

ATTRIBUTIONS OF BLAME AND SOCIAL REACTIONS TO SCENARIOS OF SEXUAL  
ASSAULT OF ADULT WOMEN

By

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Clinical-Community Psychology

University of Alaska Fairbanks

August 2019

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## **Abstract**

Alaska consistently has the highest rate of sexual assault in the nation, yet research within the state has focused on stranger rape or assaults which were reported to medical or law enforcement professionals. National research suggests these characteristics are not representative of most victims. The current study fills a gap in research by examining the attitudes and reactions towards victims of stranger and acquaintance rape who have disclosed their assault to friends rather than authorities. Attribution theory was hypothesized to underlie relationships between attributions, emotional reactions, and social behaviors that victims encounter. Using an experimental design, participants were randomly assigned to read either a scenario of realistic acquaintance (common) or stereotypical (rare) stranger rape. The stereotypical assault scenario depicted a victim who was attacked outdoors by a stranger in a physically violent manner. The acquaintance rape scenario, in which a woman experiences assault inside her home by a known acquaintance who uses coercive verbal tactics, reflects characteristics of sexual assault that are experienced by most victims. The influences of type of rape, modern sexism, rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, gender, training, or experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault on participant reactions were explored. It was hypothesized that participants reading the acquaintance rape scenario, participants with higher acceptance of negative attitudes (rape myths and modern sexism) and expectations that peers accept high levels of rape myths, male participants, and those who lack training or experience responding to disclosures would report more negative attributions (high fault and blame), emotional reactions (low empathy and high anger), and social reactions to the victim and positive reactions towards the perpetrator (low attributions of fault and blame, high empathy and low anger). Results revealed that acceptance of modern sexism, rape myths, and expecting that friends accept rape

myths were associated with higher attributions of fault and blame to the victim, more anger towards the victim, more empathy felt for the perpetrator, and increased likelihood of offering the victim negative social responses. When asked what would improve response to sexual assault at UAF, participants indicated that changes in training, the UAF community, Title IX processes, awareness, resources, and demonstrating trustworthiness are important. Given these results, recommendations for stakeholders include communicating that most students do not accept modern sexism or rape myths to combat pluralistic ignorance and targeting the most prevalent rape myths in training. Changes to education and awareness efforts are recommended, including conducting sessions in-person, over several sessions, within single-gender groups, and utilization of pre- and post-training outcomes assessments to measure a variety of biases (such as rape myths). Stakeholders are encouraged to use existing research as a framework for teaching students about different types of reactions to disclosures of sexual assault, emphasizing which reactions victims experience as helpful and hurtful. Limitations and strengths of the study are also discussed.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to take a moment to thank my co-chairs, Drs. Inna Rivkin and Ellen Lopez, and committee (past and present): Drs. Valerie Gifford, Rebecca Robinson, and Mike Worrall. Your time and detailed feedback have been instrumental in the process of planning, implementing, and completing this project. Thank you for sharing the exciting moments of progress as well as guiding me through my occasional uncertainty.

This project was truly a group effort. Many members of the UAF community, including Mae Marsh, Keith Mallard, Kara Carlson, Cody Rogers, and Brittany Van Eck, offered their time, expertise, and experience to improve this project. An additional group of community members, Mark Joyce, Wendy Frandsen, Thaddeus Williamson, Dr. Amy May, and members of UAF Residence Life were kind enough to help me advertise this project. I am indebted to each of these individuals. This project is better because of their participation.

Several undergraduate students were instrumental in the completion of this work. I am incredibly thankful to Mariah Henderson, whose perspective and feedback helped me modify the Social Reactions Scale for use in the current study. To Taylor Kelly and Shania Perkins, thank you for giving so much of your time to this project and offering such detailed and thoughtful attention to the qualitative coding.

To Dr. Katrina Rast. I'm incredibly thankful that you are back in Fairbanks. Without our coffee time, there would have been far less humor, motivation, and momentum throughout the final stages of this dissertation. Thank you for letting me in on your process while you were completing your dissertation. Seeing you finish made the light at the end of the tunnel more real.

I would like to express my gratitude for my co-workers at UAF Facilities Services. You gave me a space, a home, and a community that provided more support than I can express during

the first two years of this project. In particular, thank you Marianne Freelong and Karl Bergman for our conversations. Whether we talked about this project or not, those times let me vent, kept me grounded, helped me find balance as I dove into this project.

Finally, I cannot thank my family enough. To my dear Ace, you cannot read. If you could, I doubt you would read this paper. Regardless, allowing me to interrupt your naps to pet you was soothing during my writing breaks. To my husband, Eddy Hix: I cannot count the number of times you listened to me talk about this paper. Thank you for your editing advice, your humor, the time you gave to work together, and your gentle reminders that progress was always possible. As Hawkeye Pierce, MASH 4077th, asserted in Goodbye, Farewell, and Amen (1983), “I can take umbrage, I can take the cake, I can take the A-train, I can take two and call me in the morning, but I cannot take this sitting down. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna take five.” It's time to take five for some hiking and camping.

### **Statement by the Author**

The current study focuses on reactions to adult women who experience sexual assault perpetrated by a male assailant. While the choice to focus on this population is described within the study, the author would like to acknowledge that people of all ages, gender identities, and sexual identities are targeted by and perpetrate sexual violence. The choice of demographic in this study is not intended to ignore or deny that sexual violence knows no boundaries. Similarly, the words “victim” and “survivor” will both be used to refer to the individual who has experienced sexual assault. Most often, the current study utilizes the word “victim”. The words available to describe individuals who have experienced sexual assault are attached to both sociopolitical as well as highly personal meanings to those who use them. Each word also has limitations. The word victim can be experienced as a disempowering term, describing the individual as passive during the assault and/or recovery. Conversely, the word survivor may be seen as empowering by implying that the individual actively resisted their attacker, is actively pursuing their recovery, or who feels low distress or shame. The author subjectively perceived the word “survivor” to be more appropriate when focusing on the positive aspects of recovery rather than the painful aspects of distress. While recognizing the disempowering connotations that are often attached to the word “victim”, the reader is encouraged to keep in mind that its use in this document is only to bring into sharp focus the painful experience of the woman in the current study and to explore the influences of others’ reactions towards her. The author’s choice is neither intended to suggest how the audience should label individuals who have experienced assault nor ways that individuals should label themselves after such an experience.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The current study explores sexual assault-related attributions as well as the social and emotional reactions most likely to be received by victims in response to disclosures of sexual assault at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). This study used an experimental design wherein participants were randomly assigned to read one of two scenarios (realistic versus stereotypical). Measures of attributions of blame and responsibility, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions were assessed to explore whether significant differences existed between reactions to the two scenarios.

