess. Anthony, in addition to several other men, frame sexual violence experience in such a way in that it actively *degrades* this idea of sexual prowess, and in effect, a man’s idea of his own masculinity. This degradation can have significant impacts on a man’s conceptualization of his sense of identity; which can further compound the lack of a willingness to engage with future sexual partners.

For other men, their experiences with sexual violence resulted in more serious ramifications. David, an asexual man, recounts that he believes that his negative sexual encounter may have resulted in his ensuing asexuality:

David: “Yeah. I mean, like I said, I could never envision myself in a sexual relationship. It's just, I know it's not like that, but I don't know, like before I could ever actually have the desire to participate in a sexual relationship, that that part of me was just, was just killed off... I just, honestly, a sexual relationship has no significant meanings to me anymore... I have absolutely no interest in having a sexual relationship with anyone.

Interviewer: “I'm just trying to make sure that I'm understanding. So would you, do you think of yourself then as being an asexual person?”

David: “That's the term that everyone has used around me... So yes, I would say that I am.”

David recalls that after his experiences with sexual violence as an adolescent, he believes that he lost his desire to engage with other people sexually. While this is a rare occurrence within this specific sample of participants, the gravity of this result is still striking. Other men have expressed that they avoided intimate relationships as a result of their experiences with sexual violence. Harold, a straight man, discusses this notion:

I've taken a lot slower approach with relationships, and I think after I've become more comfortable with myself and who I am as a person, I've started to be more okay with just shutting down those kinds of possibilities, where they would think, where they would have any chance of thinking, ‘Oh hey, he wants it.’

Frank, a straight man, also expresses similar sentiments: “At the time... I mean I was single. But I didn't date anybody for a really long time after that.” Both men note that after they experienced sexual violence, they not only avoided sexual contact, but were *cognizant* of their approach as it related to physical relationships and actively avoided them all together.



Some men discussed the ‘epiphany’ that they had within the context of ensuing relationship avoidance. Wayne, a gay man, discusses this ‘epiphany’ as it related to his pursuing of intimate partners after his experience with sexual violence:

And so afterwards, I didn't talk to him, avoided him and didn't recognize it at the time, but looking back it's like, ‘Wow, I avoided relationships and most intimacy for the past couple of years,’ and it started right after that... looking back, it seemed like anytime I started to stray too close to that kind of attachment or intimacy I felt really uncomfortable... So I tended to withdraw.

Sexual violence seems to have a potent effect on a man’s sense of masculinity, and this impact can manifest itself in a man avoiding future sexual contact; this avoidance strategy facilitates a lengthy ‘recovery period’, in which the man who has experienced sexual violence allows his sense of masculinity to be redeemed.

While many men avoided sexual encounters after they had experienced sexual violence, some (albeit few) men described the opposite phenomena occurring. Jeff, a straight man, delves into his desire to actively seek out sexual encounters after his experiences with sexual violence as an adolescent:

For me, my boundaries were really weird. Like, I mean, I tried to sleep with as many people as I could... And when I talked about it with my psychiatrist, it really came up with, I felt like that made me more of a man. I mean, I really think you can go two ways as far as that; you can be extremely inhibited by it or you just totally lose all sense of what that true connection and what that act really means... I mean, I feel like if I hadn't changed the whole objectifying women, sleeping with anything that walks thing, I wouldn't be married still.

Both of these ‘redeem’ and ‘reestablish’ tactics are particularly important as they relate to broad conceptualizations of masculinity as they relate to sexual violence experience

responses by men, as the discussion of these two phenomena are absent from contemporary sociological literature.

### *Sexual Double Standard*

Some men explicitly acknowledged discrepancies between the ways in which survivors of sexual violence are treated based on their gender identity. Several of the participants talked at length about the challenges that they faced as *men* survivors of sexual violence, and many alluded to what they described as a ‘double standard’ when it came to how members of society saw them as men who had experienced sexual violence compared to women. Roughly one-quarter of participants used phrases like “if the roles had been switched” or “If I would have done that to [her] [a woman], I would’ve been almost arrested if [she] has chosen to report that, but because I’m the guy, it’s a lot less of an issue for others to consider.” to describe the ways that they felt that they had largely been excluded from prominent discourse surrounding issues of sexual violence.

Several participants began to frame their discussion of the role that their gender identity played in their overall experiences with sexual violence early on in the interview process. Bob, a straight man, discussed this in detail, at many points expressing his frustration with the ways that he had been treated as a man who has experienced sexual violence:

By modern definitions, it was not consensual, because I really didn't want it to happen. She didn't ask me if I wanted it to happen, she didn't make sure I was okay with it at any point in time. I was aversive, at best, the entire time, and I know if the roles had been switched and I had been acting like that with a girl, I wouldn't have gotten past that first kiss without taking a step back and going, ‘Okay, we've got to make sure that they want this to move forward just as much as I do, otherwise this is definitely some kind of assault.’

Many men echoed comments similar to Bob's; Bob goes on to recount the ways that he feels that he has been shunned by members of the academic community because he is a man who has been sexually assaulted:

Yeah, because I mean, that one person I mentioned...I argue with her all the time...Like whenever I was talking about my experiences and they would talk about how... I actually had some people argue that just because I had systemic privilege, I was incapable of being sexually assaulted by someone who was dis-privileged in our society, just because of the way intersectionality works.

It's patriarchy and my own manhood that is harming me, not the friend who forced herself on me. And it's social expectations that's causing me psychological distress, not the fact that people that have studied these topics rigorously are now mocking me for doing exactly what they say men should do and being open with their experiences and their feelings. They're now mocking me for that...

It is clear that Bob has felt neglected, and that he feels that his experiences are framed by others as less valid compared to other people who have experienced sexual violence; Past research has also found that men who have been sexually assaulted by women report feeling that their experiences are trivialized compared to women who have been sexually assaulted (Cook and Hodo 2013). This is a common theme that a quarter of the sample alluded to, in that they feel that society perceives their manhood acts as a sort of mechanism that shields them from being the victim within a sexually violent scenario. However, several men took the time to argue that this is not true, and that they are constantly fighting the perception that men are incapable of being victimized within a sexual violence framework. Additional participants noted other ways the sexual 'double standard' affected their survivorship. Harold, a straight man, explained how "a lot of people don't really think about men being able to be victims." This echoes the sentiments of several other men that felt that their experiences were taken less seriously because of the ways that sexual violence victimhood is often constructed by society.