### **Scope of Sexual Assault: Nationally and Alaska**

Sexual assault has received increased attention during the past decade. Numerous large-scale studies suggest that sexual assault is a relatively common crime that between 13-22% of women report experiencing during their lifetime (Black et al., 2011; Elliott, Mok, & Briere, 2004; Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007; Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003). Of recent interest is the prevalence of sexual assault on U.S. college campuses, where prevalence of sexual assault varies between 2.8% and 20% (Anderson & Clement, 2015; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Rates of sexual violence in Alaska have historically exceeded both college and national prevalence rates. It is estimated that between 20.9-37.1% of Alaskan women have ever experienced sexual assault (Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003; Samaniego et al., 2010).

### **Definition and Characteristics of Sexual Assault**

Sexual assault has a wide variety of definitions, historically as well as currently (Bourke, 2007; Fisher et al., 2000). Regardless of the definitions used, three elements are typically assessed to define the crime of sexual assault or rape (Cook, Gidycz, Koss, & Murphy, 2011).

These include the following: 1) the sexual acts involved, 2) tactics used by the perpetrator to complete these acts, and 3) evidence of non-consent from the victim (Cook et al., 2011). In addition to the variety of definitions existing regarding sexual assault, many labels exist referring to sexual assault and victimization (such as sexual victimization, sexual violence, rape, and sexual coercion). The current literature review clarifies and operationalizes several of these labels.

The current study is designed to fill an important gap that exists within Alaskan research, most of which has explored the experiences of a small fraction of victims (victims who report their assault to law enforcement, for instance). The current study presented participants with either a stereotypical sexual assault scenario or a scenario depicting a realistic sexual assault. Specifically, in most sexual assaults, the perpetrator is a man, the victim is a woman (Elliott et al., 2004), the assailant is acquainted with the victim (Fisher et al., 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006), the assault occurs indoors (Fisher et al., 2000), and weapons are rarely used or present during sexual assaults (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). Furthermore, most assaults result in either no or minor injury to the victim (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Dunn, Vail-Smith, & Knight, 1999; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ullman, 1996c; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993), and it is common for the victim, the perpetrator, or both to be using alcohol at the time of the assault (Abbey, Clinton, McAuslan, Zawacki, & Buck, 2002; Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, & McAuslan, 1996; Anderson & Clement, 2015; Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Clum, Nishith, & Calhoun, 2002; Edwards et al., 2014; Harrington & Leitenberg, 1994; Koss et al., 1988; Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Wechsler, 2004; Orchowski, Untied, & Gidycz, 2013a; Resnick et al., 2012; Rosay, Postle, Wood, & TePas, 2008; Rosay & Henry, 2007; Ullman, Karabatsos, & Koss, 1999). Although

victims are regarded as more credible when they resist physically, victims are likely to utilize resistance strategies that match the tactics of the perpetrator (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Santana, 2007; Krulewitz & Nash, 1979; Siegel, Sorenson, Golding, Burnam, & Stein, 1989; Ullman, 1998; Ullman & Knight, 1992). It has been estimated that 60% of victims whose experience meets a legal definition for sexual assault or rape do not label their experience as sexual assault or rape (Wilson & Miller, 2015).

### **Attributions & Rape Myths**

It is hypothesized that social attributions and myths concerning the nature of sexual assault influence whether victims attribute labels such as “assault” and “rape” to their experience. Several theories provide frameworks for understanding the formation of social attributions and myths. According to attribution theory, people are motivated to make sense of the world and their experiences within it to maintain a stable sense of the world, others, and events within their lives, including sexual assault (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kelly & Michela, 1980). One attribution theory, Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) just world theory, states that people develop three core beliefs early in life that influence how people understand and react to events such as sexual assault: 1) the world is benevolent, 2) the world is meaningful, and 3) the self is worthy. These core beliefs tend to result in beliefs such as bad things only happen to other people in their world, and that these bad things happen for a reason (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In a second attribution theory developed by Weiner (1980), attributions regarding controllability of events and emotional reactions guide how we react to people seeking help (including sexual assault victims). Finally, in the process model of emotion regulation, it is hypothesized that people modulate their emotions primarily through choices regarding situation, attention, and cognitive appraisal. Specifically, the model suggests that people regulate emotions by selecting certain

situations, making modifications to their situation, selectively attending to certain aspects of their environment, choosing cognitive responses, and modulating their emotional reactions (Gross, 1998). Regarding helping and attributional judgments, such a model predicts that people may choose whether they want to be in situations in which help is needed. When in such situations, people engage in cognitive appraisals of the situation, including potentially victims of sexual assault. These appraisals may influence emotions related to the victim of sexual assault and consequently social behaviors (Gross, 1998).