Some participants described their experiences as a way to understand women's experiences with sexual violence. Jerry, a straight man, addresses this: "it just made me ... for one, it gave me that perspective of like, 'Oh, this is how women feel...'" For Jerry, his unwanted sexual contact from a woman provided him with insight into how the plethora of women who have experienced some form of sexual violence feel after such unwanted encounters. As past scholars have noted that conceptualizations of particular social arenas are often gendered in their framing (Cohn 1993), so too are discussions of sexual assault, in which the 'male perpetrator and female victim' paradigm is often pervasive. This pervasive paradigm can dictate the ways in which individuals frame sexual violence experiences in their minds, which Jerry realizes is problematic. Jerry goes on to delve into more detail:

So, yeah, in a way, it made me feel like I'm a man, so in the first case, my feelings don't matter... And if a girl does it, then no one's going to believe the guy... like, 'Oh, she grabbed your ass, big whoop.'

Jerry also alludes to the 'double standard' that many men described, grounding his discussion in his experience of a woman groping him while at a sporting event. This theme of the 'double standard' as it relates to the ways in which men ground their experiences linguistically was discussed by some participants as well. Wayne, a gay man, addresses this:

I think it's been why I have been reluctant or afraid to see it as a sexual assault or sexual violence because it's not congruent with what I know or clients that I've had and their experiences of what it should be. I think with women that have experienced sexual assaults, there's... this tendency to [think]...this person is so strong and amazing and gets through it and goes to the police and confronts it and everything like that...I don't feel like either of those. And maybe it's because I didn't talk about it up until recently...

Wayne's discussion of this theme was prominent amongst several participants, in reference to discussing the constructing of their sense of survivorship as it related to sexual violence experience.

### *Men as Survivors of Sexual Violence*

The idea of being a survivor of sexual violence, and what that entails, was something that several participants discussed in detail. Many men addressed this broad topic in several pertinent ways; a sense of the camaraderie of knowing that others have also experienced sexual violence were discussed, in addition to notions of the term and usage of 'survivor' as a significant label, and also how surviving sexual violence impacts participants' sense of who they are as men.

### *Camaraderie of Experience*

While not a ubiquitous theme, few men did discuss the sense of camaraderie that they felt by discussing and interacting with others who have also experienced sexual violence in their lives. Gerald, a straight man, discussed his interactions with several other men that he grew up with:

When we all started getting to be about 30 and 35 and we started talking about our life experiences, and my wife, who knows everybody and has stayed friends with all of our friends, she started talking about how every girl that she knew had been sexually active at a young age. I'm like, 'That's crazy. I never thought that.' She's like, most of the guys she knew has been sexually assaulted. I'm like, 'Oh, what about so and so?' She's like, 'Yup, this person.'

We started discussing it, and then a couple of other people went, 'Yeah, that happened to me...' As I said, when I started learning that I was not alone in this, that it was happening to a lot of people and they were in the same situation, I think that it certainly has changed my idea that it doesn't affect who I am as a man. Honestly, it makes me more a man that we have all had that same experience.

The fact that Gerald was not alone in his experiences reinforces his own sense of his masculinity, in that he does not feel a sense of isolation regarding his unwanted sexual encounters. This sense of isolation would degrade his sense of himself as a man, and by knowing that other men have also had the same experiences that he has, he feels less vulnerable, and more masculine.

Other men have described the benefits that they have gleaned from discussing their experiences with sexual violence, in terms of a shared sense of survivorship. Carl, a gay man, describes this sense of fellowship:

It's one of those things that for me, I've learned to be able to talk about it more to people and just share my kind of story kind of thing... So especially with [Domestic Violence Shelter], I remember when I was telling my story, the person that was taking my statement...was like, 'I'm really proud of you for doing this'... just made me feel like it's all right and it's okay to do this kind of thing.

This sense of positive feedback that Carl received is crucial for enabling men to be open and honest about their experiences with sexual violence. As was noted earlier, some men have felt shunned when they discuss their own experiences with sexual violence, and Carl's positive experiences as a man who has experienced sexual violence illustrates that this is not always necessarily the case. This further suggests avoiding the implementation of a 'one size fits all' approach to men's experiences with sexual violence, as response variance does seem to be present; although broad, thematic patterns do exist, it is important to take each man's experience on a case by case basis, as to avoid incorrect generalizations.

*"Survivor"*

Many participants addressed the use of the term 'survivor', and the multitude of ways that they felt connected or detached from that term as it related to their own lives. David, an asexual man, expressed a sense of discomfort or uneasiness with referring to himself as a 'survivor', stating that, "I don't dwell on it any more than I need to. I mean, it doesn't take up my every waking thought and I'm comfortable with where I am...I don't know if I would call myself a survivor." Other men expressed similar sentiments, like Harold, a straight man:

I don't, as I was saying with a bunch of the other stuff, I don't see myself as a victim, or a survivor. I see myself as myself. Despite my situations, they're not what defines me... I am me, and I'm always going to be me. If I want to be a victim or a survivor, or whatever like that, I can make that be my whole identity, but I choose to be more than that.

Taken together, David and Harold both note that they feel at odds with labeling themselves as survivors of sexual violence. Harold specifically mentions that he does not want his sexually violent experiences to become the totality of his existence, so he chooses to eschew such terminology in order to 'rise above' his experiences. Walter expressed similar feelings:

So I would say no [to feeling like a survivor of sexual violence], just because I feel like I'm kind of at a point where I'm at peace with those events, and they're not really pressing on my mind or anything like that. Most of the people I know who have dealt with sexual assault, it is something that comes up more often and affects them more negatively. So I guess I don't think of myself as the typical representative of that I would say.

This notion of 'moving past' and 'rising above' the sexually violent experience was a common theme for several participants, in that it seems that this sort of coping

mechanism has allowed many men to come to terms with and accept themselves as having experienced sexual violence, but on their own terms.