Two types of attitudinal biases may inform how attributions result in actions towards rape victims: sexism and rape myth acceptance. Sexism is a multifaceted construct including discriminatory and prejudicial beliefs about gender (Campbell, Schellenberg, & Senn, 1997). Sexism may bias potential support providers of sexual assault victims to judge the victim's actions based on how well the victim fits into potentially prejudiced or stereotypical beliefs about gender. Similarly, rape myths may also bias responses to sexual assault victims. Rape myths have been defined as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists-in creating a climate hostile to rape victims" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). A wide variety of rape myths have been identified and grouped into categories (Feild, 1978; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). These categories include the attitude that rape prevention is a woman's responsibility (Feild, 1978) and disbelief in rape victims (Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985). These myths may serve several functions, including preservation of fundamental attributions about controllability, the world, and self. One specific myth tends to color attributions made about rape and rape victims: that rape is real only when the assault is violent, committed by strangers, outdoors, at night, and against a victim who struggles physically (Koss & Harvey,

1991; Vandiver & Dupalo, 2012; Weis & Borges, 1973). Additionally, rape myths and related attributions may inform social reactions to sexual assault.

### **Social Reactions to Sexual Assault**

Most victims report that they confide in others after experiencing sexual assault (Ahrens, Cabral, & Abeling, 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Littleton, Axsom, Bretkopf, & Berenson, 2006; Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005; Ullman, 1996a). Sexual assault is rarely reported to authorities, which suggests that many disclosures of sexual assault are made to other formal (counselors, medical professionals, social workers, etc.) and informal (family, friends, romantic partners, etc.) support sources (Belknap, 2010; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003b; Kilpatrick et al., 2007). When sharing their experience with others, victims often worry about the type of social responses that they may receive (Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Rosay & Henry, 2007). Victims often describe emotional support, tangible aid, and informational support as helpful (Ullman, 2010). Victim blaming, stigma, reactions meant to distract the victim, reactions focused on the support provider, and controlling responses are often classified as being negative reactions (Ullman, 2010).

Although victims tend to report receiving more positive than negative reactions, negative reactions tend to impact the recovery process more than positive reactions (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007). Specifically, receiving a greater number of negative reactions has been linked to victims subjectively feeling worse after disclosure, increased self-blame, higher revictimization rates, and increases in symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2007; Mason, Ullman, Long, Long, & Starzynski, 2009; Orchowski et al., 2013a). Attributions about rape are likely to affect

perpetration of sexual assault, the social reactions that women receive to disclosures of sexual assault, and consequently the recovery process experienced by sexual assault victims.

### **Significance of This Study**

Literature since the 1980's reveals a great deal about the scope and nature of sexual assault in the U.S. Sexual violence is prevalent within the U.S., with research revealing estimates that between 10-20% of women have experienced sexual violence during their lifetimes (Black et al., 2011; Elliott et al., 2004; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004; Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003). Young adult women may be particularly vulnerable, with research suggesting that a significant portion of sexual assaults happen to women between ages 18 and 24 (Breiding et al., 2014; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Sinozich & Langton, 2014). Yet, little is known about the experiences of women in Alaska following sexual assault. Limited research suggests that just less than 1% of college women in Alaska experience sexual assault in a one-year span, many of whom are most likely to disclose their assault to friends, intimate partners, and acquaintances (Blumenstein & Myrstol, 2016; Myrstol & Blumenstein, 2016). Many of the studies that have been conducted in Alaska focused on a small subset of rape victims, such as victims of stranger rape and victims who chose to report their assault to the police (Brems & Wagner, 1994; Rosay & Henry, 2007; Rosay et al., 2008). To examine the potential experience of most adult victims of sexual assault, the current study uses scenarios that focus on adult women as victims. It deserves emphasis that other groups, such as minors, elders, and men, are also victims of sexual assault. A better understanding of rape-specific attributions and social reactions related to adult women who are victims within a major university setting may help inform sexual assault response and awareness training within Alaska.

## **Proposed Study**

This study proposed to measure attributions of blame and responsibility, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions towards an adult woman who is a victim of sexual assault and a male perpetrator presented in two scenarios: one realistic acquaintance rape scenario and one stereotypical stranger rape scenario.

## **Problem Statements**

### **Specific aim #1**

Explore how the type of sexual assault influences the reactions of the campus community, including attributional judgments, emotional reactions, and social reactions.

### **Hypothesis**

Relative to participants exposed to the acquaintance rape scenario, participants exposed to the stranger rape scenario were expected to endorse more positive social reactions, fewer negative social reactions, stronger agreement that the perpetrator is responsible and to blame, stronger disagreement that the victim is responsible and to blame, more positive emotional reactions (less anger, more empathy) towards the victim, and more negative reactions (more anger and less empathy) towards the perpetrator.

### **Specific aim #2**

Explore how rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, and gender affect and moderate social reactions, expected peer social reactions, judgments and emotional reactions to a stranger versus an acquaintance rape scenario.

### **Hypothesis**

Higher rape myth acceptance, peer rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism were each expected to strengthen the trends hypothesized in aim #1 (see above). Men were expected to

exhibit the patterns from specific aim #1 (see above) more strongly than women. Independent of scenario, gender, rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism were also expected to exert significant direct influence on judgments, attributions, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected social reactions. Regardless of sexual assault scenario, male participants, and participants with higher rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism, were expected to rate the perpetrator as less responsible and blameworthy, respond to the perpetrator with less anger and more empathy, report a higher number of negative social reactions, and report a higher number of negative expected peer social reactions compared to female participants and participants with lower scores on rape myth acceptance and modern sexism.

### **Specific aim #3**

Understand the influence of training and relevant experience on attributional judgments of fault and blame, and emotional reactions towards the victim versus perpetrator. Understand the influence of training on social reactions and expected peer social reactions towards victims.

### **Hypothesis**

Participants who lack training or experience responding to sexual assault disclosures were expected to respond in the manner described in specific aim #1. Students who have had training or experience responding to disclosures were expected to, across both sexual assault scenarios, express more positive reactions towards victims (decreased judgments of blame and fault, increased empathy, decreased anger, higher likelihood of offering positive social reactions, lower likelihood of offering negative social reactions) and predominantly negative reactions towards perpetrators (endorse more of blame and fault, experience more anger, and experience less empathy).



#### **Specific aim #4**

Examine relationships between attributions, emotional reactions, and social responses.