However, other men felt that the term 'survivor' did encapsulate their sense of identity related to their experiences with sexual violence, and were more open to embracing the idea of labeling themselves as 'survivors.' Jeff, a straight man, discusses this:

So yeah, I do [feel like a survivor of sexual violence]. I pushed through, I'm very successful professionally, I am very successful personally, which the more important thing; I have a great family, I have awesome kids, an amazing wife, a beautiful home, and a circle of friends that support me. I would take that over making \$200,000 or whatever a year.

Jeff discusses the idea of 'pushing through', which Pete, a straight man, also alludes to in his discussion of calling himself a 'survivor':

But as far as a survivor goes, yeah. I guess I would be because I didn't let it affect me any more than it already did. And now I'm a father of two with a college degree and with a career. I just really needed to get to that point in my life, get past the young stuff and get through my 20's to become, that made me successful. It made me a survivor in, I guess in my own sense.

Although Pete initially expresses sentiment similar to Jeff, in that he feels that he's 'made it through' his experiences with sexual violence, he still chooses to categorize himself as a survivor 'in his own sense', which echoes what other men have said who did not see themselves as survivors.

### *Survivorship and Identity*

Finally, several men delved into the ways in which their experiences with sexual violence impacted their overall sense of self. These conversations were diverse, in that



men reported a variety of different perspectives. For many participants, the interview process allows them to grapple with their sense of self from a more holistic perspective, in that many men discussed the ways that they saw themselves as men, and how that idea fits into society's conceptualization of what it means *to be* a man, in extensive detail. Timothy, a straight man, expands on how his experiences have impacted how he thinks about what it means to be a man in today's society:

...there's society or at least, you know, at least what I grew up in is, you know, the big, strong macho man dominates. Um, you know, I grew up in a very conservative household. Uh, and I don't consider myself a conservative and really the least bit, at least socially. You know, I, you know, I don't think that, you know, a man, he used to be big, macho, dominant. You know, I really think people should just pick, you should do what, what makes them feel comfortable in terms of how they identify.

For many men such as Timothy, the experiences that they have had have profoundly affected their sense of identity, particularly their sense of masculinity, in meaningful ways. For other men like Wayne, a gay man, he discusses the ways that he navigates his overall sense of self now, and what that navigation looks like:

I wouldn't consider myself the most masculine man, just in the general sense of what the average man looks like, quote unquote. For Halloween this year I'm dressing up as Kylie Jenner. That's not very masculine. Most guys aren't doing stuff like that. So, I guess I feel like I would put myself somewhere in between masculine and feminine. Somewhere in that gray zone. I guess as far as the negative traits. I don't think I'm completely bad, but there's times where I catch myself doing things and I'm like, 'Oh wait, this is not right.' I don't like talking over people and stuff like that, or always putting my opinion out. And I always try to make sure everybody's heard, but sometimes I just get on a train where I'm just saying stuff and saying stuff and saying stuff. And I'm like, 'Wait, I'm not letting all the women in the room talk, or all of the other people in the room talk.' Things like that.

For some men such as Wayne, their overt sense of self, and how this sense relates to their masculinity, is more flexible. Many men like Wayne and Timothy were very comfortable discussing their sense of self and their masculinity in non-traditional, fluid ways.

Yet other men discussed the manner in which their experiences with sexual violence galvanized their sense of self, and more particularly, their sense of their own masculinity. Anthony, a bisexual man, explains:

I think that after experiencing this instance of sexual violence, I did not want to let that somehow detract from what I thought of as my masculinity, right? That I felt like I could not compromise in sort of letting that shave away at what I thought was being masculine was, if that makes sense.

So yeah, that's what I would say is that after the experience with sexual violence, my experience thinking about how that affected my masculinity was a sense that I had to sort of actively protect my masculinity from that harming it, if that makes sense.

Although other men discuss their sense of self in very flexible ways, some men like Anthony reacted to their experiences with sexual violence by attempting to *hold on* to their sense of masculinity, and in Anthony's case specifically, actively *protect* his masculinity from potential damage.

While some men conveyed the ways that they have embraced their flexible masculinity, and other have discussed the ways that they have tried to protect their sense of masculinity, still other men discussed that the word masculinity has lost much of its meaning. Daniel, a straight man, explores this:

Dude, it is a very big question. Um, and like gender identity is like all wrapped up in that to me. Um, I mean like honestly the first thing that hits my mind is like the smell of like cedar and leather and like geared oil because it's just so corny... But then I, then I think about really, I feel like that word is totally meaningless. I guess... it doesn't equate to like good person, bad person. It doesn't mean a thing

like hard worker, lazy, it, the characteristics that it illustrates I just think are so shallow... so it doesn't mean anything [to me]... But I know that it means a lot to a lot of people.

Daniel expresses thoughts related to masculinity that few other men in this sample do, in that he conceptualizes the idea of masculinity as effectively meaningless. This sentiment is markedly different from most other men that were interviewed, many of whom gave rather stereotypical answers regarding what masculinity means to them and how it impacts their sense of identity. But Daniel argues that this idea holds little value for him, because of what he perceives as a lack of attachment that the idea of masculinity has towards more meaningful characteristic facets. Daniel's introspection is crucial for continuing to allow men safe avenues in which they can grapple and dissect their own masculinity in a manner that is free from judgement and critique. Other scholars had advocated for similar spaces to be implemented for men to discuss related issues with other men (Piccigallo et al. 2012)

Through this analysis of data, it has been shown how men come to understand their sense of sexual violence survivorship, and how that sense of survivorship impacts multiple facets of their lives in a several interweaving, complex ways. The results of these interviews, and how this analysis can be situated with broader sexual violence scholarship, will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research answers two broad questions related to men's experiences with sexual violence: How do men experience being the survivor of sexual violence while attending a college campus? How do those lived experiences coincide with or differ from traditional conceptualizations of gendered norms and masculine ideologies? These data support major findings that men experience and discuss their experiences with sexual violence in distinct, meaningful ways that shape the manner in which they conceptualize their own masculinity and identity. In addition, these experiences have a profound impact on how men seek treatment, engage with subsequent sexual partners, and situate their own experiences within broader sexual violence survivorship mechanisms.

Men within this study discussed the ways in which partying was related to their experiences with sexual violence, and many of these men discussed their stories in a similar fashion to women who have experienced sexual violence within the same context (Mouilso et al. 2010). The same can be said for men who discussed their experiences with sexual violence who felt pressure to engage in unwanted sexual encounters, yet notions of masculinity impacted the ways in which men understood and dealt with external sexual pressure, in addition to the notion of the sexual double standard that many men described in relation to women's experiences with sexual violence. A man's sense of his own masculinity also has a distinct impact on the ways in which men linguistically

frame their experiences with sexual violence, as over half of the men who participated in this research expressed some difficulty or hesitancy applying specific linguistic frames to situate their experiences with sexual violence. As was noted, the discrepancy between being able to subjectively identify oneself as a victim of sexual violence and at the same time identifying as a man seems to have lasting effects on the ways in which men were able to process and situate their own sexually violent experiences; this is further evidenced by the amount of participants who questioned the validity of their experiences (i.e., ‘epiphanies’). Additionally, men typically explored the ways that the aftermath of their experiences with sexual violence had impacted their lives; the majority of men within this sample did seek out some form of therapy or coping mechanism after their sexually violent event had occurred. This seems to contradict prominent masculine themes regarding men and the ways in which they typically internalize traumatic events that they experience (although men interviewed for this kind of research may be more likely to participate in such endeavors due to their acceptance of their experiences as sexually violent) (Cook and Hodo 2013). Perhaps one of the most poignant findings of this research is the impact that experiencing sexual violence has on subsequent sexual encounters; men seem to engage in one of two strategies in order to ‘shield’ their masculinity after experiencing some sort of sexual violence – this is accomplished by either avoiding sexual contact with potential partners, i.e., ‘redeeming’ masculinity, or actively seeking as many sexual partners as possible, i.e., ‘reestablishing’ masculinity. Finally, men discussed the ways in which being a survivor of sexual violence is related to their subjective interpretation of their identities, noting the myriad ways that surviving sexual violence seems to facilitate a more flexible, dynamic interpretation of one’s

masculinity, or a more rigid, static sense of who they are as men. This section explores the various ramifications that each of these broad findings and themes has for comprehensive sociological literature, specifically the ways that masculinity and identity are conceptualized within this framework.

### *Ramifications for Masculinity*

The results of this research have several implications for sociological literature regarding masculinity, specifically the ways in which masculinity impacts the behavior of men who have experienced sexual violence. Traditional sociological conceptualizations of masculinity are predicated on hegemonic ideologies; ideas regarding hegemonic domination (Connell 1995, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) are socialized to many people, particularly young men, at a very early age, and manifest in sexual encounters in a variety of fashions (Grazian 2007, Quinn 2002). Yet many of the discussions regarding the ways that the men within this sample have experienced sexual violence seem to cloud these previously held notions. Past scholars, such as Connell and Messerschmidt (Connell 1995, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) have situated masculinity as a mechanism that enables individuals to access and implement the use of power in hegemonic terms; Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe the notion of a ‘plurality of masculinities’, and the ways in which this plurality manifests in a multitude of social arenas. Yet men within this sample contextualize their masculinity in more nuanced ways. Much of this can be explicated by the manner in which men discuss the ways that they described their subjective experiences with sexual violence. For men in this sample, many of them do elicit similar conceptualizations regarding their own experiences with sexual violence in a manner consistent with many women who have also discussed their sexually violent

experiences; this is often characterized by feeling pressured to engage in sexual contact. Men within this sample expressed similar notions on multiple occasions; However, masculinity seems to act as a buffering mechanism, in that men actively describe their experiences with sexual violence in ways similar to women's descriptions, but then have immense difficulty linguistically framing their experiences within the context of sexually violent nomenclature and language frames. In this sense, masculinity acts as a gatekeeper, in that it allows men the ability to understand and discuss their experiences in socially concordant ways, yet simultaneously blocks men from applying those same socially consistent linguistic frames to their own experiences with sexual violence. To reiterate, the idea of being a victim or a survivor of sexual violence *linguistically*, and also identifying as a man seems to be, for many of the men interviewed for this research, categorically at odds with one another. This does seem to support previous research (Åkerström, Burcar, and Wasterfors 2011).

Much of this issue concerning men who describe their experiences with sexual violence and at the same time avoiding framing those experiences with victimizing language may relate to the ways in which their sense of their own masculinity interacts with broader social conceptualizations of victimhood. Dominant forms of masculinity seem to counteract the ability that men who participated in this research have to see themselves within the context of sexual violence victimhood, which supports past literature related to this notion (MuGuffey 2008). In this sense, the inability to describe their experiences with sexual violence through the use of victimizing language is mediated through men's sense of their masculinity, which then prohibits men from seeing themselves within broader victim and survivor social mechanisms. This further

illustrates the ways in which a man's sense of his own masculinity acts as a sort of gatekeeping mechanism, in that that sense of masculinity will only allow a man to frame his experiences with victimizing language in very particular ways in order to preserve its own sense of itself. The notion that masculinity acts in a self-preserving manner when faced with external threats to its own foundation can be further evidenced by the ways in which men continually discussed the ways that they questioned the validity of their own experiences with sexual violence, as well as the ways that men described their 'epiphanies' that they had regarding their experiences. These notions of questioning their own experiences in addition to having 'epiphanies' a considerable amount of time after the experiences had occurred further illustrates the ways that masculinity acts in a self-preserving, 'buffering' manner; roughly one quarter of the men interviewed discussed the ways that they questioned if their experiences with sexual violence had actually occurred after the fact, or described the ways in which they came to realize that these experiences were not consensual much later. The existence of these questions regarding the validity of the experience as well as 'epiphanies' continue to demonstrate masculinity's complex existence. It seems that a man's sense of his own masculinity is constantly attempting to protect itself from external degradation, and thus enacts a variety of strategies, or 'buffers', in order to preserve its own integrity.