#### **Hypothesis**

It was hypothesized that, regarding both the victim and perpetrator, there would be significant positive correlations between attributions of fault, blame, feelings of anger, and negative social reactions. Additionally, it was hypothesized that attributions of fault and blame would be negatively correlated with feelings of empathy and positive social reactions.

#### **Specific aim #5**

Understand what participants perceive would help improve campus responses to sexual assault.

#### **Hypothesis**

No hypothesis is put forth for this aim. Instead, a content analysis was used to reveal themes across participant responses.

#### **Specific aim #6**

Examine relationships of demographic factors (e.g. age, undergraduate versus graduate student status) with judgments, emotional reactions, rape myth acceptance, and emotional reactions to the scenarios.

#### **Hypothesis**

No hypothesis is put forth for this aim. Instead, relationships between variables were explored.

#### **Specific aim #7**

Examine whether a relationship exists between participants reported reactions and expected peer reactions to the scenario (specifically rape myth acceptance and social reactions)

## **Hypothesis**

Participants exposed to both scenarios would expect their peers to respond in ways that closely mirror the participant's own reactions.

This study informs improvement of sexual assault awareness and response training by identifying problematic attributions and reactions that can be targeted while also identifying positive attributions and reactions that can be reinforced.

## **Design**

To achieve these aims, the proposed study utilized a randomized, between-subjects experimental design. Undergraduate and graduate student participants at UAF completed an online survey in which they were randomized to read one of two rape scenarios: (1) a stranger sexual assault (stereotypical scenario), or (2) an acquaintance sexual assault. The study used a variety of quantitative assessments to measure blame and responsibility placed on the victim and perpetrator, expected peer rape myth acceptance, social reactions to disclosure of sexual assault, expected social reactions of peers to disclosure of sexual assault, emotional responses afforded to the victim and perpetrator, social desirability, rape myth acceptance, and endorsement of modern sexism. One open-ended question was administered to assess what participants believe UAF could be doing to prevent and respond to sexual assault.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Sexual assault has been widely researched beginning in the 1970's and 1980's during the rise of feminism. The literature that exists regarding sexual assault is vast. Within Alaska, where the rates of sexual assault are among the highest in the nation (Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003), research is scarce. Additionally, of research within Alaska that explores the victim's experience of seeking support post-assault, only a small fraction of victims is represented. Specifically, existing Alaskan research about victim experiences has focused on victims who reported their assault to sexual assault response teams in Alaska, which include forensic nurses, law enforcement officials, and a victim advocate (Rosay & Henry, 2008). As will be discussed in depth in this literature review, most victims do not report their assault to law enforcement, nor do they acknowledge their experience as being sexual assault or rape.

One study that was completed in Alaska asked participants what attributions and judgments they would have about a victim and perpetrator in several scenarios of sexual assault or robbery (Brems & Wagner, 1994). Specifically, the scenarios depicted the setting as being either outside or inside an office building, the stranger attacking a woman using physical violence, and the woman resisting using active verbal and physical tactics. Participants in this research reported largely favorable judgments and attributions of responsibility, namely the perpetrator was attributed more fault for rape than for theft. A limitation of this study was that the scenarios used failed to capture key elements of most actual sexual assaults. Specific characteristics of the assault in these scenarios departed from what is typical of the majority of sexual assaults, including the location, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, the

role of alcohol, the level of violence inherent in the assault, and the relationship between the perpetrator's tactics and victim's resistance strategies.

The current study was designed to address this limitation by presenting participants with a scenario that more closely mirrors what most sexual assault victim's experience. The current study assessed the attributional processes, rape myth acceptance, emotional reactions, and social reactions likely encountered by the average victim in an Alaskan college setting. The following literature review will elucidate characteristics seen in most sexual assaults based on empirical research. Also, the literature review will highlight the importance of increasing understanding of the experience of sexual assault victims seeking social support in the context of Alaska. To illustrate these points, the literature review is divided into the following four broad sections:

1. Epidemiological research is presented to highlight the elevated rate of sexual assault and rape in two populations: college students and Alaska.
2. Characteristics common to sexual assault are reviewed for two purposes. First, the review details the ways in which research within Alaska has focused on a minority of victims. Second, literature highlighting characteristics common to most sexual assaults is reviewed to support the design of the current study, which aims to explore the experiences had by most sexual assault victims. The literature review focuses on the following characteristics of sexual assault: Location, relationship between victim and perpetrator, prevalence and severity of injury, type of resistance as it relates to perpetrator tactics, and how victims label sexual assault experiences. The importance of each of these characteristics as they relate to the cognitions (attributions and rape myth acceptance) and behavioral reactions of support providers is explored.

3. Attribution theory is briefly reviewed to highlight the cognitive processes that organize reactions to sexual assault victims. Sexist attitudes, rape myths, and both types of attributional processes are reviewed to illustrate the expectations and beliefs that guide both victims' and support providers' responses to sexual assault.
4. Social reactions to sexual assault are described to illustrate the impact that social reactions have on victims' adjustment and to demonstrate the value that this research can provide to awareness programs and training.

### **Definitions and Prevalence of Sexual Assault**

Sexual assault has recently been identified in the media and among feminist groups as a nation-wide concern. Consequently, research interest in rape-related topics has increased since the 1970's (Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997). Reported prevalence rates have been variable, which may be partially due to variations across studies in the definition used by the researchers for "rape", "sexual assault", and "sexual victimization" (Cook et al., 2011; Lynch, 1996).

Definitions of what constitutes sexual assault and rape have varied throughout history, traditionally being defined as a crime involving defiling of a man's property (see Bourke, 2007 for a historical review). In modern society, sexual assault is defined in research as well as federal and state laws (Fisher et al., 2000; Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Rape is most often defined as an unwanted sexual act involving oral, anal, or vaginal penetration. When the perpetrator deliberately gives the victim drugs without her permission or tries to get her drunk and then commits rape, this is defined as drug or alcohol facilitated rape. When a victim chooses to use drugs or alcohol to the point of either being too drunk or high to know what she is doing or control her behavior and a perpetrator rapes her, this is often labeled incapacitated rape. When a

perpetrator uses force or the threat of force to rape a woman or injures a woman during rape, this is often defined as forcible rape. However, when a perpetrator uses threat of non-physical punishment, promise of reward, pestering, or verbal pressure to rape a woman, this is labeled sexual coercion (Fisher et al., 2000; Kilpatrick et al., 2007). For the purposes of this literature review a variety of terms will be used to refer to any crime within the broad category of sexual violence. These terms will be varied to reflect what various source articles studied as well as to embody the values of inclusion and diversity.

Narrower definitions of what constitutes sexual assault typically have resulted in lower incidence rates in the population. For instance, until 2012 the Federal Bureau of Investigation defined the crime of rape as nonconsensual penile-vaginal penetration (Johnson, 2012). This definition excluded several types of victimizations, such as those involving sexual acts other than penile-vaginal intercourse. Several studies illustrate how definition of sexual assault results in divergent estimates of prevalence. In one nationwide survey measuring sexual victimization broadly, women were classified as having experienced sexual assault if they stated they have experienced unwanted sexual contact (ranging from touch to intercourse) while being threatened or physically forced (Elliott et al., 2004). Of these women surveyed, 22% of women reported having experienced sexual assault in their lifetime (Elliott et al., 2004). In a study using a narrower definition that only measured victimization including penetration by use or threat of force, only 13.4% of adult women in the U.S. were projected to have been victims of completed forcible rape in their lifetime (Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003).

The sample with which the research is conducted also influences the estimated rates of victimization. Study samples often are limited to adult sexual assault victims chosen to be representative of either the nation or college campuses regarding age, gender, and ethnicity.

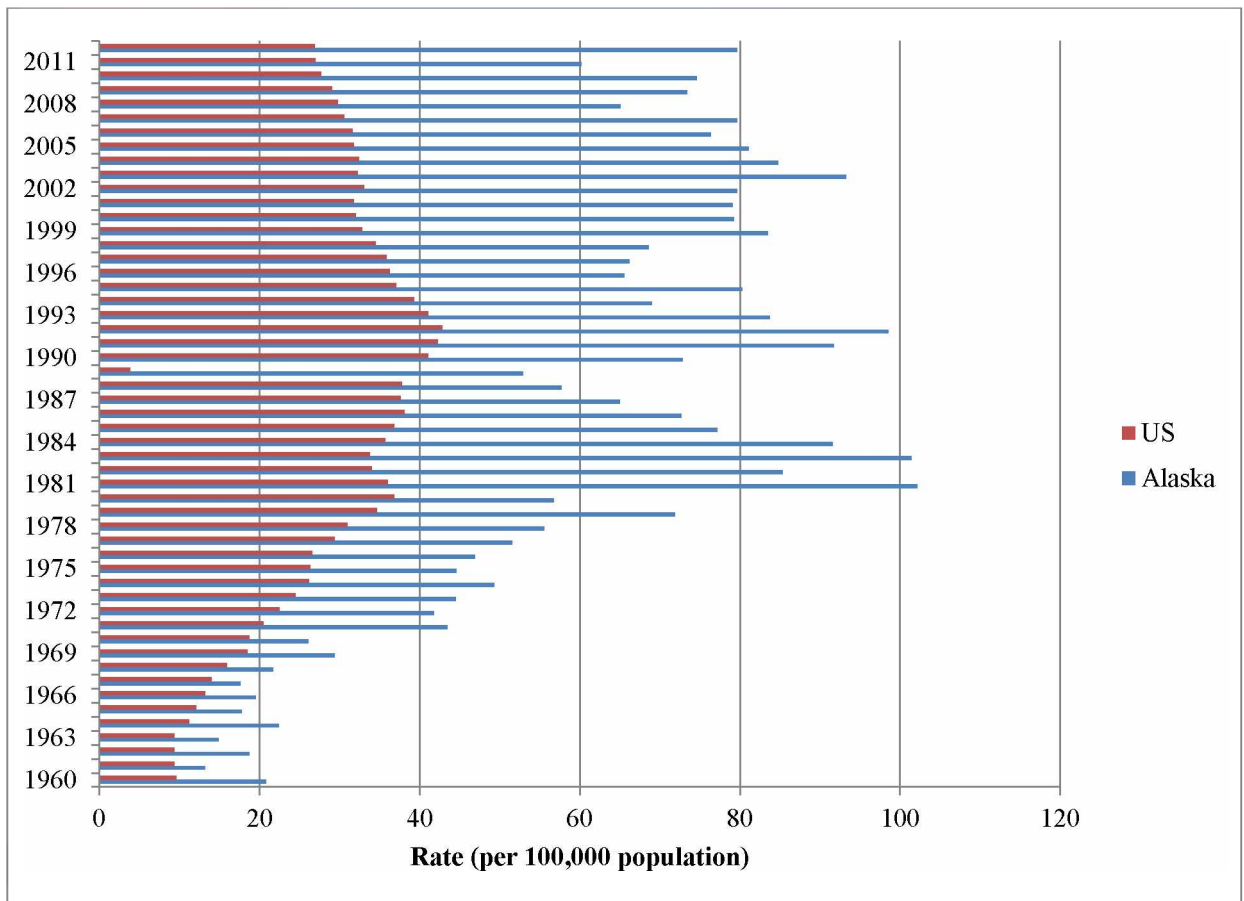
According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Black et al., 2011), approximately 20% of women and 1% of men reported having experienced rape during their lifetime, which was defined as completed or attempted forced penetration. In another study that utilized a large sample of women both nationally and from U.S. colleges, projections indicated that 18% of women have been raped in their lifetime (Kilpatrick, et al., 2007). One national survey found that 1.3% of women reported having been sexually victimized during the previous year alone (Truman, Langton, & Planty, 2013).