This same notion can be applied to the ways that men have the potential to alter their sexual behavior after they experience some form of sexual violence. The findings discussed in this research indicate that when men experience sexual violence, they tend to follow one of two paths in reference to seeking future sexual partners; either actively avoiding sexual contact with other people for long periods of time (i.e., 'redeeming'



masculinity), or actively seeking out as many sexual partners as possible (i.e., 'reestablishing' masculinity). Based on the interview data, these phenomena seem to begin immediately after the sexually violent event occurs. Both of these behaviorally related phenomena are directly connected to the notion of masculinity acting as a sort of 'buffer' or 'shielding' mechanism, in that men perceive their sense of masculinity to be damaged when they experience some form of sexual violence. When this occurs, men can react in ways that seek to effectively redeem this damage to their overall sense of their masculinity. This can be facilitated by either by 'shielding' their sense of masculinity from additional 'damage' by avoiding sexual partners for a lengthy period of time. In this sense, a man's sense of masculinity seeks to mitigate its own 'damage', and can enact avoidance strategies in order to redeem over time. This phenomenon can also occur in an opposite sense, as men can also seek to reestablish a perceived sleight to their sense of masculinity by actively seeking as many sexual partners as they are able. This active attempt to 'redeem/reestablish' a perceived loss to one's sense of masculinity differs from previous discussions related to attempts to recover perceived damage to a man's sense of masculinity, but despite the difference in strategy, the attempted outcome is the same. The ways in which men actively seek to 'redeem' their sense of masculinity by avoiding sexual contact, or 'reestablish' their masculinity by actively seeking as many sexual partners as possible after a sexually violent event is an important, unique contribution to sociological literature, particularly as it relates to issues of gender and identity construction.

Another important contribution that this research makes to broad sociological conceptualizations regarding masculinity is the ways in which men discuss their

experiences with sexual violence as they relate to other men. While not a common theme, participants did talk about the ways in which their discussions with other men who had also experienced sexual violence did facilitate a sense of empowerment and camaraderie. One participant discussed the camaraderie that he felt when he shared his experiences with other men who have also gone through similar experiences in particularly poignant terms: “Honestly, it makes me more a man that we have all had that same experience.” In this sense, a feeling of connectedness to other men who have experienced sexual violence bolsters the strength of their shared sense of masculinity; this supports past work that argues men, through shared homosocial (non-sexual) interactions, maintain a coherent sense of dominant forms of masculinity (Bird 1996). This sense of connectedness works to bolster masculinity by dispelling feelings of isolation; contemporary research suggests that as men age, they become more isolated, feel more alone, and lose friendships (Way 2011). The implications of the current research here suggest that sharing common traumatic experiences with other men can mitigate these feelings of isolation and loneliness, while at the same time fostering one’s sense of masculinity. These findings are particularly salient in terms of their impact regarding the effectiveness of group therapy for men who have experienced sexual violence; past research has explored the effectiveness of men’s sexual violence group therapy in few instances (Piccigallo, Lilley, and Miller 2012, Zverina et al. 2011). The research conducted here further supports this past research, particularly Piccigallo, Lilley, and Miller’s (2012) call for increasing the implementation of single sex support groups for men in order to maximize the effectiveness of treatment procedures.

Finally, this examination of men's experiences as college students makes important contributions to the ways that masculinity interacts with a willingness to seek treatment options for men who have experienced sexual violence. Similar to aforementioned notions regarding men seeking to 'redeem' their sense of their own masculinity through avoiding and seeking out sexual behaviors, the same notion can be applied to men's experiences with seeking a variety of treatment options. Despite a majority of men who did see out formal therapy as a way to deal with their experiences with sexual violence dictating that they waited for a long period of time before eventually seeking help, these men also described the help that this treatment facilitated, in terms of rebuilding their self-confidence and self-esteem (it should be noted that none of the men interviewed explicitly discussed whether they reported their sexually violent encounters to law enforcement or university officials or not). This seeking to 'rebuild' a man's sense of his self-esteem and masculinity can similarly be applied to the advent of seeking formalized treatment in the same way that some men avoided or sought out sexual partners; men's sense of their masculinity is central to their overall self-concept, and when this integral part of their identity is challenged, men will seek out or engage in a variety of distinct behaviors in order to reestablish and reconstruct what they perceive has been harmed. In this way, masculinity is deeply tied to a man's sense of self, which many sociologists have already discussed at length (Connell 1995, Pascoe 2007). What this research contributes is the *variety* of behaviors that men will seek out or avoid in order to maintain a coherent sense of their masculinity, and therefore, their sense of self.

#### *Ramifications for Identity*

Like masculinity, the findings regarding men's experiences with sexual violence as college students have profound impacts regarding not just men's sense of their masculinity, but ramifications for men's broad sense of who they are as individuals as well. Masculinity is just one facet of a complex web of interweaving parts that construct a person's sense of their own identity; sexual violence not only impacts masculinity, but identity from a holistic vantage point as well.

Related to the avoidance of using terminology that would situate their experiences with sexual violence within assault and rape paradigms, men also have a complex relationship with self-identifying as a survivor of sexual violence. Many men seem to actively eschew implementing the term 'survivor' as a facet of their overall identity. This sense of disconnection from this term may be related to Weiss' (2010) discussion of the ways in which our society's expectations of men are in many cases counterintuitive to overt conceptualizations regarding victimization and survivorship of sexual violence, therefore men who are victims struggle to receive legitimacy in their formalized claims of being survivors of sexual violence. The men who have been interviewed here encapsulate Weiss' (2010) work, in that they have faced similar stigmatization regarding their experiences, and therefore do not internalize the 'survivor' label as a salient facet of their identity construction.

Other men have been more open to adopting the 'survivor' moniker, but with some caveats and stipulations. At least four participants discuss the ways in which they did self-identify as a 'survivor' of sexual violence, but they also simultaneously framed this admission within the context of their own individual identity construction. Again, this supports prior sociological findings, such as work exploring Swedish men's

experiences with violence and the ways in which they augment their identities in order to maintain a coherent sense of self and also identify as victims (Åkerström, Burcar, and Wasterfors 2011). When subjected to different forms of violence, some men will not completely reject the label of ‘survivor’, but instead subtly modify this connotation so that it still coincides with their overall sense of self. In this way, men can still be ‘men’, and yet also acknowledge that they experienced some sort of act that did enable them to be a survivor. This flexibility of usage with terminology seems to imply that men attempt to preserve their sense of identity by constructing their sense of sexual violence survivorship within what they perceive to be are their own terms. This malleable sense of identity construction allows these men to ground their experiences within a survivorship framework, but at the same time maintain a sense of individual identity and autonomy.