According to a review of rape and sexual assault statistics collected by the U.S. Department of Justice, women of college age have the highest rates of sexual victimization compared to other age groups (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). Estimates suggest that approximately 20-25% of college women experience sexual assault while in college (Anderson & Clement, 2015; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Defining sexual victimization in narrow ways, such as only assessing rape (as defined above), yields deflated prevalence estimates ranging from between 4-11% (Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). When sexual victimization is defined in a broader manner that includes unwanted sexual touch, prevalence estimates rises to between 53-62% (Kanin, 1957; Koss et al., 1987). Research suggests that the first year of college carries elevated risk for women, with estimates of sexual victimization (broadly defined to include unwanted sexual contact) as high as 62%, with 15% reporting that they experienced attempted or completed incapacitated rape (Carey, Durney, Shepardson, & Carey, 2015; Fisher et al., 2000; Kanin, 1957). It is estimated that 26% of women have experienced an attempted or completed incapacitated sexual assault by the start of their second year of college (Carey et al., 2015). Another perspective on risk of sexual assault in college is that within any given year the risk for sexual assault is higher than in the general population of women. It is estimated that

5.15% of college women experience rape within a given calendar compared 0.94% of the general population of women (Kilpatrick et al., 2007).

Within Alaska the prevalence rates of sexual assault have been estimated as being higher than those of the U.S. as a whole (see Figure 1). In one survey that measured the prevalence of completed, forcible rape, it was estimated that 20.9% of Alaskan women had been victims in their lifetime (Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003). In a second study designed to represent adult Alaskan women's experience of drug or alcohol incapacitated rape or forcible rape, it was estimated that 37% of adult Alaskan women had experienced rape in their lifetime (Samaniego et al., 2010). The data from the survey also suggest 91,725 women in Alaska experience sexual assault in their lifetime (Samaniego et al., 2010). As shown in Figure 1, the rate of sexual assault in Alaska has consistently been higher than that of the rest of the U.S. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012).





*Figure 1.* Rates of sexual assault in Alaska historically. Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation (September 2012).

It is noteworthy that the prevalence of rape in Alaska is so high. However, more shocking is that these prevalence estimates are likely to be conservative for several reasons (Samaniego et al., 2010). First, stigma may have prevented some women from reporting sexual violence during the Samaniego and colleagues study. Second, while the authors attempted to gather a representative sample, it likely did not represent certain groups of women. The methodology may have excluded women who were homeless, lacked access to a phone (such as those who were incarcerated or residing in a medical facility), and those who did not speak English. Third, both Alaskan studies described above did not measure all types of sexual violence that are defined by the Alaska statutes as comprising sexual violence (Samaniego et al., 2010).

Specifically, while not included in the study definition of rape used by both studies, Alaska statutes include within the definition of sexual assault in the first-degree sexual penetration without consent by a perpetrator who did not use or threaten to use force (Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003; Samaniego et al., 2010; Sexual offenses, AK). Similarly, Alaska statutes include sexual contact without consent within the definition of sexual assault in the second and third degrees, which would not have been measured in these studies (Ruggiero & Kilpatrick, 2003; Samaniego et al., 2010; Sexual offenses, AK). Also excluded would be some instances of sexual assault in the fourth degree, which involves sexual contact perpetrated by an employee of a state correctional facility against an individual in custody. Taken together, it may be concluded that both surveys conducted for the purposes of estimating the prevalence of sexual violence in Alaska likely resulted in conservative estimates.

What is more, the averages reported by these studies may mask a more insidious pattern of violence within Alaska. There is evidence that sexual violence inordinately affects certain ethnic groups within Alaska. As of 2007, 19% of Alaskans self-identified as being Native Alaskan (Amnesty International, 2007). However, of sexual assaults reported to Alaska State Troopers (AST), approximately 60% of victims and suspects are classified as Alaska Native (Rosay et al., 2008). As will be described in detail in the social reactions section of this literature review, most victims of sexual violence indicate that they never reported their victimization to law enforcement. Therefore, it is unknown whether Alaska Native victims are compelled to report their assault to law enforcement more than other ethnic and racial groups. This would create the appearance of inflated rates of sexual assault among Alaska Native peoples. However, in concert with the consistently elevated rate of sexual violence in Alaska compared to the U.S.,

the potential that Alaska Native people experience or perpetrate sexual assault at higher rates than Caucasians is cause for concern.

### **Characteristics of Sexual Assault**

Given many existing misunderstandings that will be described in detail in the rape myths section of this literature review, the current study presented participants with either a realistic acquaintance rape scenario or a stereotypical stranger rape scenario to assess differences in attributional judgments, emotional reactions, and social responses. This section of the literature review will highlight in depth what is meant by a realistic rape scenario. Characteristics of sexual assault that have been the subject of research include the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator, the location of the assault, the use or absence of weapons or force in the perpetration of the assault, alcohol use at the time of the assault, and resistance strategies used by the victim. Each of these will be reviewed below to clarify common characteristics of sexual assaults nationally and, where available, on college campuses or within Alaska.

The relationship between the victim and perpetrator has been studied for several decades. Early criminology research concluded that the perpetrators of most rapes were strangers to their victims (Mulvihill, Tumin, & Curtis, 1970). As research evolved, this conclusion has been revealed to be more of a reflection of the types of sexual violence police were willing to investigate rather than a reflection of the reality of sexual violence at the time (Brownmiller, 1975). More recent national data suggests that at least 72-83% of women described the perpetrator as someone they knew (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Jones, Wynn, Kroeze, Dunnuck, & Rossman, 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Ullman & Siegel, 1993). In fact, research suggests that in a significant percentage of cases, the victim knew her assailant very well prior to the assault (Abbey et al., 2002).

Among college students, a similar pattern has been found (Lawyer, Resnick, Bakanic, Burkett, & Kilpatrick, 2010). In large samples of college women, approximately 85-97% of sexual assaults involved a perpetrator who was a male acquaintance (Abbey et al., 1996; Fisher et al., 2000; Koss et al., 1988; Orchowski et al., 2013a). Victims also frequently characterize their relationship to the perpetrator prior to assault as a dating partner (Abbey et al., 1996) or friend (Lawyer et al., 2010). Among a small convenience sample of college students, only 6% reported that the attacker was a stranger (Edwards et al., 2014).

Research from within Alaska, though similar in some ways to national and college student data, presents a more ambiguous picture. Among sexual victimizations reported to AST, only 2% involved an offender who was a stranger to the victim (Rosay et al., 2008). Most victims in these cases described the perpetrator as a friend or acquaintance (Rosay et al., 2008). Similarly, when data from sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs from across Alaska was examined, only 14% of offenders were described as strangers, and most victims described their offenders as people who had been a friend or acquaintance (Rosay & Henry, 2008). Likewise, in a different dataset acquired by SANE programs from across Alaska, 97% of offenders were described as acquaintances to the victim (Rosay & Henry, 2007). In all three of the studies within Alaska in which the relationship between the victim and offender was measured, data were collected from victims whose assaults were reported to either a medical organization or law enforcement. As will be reviewed later in this section, national data suggests that few victims report their assault to law enforcement and those assaults reported to law enforcement tend to overrepresent rape perpetrated by strangers who threatened or used weapons. In a survey of university students in Alaska, less than 1% reported sexual assault to the police (Myrstol & Blumenstein, 2016). There are no community-based estimates of the

percentage of women in Alaska who chose to (or not to) report sexual assault to law enforcement, which makes interpretation of existing data difficult. National trends would suggest that the actual percentage of Alaskan women sexually victimized by acquaintances (versus strangers) is higher than what is reported in existing Alaskan research. Although more research is needed in this area, what is apparent is that Alaskan women report they are at greatest risk of victimization by people they know as acquaintances or friends.

The locations that women are at most risk of sexual violence are in their homes or the homes of their friends and acquaintances (Abbey et al., 1996; Dunn et al., 1999; Fisher et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2004). According to data collected between 1994-1996 by the National Violence Against Women survey, 94.3% of assaults occurred indoors (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002). Although there is evidence to suggest that victims are at risk of stranger rape in their own home, stranger assaults occur in vehicles and outdoors more frequently than do acquaintance assaults (Jones et al., 2004). For college women, dorms and off campus residences are areas of greatest risk. Research suggests that most assaults, approximately 66% across several studies, occur in a residence, most often of the victim or the perpetrator (Abbey et al., 1996; Abbey et al., 2002; Fisher et al., 2000). Among college students, another location in which assaults may be likely is house parties (Lawyer et al., 2010).

Within Alaska, what is known about where sexual violence most frequently occurs comes from community samples. Although data within Alaska suggests that between 70-87% of sexual assaults took place within a private residence, there are contradictions regarding in whose residence assaults most frequently occurred (Rosay & Henry, 2007; Rosay et al., 2008). According to AST data and one set of SANE data, assaults in residences occurred most often in the suspected perpetrator's residence (Rosay & Henry, 2008; Rosay et al., 2008). According to a

second set of SANE data within Alaska, most assaults occurred in the victim's home (Rosay & Henry, 2007). Regardless of the specific residence, research suggests that Alaskan women are at greatest risk of sexual victimization not just by someone they know, but also in their home or the homes of their friends and acquaintances.

The level of violence that occurs during sexual assault has been examined in several ways: examination of legal documents from offenders incarcerated in maximum security prisons or psychiatric units, SANE data, and in surveys of violence among national samples. Violence can be indicated by several characteristics: use or threat with a weapon during an assault, violent acts during an assault, and victim injury following an assault. In a sample skewed towards the extreme end of violence (offenders institutionalized in a maximum security psychiatric unit), half of offenses involved weapons (Quinsey & Upfold, 1985). Several key research findings are necessary to put this into perspective. As will be described in the social reactions section of this literature review, it is estimated that between 77-98% of sexual assaults are never reported to police (Ahrens et al., 2009; Anderson & Clement, 2015; Belknap, 2010; Dunn et al., 1999; Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003b; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 1988; Sinozich & Langton, 2014; Ullman, 1996c). Of assaults reported, it has been estimated that between 5-22% result in conviction (Bouffard, 2000; as cited in Murphy, Banyard, & Fennessey, 2013). Sexual assaults characterized by a stranger attacker, and those involving the use of a gun or knife are most likely to result in the decision to press charges (Bouffard, 2000; Spohn & Holleran, 2004). In other words, the level of violence present during these rapes represents a miniscule segment of the population of rape victims. In national and college samples of sexual assault victims, no weapons were present or used in 90% of victimizations (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004; Ullman, 1996c; Ullman et al., 1999). While

research suggests that weapon use during sexual assault is rare, perpetrators of stranger rape are more likely to brandish weapons (Koss et al., 1988). Within Alaska, 99% of assaults reported to AST did not involve weapon use (Rosay et al., 2008). Given that most victims never report their assault to law enforcement, Alaska's data may be biased. It can be concluded, however, that it is likely that few sexual assaults within Alaska involve violence inflicted by a weapon.

Considering injuries as a measure of level of violence in sexual assault, existing literature indicates that most rapes do not result in injuries (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Dunn et al., 1999; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ullman, 1996c; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993). When sampling from case reports of incarcerated rapists, arguably the most aggressive subsection of sexual assault perpetrators, it is estimated that between 37-61% of victims sustain injuries (Jones et al., 2004; Koss et al., 1988; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993). These figures are derived from samples overrepresenting stranger rape, a type of rape in which victims are more likely to experience both minor and serious injury (Jones et al., 2004; Koss et al., 1988). Estimates of how frequently sexual assaults result in injury vary from 10-52% (Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Ullman & Siegel, 1993). Generally, those who report injuries report them to be minor injuries, such as scratches, bruises, or welts (Abbey et al., 2002; Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Ullman, 1996c). Several issues are noteworthy regarding these data. Although evidence generally suggests that most victims do not experience injury, some of the higher estimates reported in these studies may over-estimate the proportion of victims experiencing injury. For example, in the estimated 52% of victims who experience injury in one national survey (Kilpatrick et al., 2007), the study defined sexual assault in such a way that the sample included

only women whose perpetrators used physical force or threat of physical force. This definition, in and of itself, may have inflated the estimated number of women who experienced injury.