While men’s experiences with sexual violence do seem to have a strong impact on their collective sense of self as it relates to their identity as men, surprisingly, this same impact does not hold true for men in reference to their identify as college students. Overwhelmingly, men interviewed for this research did not draw any connections between their experiences with sexual violence, and subsequent ramifications for their college careers. For many participants, this was because their experiences had occurred several years ago (e.g., during high school). Additionally, men described college as the vehicle through which they channeled their negative experiences with sexual violence. In this manner, college acted like a safe haven that some men could focus on other activities, in lieu of their experiences with sexual violence. This sentiment was echoed by several participants and, although sexual violence impacts several disparate facets of a person’s life, may complicate past assumptions regarding the ways in which people who

experience different forms of violence are able to compartmentalize their experiences as they relate to multiple facets of their lives, in terms of a ‘spillover effect’ (Katz, Lopez, and Lavan 2017). For many men, particularly those whose sexually violent experiences transpired while they were in high school, the transition to college seems to facilitate a paradigm shift within their lives which enabled them to move on from their previous experiences with sexual violence. In this case, the identity of ‘college student’ or ‘graduate student’ does not seem to be severely impacted by the experience of sexual violence.

### *Limitations*

This research does possess limitations. First, this study only focuses on men college students, and all but one of the participants came from the same university. Although the nature of qualitative research is not predicated on issues of generalizability, this nonetheless limits the scope to which these finds can be applied to a larger population of men. Additionally, the population that was included in this analysis was largely obtained using convenience sampling frames, which may have influenced the findings that are discussed in this research. Some participants may also have opted not to participate in this study who were not yet framing their experiences as sexually violent. Furthermore, the inherent nature of this research may have caused men who were eligible to participate in this study to avoid setting up an interview altogether because of the sheer difficulty that many people face when discussing such sensitive and traumatic topics.

There are also issues regarding social desirability bias that must be accounted for when conducting interviews, as participants are more apt to giving answers that they believe are socially acceptable compared to individuals who fill out surveys

anonymously; this may have been slightly quelled due to the fact that some interviews were recorded via telephone calls, but nonetheless is still noteworthy. Participants were also not offered any sort of compensation (financial or otherwise) and are therefore generally less likely to want to engage with this study (Grady 2005).

Another limitation that impacts this research is the positionality of the researcher. As a white, heterosexual, cisgender man, the PI's identity may have enacted some participants to truncate their responses to interview questions, or not allowed participants to open up regarding their experiences with sexual violence, because of a lack of perceived similarity to the PI. While these facets of the PI's identity are beyond control, they nonetheless may have impacted the data that was obtained within this study.

Additionally, this study chose to focus its lens on men who had experienced sexual violence who were also college students. This narrow focus inherently excludes men who do not have the financial or social means to attend a university, and therefore may be limiting the number of men who have experienced sexual violence and want to share their stories, but simply are not able to attend a university.

This research is also limited by the way recruitment was framed. Although recruitment materials were constructed in such a way as to attract people who identified as either men or trans men, this conceptualization of identity is still limiting, and may have therefore inadvertently excluded those individuals who do not identify within the confines of any specific gendered label.

Finally, this study was limited by the use of email as a dominant form of recruitment. Although many college students widely use email as an integral facet of their

college experience, some potential participants may have difficulty navigating such recruitment methods, particularly those students who may not feel comfortable replying to a request to participate in a research study of this nature via email recruitment.

### *Future Research*

There are multiple avenues for future research that scholars can address and employ. First, men are often understudied regarding sexual violence scholarship, and too often their voices are neglected even when their stories are explored within the context of sexual violence literature. Stereotypes regarding men and their inability to experience sexual violence are pervasive in contemporary society, and these preconceived judgements exist within the halls of academia as well. Sociological research would benefit from employing a more holistic approach to sexual violence that draws on all voices and all gender identities, such as trans men who have experienced sexual violence. While some research does explore the ways in which minority men navigate their social worlds after they experience some form of sexual violence (Brady 2008, Hequembourg et al. 2015, Hickson et al. 1994), these inquiries are largely focused on gay men's experiences, and ignore trans men in addition to gender fluid men. The inclusion of these marginalized men's voices would allow scholars to explore the ways that multiple overlapping identities react to and navigate sexual violence that is largely ignored by contemporary scholars.

Second, future scholars can provide a more balanced view regarding the ways in which men experience sexual violence by exploring men's voices beyond the confines of the college milieu. This research focused on one singular aspect of a man's life, and the ways in which it is (or in this case, is not) affected by experiencing sexual violence. By



exploring other arenas that men occupy, such as Gear's (2005) work that explores masculinity, sex, and men prisoners, a more complete picture can be constructed regarding the ways in which experiencing sexual violence influences multiple facets of one's life. Potential work could seek to explore the ways that men who are sexually assaulted or harassed navigate the declaration and documentation processes within the employment sector, in addition to investigation into the ways in which men who experience sexual violence navigate legal processes (rape kits, pressing charges, etc.) after their sexually violent encounter occurs, as these particular areas are largely understudied within sociological landscapes.

Third, future scholars can seek to involve stakeholders within various institutional organizations (such as universities), in order to enact policies that include men in formal definitions regarding sexual violence. In many cases, the idea of 'men as victims' is categorically excluded from the ways in which organizational actors define when sexual violence has occurred (Weiss 2010), and by including men who have experienced sexual violence within these governing bodies who create such categorizations, institutions can seek to create more egalitarian frames that include all people who experience sexual violence. Because virtually none of the men that were interviewed for this research reported their experiences to authorities, the implementation of this step is especially important, as a means of attempting to increase reporting among men who experience sexual violence. This could potentially be implemented by raising men's sexual violence awareness on college campuses through university sanctioned communication platforms, in addition to incorporating single sex counseling groups that focus on creating safe spaces for men survivors of sexual violence.

Finally, additional academic work would do well to investigate the ways in which formal counseling and therapy options, in addition to group therapy, benefits minority men who have experienced sexual violence. Past work has explored the efficacy of group therapy for men sexual violence survivors (Piccigallo, Lilley, and Miller 2012), but this work largely excludes gay, trans, and gender fluid men's voices. Sexually marginalized voices need to be included within this context in order to facilitate a more encompassing sociological understanding of what it means to not only be a man who has experienced sexual violence, but to occupy a minority status as man who has experienced sexual violence as well. By implementing these suggestions for future research, sociological inquiries can seek to create a more holistic view for all people who experience sexual violence.

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## APPENDICES

### i. IRB Application Approval Letter



#### Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 06/05/2019  
Application Number: AS-19-64  
Proposal Title: Hidden in Plain Sight: Men's Lived Experiences with Sexual Violence on College Campuses  
Principal Investigator: Zac Carlisle  
Co-Investigator(s):  
Faculty Adviser: HEATHER MCLAUGHLIN  
Project Coordinator:  
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Expedited  
**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved**  
**Approval Date: 06/04/2019**  
**Expiration Date: 06/03/2020**

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or

2. sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
3. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
4. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
5. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-3377, [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu)).

Sincerely,  
Oklahoma State University IRB

ii. Recruitment Flyer



**You are invited to participate in the research study which explores men's experiences with sexual violence. This study is seeking out people who identify as men who are 18 or older, who are currently enrolled as college students, and who are survivors of sexual violence to take part in this study.**

**This study is hoping to understand how identifying as a man and being a survivor of sexual violence influences one's college experiences. All data obtained by this study will be strictly confidential and kept secure (i.e., locked filing cabinet, password-protected). Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym that will not contain any identifying information.**

**If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:**

- **Answer a few short screening questions to determine if you are eligible.**
- **If you are eligible, participate in one interview (face to face, skype, or telephone).**
- **Be audiotaped during the interview.**

**Please contact the primary investigator, Zachary T. Carlisle, M.A. (Oklahoma State University), at [405-356-6041](tel:405-356-6041), or via e-mail at [zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu](mailto:zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu) for more information regarding the study, or if you are interested in participating! You can also visit [sociologyproject.com](http://sociologyproject.com) for more information about this research study!**

**Thank you very much for your time!**



"Men's Experiences with Sexual Violence Research Study" 405-356-6041 zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu sociologyproject.com	"Men's Experiences with Sexual Violence Research Study" 405-356-6041 zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu sociologyproject.com	"Men's Experiences with Sexual Violence Research Study" 405-356-6041 zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu sociologyproject.com	"Men's Experiences with Sexual Violence Research Study" 405-356-6041 zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu sociologyproject.com
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Approved:  
By: 08/09/2010  
Protocol #: 08-17-01

iii. Screener Questions

Screener questions for eligibility to participate in the study “Hidden in Plain Sight”

1. What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_

(Must be at least 18 to participant)

2. How do you currently define your gender?

- man
- woman
- Transgender man
- Transgender woman
- Queer
- \_\_\_\_\_

3. Have you ever experienced any form of sexual violence in college? (This includes rape, sexual assault, unwanted touching, or any other kind of unwanted sexual contact)

- Yes
- No

4. Are you currently enrolled as a college or university student?

- Yes
- No

#### iv. Interview Protocol

##### “Hidden In Plain Sight” – Interview Protocol

1. What is your current college major?
  - a. Where are you from?
  - b. What originally drew you to attend OSU?
  
2. As you know, the main focus of this interview is to discuss your experience(s) with sexual violence. Can you tell me about the experiences(s) that led you to participate in this interview today?
  - a. When did this happen?
    - i. Single incident, or multiple?
  - b. How did this experience impact you at the time?
  - c. How do you think that this experience impacted the way that other people saw you?
    - i. How you saw yourself?
  
3. Have you ever known anyone else who has experienced sexual violence?
  - a. If so, could you briefly describe that experience, and how it made you feel?
  - b. Did this experience affect how you saw or thought about that person?
  
4. What have you done to deal with your own experiences with sexual violence?
  - a. What strategies have helped the most?
    - i. Why?
    - ii. How have these strategies changed throughout your life?
  - b. Who did/do you go to for social support and why?
  - c. How do you feel your own experiences have impacted your mental health?
  
5. How have your experiences with sexual violence affected you personally?
  - a. Have you ever used any sexual violence-related services or resources?
    - i. Why/why not?
  - b. If you have, what challenges have you faced with these resources, if any?
  - c. What would be your ideal mental health service experience?
  - d. How would you like to see these resources improved?
  
6. How have your experiences with sexual violence impacted your school experiences?
  - a. Have you ever discussed your experiences with anyone on campus?
  - b. Have you ever used campus mental health resources?
  - c. How are you doing in your classes?
  
7. When you think of the word “masculinity”, what comes to mind?
  - a. What does masculinity look like?



- i. How do you define it?
    - ii. How does society define it?
  - b. Do you feel like you meet that definition of masculinity?
8. How have your experiences with sexual violence impacted the ways that you see yourself?
  - a. Have your experiences influenced the ways that you think about yourself as a man?
  - b. What words would you use to describe yourself as a man?
  - c. Does the way that you see yourself now fit into your idea of what a survivor of sexual violence looks like?
  - d. How does being a man relate to your sexual identity?
9. What was this interview experience like for you?
  - a. What would you change?
10. Why did you want to participate in this study?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss?

## Services List

### Oklahoma State University Resources

- **Counseling Services**
  - 405-744-5472
  - 320 Student Union
- **Victim Advocate** (<https://1is2many.okstate.edu/advocate>) - visit with a victim advocate to learn about resources available on campus. A Victim Advocate is not required to report any information about an incident to the Title IX Coordinator without a victim's permission.
  - [advocate@okstate.edu](mailto:advocate@okstate.edu)
  - 405-564-2129
- **Counseling and Counseling Psychology Clinic** - All students currently enrolled at Oklahoma State University will also receive the four sessions following the intake for FREE. Sessions following the five free sessions generally cost \$10.
  - 405-744-9188
- **Reboot Center**
  - 405-744-6434
  - 320W Student Union
- **Student Disability Services**
  - 405-744-7116
  - 315 Student Union
- **Alcohol and Substance Abuse Center**
  - 405-744-2818
  - 320 Student Union
- **Oklahoma State Queers and Allies**
  - [osqanda@gmail.com](mailto:osqanda@gmail.com)
  - Student Union Campus Life Cubicle 13

### Regional and National Resources

- **Wings of Hope** – Family crisis services.
  - 405-372-9922
  - 405-624-3020 – 24-hour helpline
- **Oklahomans for Equality** (<http://www.okeq.org/>) - seeks equal rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals and families through advocacy, education, programs, alliances, and the operation of the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center.
  - 918-743-4297
- **The Trevor Project** - crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people
  - 866-488-7386
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** - free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- 800-273-8255
- **Crisis Text Line** - free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. Text from anywhere in the USA to text with a trained Crisis Counselor
  - Text START to 741-741
- **GLBT National Youth Talkline** – telephone, online private one-to-one chat and email peer-support, as well as factual information and local resources for cities and towns across the United States.
  - 800-246-7743

## vi. Consent Form

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

- Project Title:** "Hidden in Plain Sight"
- Investigator:** Zachary T Carlisle, M.A.
- Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to conduct research that examines men's lived experiences with sexual violence, and how these experiences influence their college careers. Men are being sought to participate in interviews that discuss their experiences as a way to fill a gap in academic literature, as men's experiences with sexual violence are often understudied.
- Procedures:** Men who are current college students and who are over the age of 18 will be recruited via flyers, and participants will be asked to complete one roughly 60-90 minute interview. These interviews will be recorded for later analysis.
- Risks of Participation:** Although participation in this study does not pose more than minimal risk to the participant, the reliving of past sexual violence for participants through the interview process may cause a certain amount of emotional or psychological stress. In order to reduce these potential risks, a number of steps are being taken: 1) The participant has the option to stop the interview at any time, for any reason. 2) The participant has the option to ask that their interview data may be omitted from the study at any point in time, for any reason. 3) A list of local as well as national counseling resources will be distributed to each participant after each interview, in the event that the participant feels the needs to seek out such services.
- Benefits:** There are no financial benefits associated with this study. However, past research in this area suggests that men are less likely to come forward and discuss their experiences with sexual violence compared to women. This study provides men with the benefit of knowing that their experiences matter, that their voices can be heard within the context of sexual violence survivorship, and that scholars take their claims regarding their experiences with sexual violence seriously.



Approved: 9/04/2019  
Expires: 9/03/2021  
Protocol #: AS-19-04

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify the participant. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

All data obtained will ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. This will be accomplished by storing interview data in a locked filing cabinet within a locked office, and storing interview data analysis on a password protected computer within a locked office. The only person who will have access to this information is the primary researcher (Zachary T Carlisle). The interview data will be qualitatively analyzed, and all participants' responses will be assigned a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality. All interview materials will be destroyed by the end of the Spring 2020 semester.

**Compensation:**

There is no financial compensation associated with this study.

**Contacts:**

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

For information regarding this study, please contact the primary research:

Zachary T Carlisle, M.A.  
Phone number: 405-460-4212  
e-mail: [zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu](mailto:zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu)

Zachary T Carlisle's doctoral adviser:  
Name: Heather McLaughlin, Ph.D.  
Phone number: 405-744-6105  
e-mail: [heather.mclaughlin@okstate.edu](mailto:heather.mclaughlin@okstate.edu)

**Participant Rights:**

Participation in this study is voluntary! Subjects may terminate their participation in this study at any time without penalty.



Approved: 06/04/2019  
Expires: 06/03/2020  
Protocol #: AS-19-01

**Voluntary Nature of Study:**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Oklahoma State University. Identifiers and other related information will not be used for any future study.

**Oral Consent of Participant:**

*I have read and fully understand this consent form. I consent to participate in this study freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.*

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the prospective participant

  
Signature of Researcher

10/25/19  
Date



Approved: 06/04/2019  
Expires: 06/03/2024  
Protocol #: AS-19-44

vii. IRB Modification Approval Letter



**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

Application Number: AS-19-64  
Proposal Title: Hidden in Plain Sight: Men's Lived Experiences with Sexual Violence on College Campuses  
Principal Investigator: Zac Carlisle  
Co-Investigator(s):  
Faculty Adviser: HEATHER MCLAUGHLIN  
Project Coordinator:  
Research Assistant(s):

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved**

Study Review Level: Expedited  
Modification Approval Date: 10/01/2019

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The modification of the IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46. The original expiration date of the protocol has not changed.

Modifications Approved:

Modifications Approved: Add email recruitment

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved.
2. Submit a status report to the IRB when requested
3. Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.

4. Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the OSU IRB and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
5. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Sincerely,

Oklahoma State University IRB

223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078

Website: <https://irb.okstate.edu/>

Ph: 405-744-3377 | Fax: 405-744-4335 | [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu)



## viii. Email Recruitment

Hello,

My name is Zachary Carlisle, and I am a Ph.D. student from the Department of Sociology at Oklahoma State University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study called "Hidden in Plain Sight," which explores men's experiences with sexual assault and sexual violence. Your perspective is very important in improving resources and policies that can benefit young people like you!

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) at Oklahoma State University.

To participate, you must be at least 18 years old, currently enrolled as a college student, self-identify as a man, and are a survivor of sexual assault, sexual harassment, or sexual violence. Participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to participate without penalty.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete one tape-recorded interview in the format of your choice (face-to-face, video call, or telephone), which should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. All data will be confidential and be kept secure (i.e. locked filing cabinet, password-protected). Each participant will be assigned a generic pseudonym that will not contain any identifying information.

If you would like to participate in this study or if you have any questions related to this research, please email me at [zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu](mailto:zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu) or call me at 405-356-6041.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) by telephone at (405) 744-3377 or by email at [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

Thank you for your help and cooperation! I look forward to working with you.



Zachary T. Carlisle, M.A.  
Oklahoma State University  
Department of Sociology  
Murray 456  
Stillwater, OK 74078  
[zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu](mailto:zachary.carlisle@okstate.edu)



Approved:  
By: 00/01/0000  
Protocol #: 11-01-0000

VITA

Zachary T. Carlisle

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: MEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS COLLEGE STUDENTS

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology at  
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2020.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Sociology at  
University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska in 2016.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Philosophy and  
Sociology at University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska in 2011.

Experience:

Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Sociology, Oklahoma State  
University, 2015-2020.

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Sociology, University of Nebraska at  
Omaha, 2011-2014.

Professional Memberships:

Midwest Sociological Society, Affiliate

American Sociological Association, Affiliate

Pi Gamma Mu Honor Society, Affiliate