This limitation is especially relevant when considering Alaskan victims. Alaska state statutes do not require the perpetrator to use force to define their actions as sexual assault (Sexual offenses, AK). Within Alaska, the only available data concerning injuries related to sexual assault comes from SANE examinations and AST reports. SANE data estimates that 43% of victims sustain genital injuries, particularly lacerations, abrasions, and bruising, and 55% of victims experience non-genital injury, particularly bruises and abrasions (Rosay & Henry, 2008). It is hypothesized that, because the data were collected from a sample of victims who presented to nurses for examination, they may overrepresent victims who sustained injuries. Data from assaults reported to AST indicates that up to 19% of victims report injury (Rosay et al., 2008). Specifically, 19% of victims reported experiencing general pain, 10% bruises and swelling, and less than 3% lacerations, bite marks, or bone fractures (Rosay et al., 2008).

Another characteristic of sexual assault relevant to the current study is alcohol or drug use. When surveyed about substance use at the time of sexual assault, alcohol is the most commonly reported consumed substance (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Lawyer et al., 2010). Research suggests that it is common for the perpetrator, victim, or both to consume alcohol prior to sexual assaults (Abbey et al., 1996; Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). It is estimated that victims of between 3-79% of assaults drink alcohol at the time or prior to sexual assault (Abbey et al., 1996; Clum et al., 2002), though many surveys indicate that between 40-60% of victims had consumed alcohol prior to experiencing sexual assault (Abbey et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2014; Harrington & Leitenberg, 1994; Koss et al., 1988; Ullman et al., 1999; Orchowski, Untied, & Gidycz, 2013a). In most research, both the victim and perpetrator



consumed alcohol prior to the sexual assault (Abbey et al., 1996). Victims report that perpetrators consumed alcohol prior to 20-63% of reported assaults (Abbey et al., 1996; Abbey et al., 2002; Brecklin & Ullman, 2002; Edwards et al., 2014; Koss et al., 1988; Ullman et al., 1999).

Data gathered within Alaska also suggests that alcohol is often consumed prior to sexual assaults. According to data from assaults reported to AST, approximately 43% of suspects and 27% of victims had been using alcohol at the time of the assault (Rosay et al., 2008). According to one data set collected by SANE nurses around Alaska, 65% of victims were alcohol intoxicated at the time of the assault, 28% were passed out or blacked out, and 81% of perpetrators had reportedly used alcohol (Rosay & Henry, 2007). In a survey of students at one Alaskan university, students suggested that little blame is assigned to the perpetrators of assaults in which alcohol was consumed and it was unclear whether consent was given (Blumenstein, 2016).

Resistance tactics used by victims is another assault-level characteristic relevant to the current study. Resistance to sexual assault has been defined as “any action taken to ward off the attack” (Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993, p. 1633). The types of resistance against sexual assault have been classified in a variety of ways, though common categories include force versus nonforceful methods (Clay-Warner, 2002; Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman, 1998; Ullman et al., 1999; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993) and verbal versus physical methods (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003; Fisher et al., 2007; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ruback & Ivie, 1988; Ullman, 1998; Ullman & Knight, 1992; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993). Examples of forceful verbal resistance strategies include screaming (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003; Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 1999; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993), yelling (Fisher et al., 2007; Zoucha-Jensen

& Coyne, 1993), trying to get attention (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003); attempts to scare or warn off the offender (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003), and threatening the offender (Fisher et al., 2007). Non-forceful verbal resistance includes pleading (Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 1999; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993), crying (Ullman et al., 1999; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993), reasoning or negotiating with the offender (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003; Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 1999), saying stop or assertively refusing (Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 1999; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993), quarrelling or arguing with the offender (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003; Ullman et al., 1999); and attempting to persuade or appease the offender (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003). Distinctions between forceful and non-forceful physical resistance have been less clear than distinctions between types of verbal resistance. For instance, fleeing has been classified as forceful (Ullman et al., 1999) and non-forceful (Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman, 1998). However, less contested examples of forceful physical resistance include pushing away, hitting, scratching, fighting, and attacking the offender with a weapon (Fisher et al., 2007; Ullman, 1998; Ullman et al., 1999). Examples of non-forceful physical resistance include trying to avoid the offender and removing the offender's hands (Fisher et al., 2007).

Resistance to sexual assault in some manner is common. An estimated 47-91% of victims use resistance of some kind during their assaults (Clay-Warner, 2002; Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher et al., 2007; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ruback & Ivie, 1988; Siegel et al., 1989; Ullman et al., 1999). The type of resistance used during sexual assault has been of interest to researchers aiming to determine whether resistance is effective in preventing completed rape, whether resistance results in greater injury to victims, and what influences the types of resistance victims use during an assault. Some studies suggest that using physical resistance against sexual assault

is common, with estimates suggesting victims use physical resistance during between 39-70% of assaults (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003; Fisher et al., 2000; Koss et al., 1988; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ruback & Ivie, 1988; Zoucha-Jensen & Coyne, 1993). However, other studies report that physical resistance is used less frequently, estimating that between 10-28% of victims use physical resistance strategies (Edwards et al., 2014; Siegel et al., 1989; Ullman, 1998; Ullman & Knight, 1991; Ullman & Knight, 1992; Ullman & Knight, 1995).

Two factors are often cited in research as significantly related to type of resistance used by victims. First, offender use of physically violent tactics is related to victims increasingly using physical resistance strategies (Edwards et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2007; Siegel et al., 1989; Ullman, 1998; Ullman et al., 1999; Ullman & Knight, 1992). In the context of the most physically aggressive attacks by perpetrators that were later incarcerated in maximum security facilities, between 12-22% of victims reported using forceful physical resistance (Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ullman & Knight, 1992; Ullman & Knight, 1993). The second factor that influences resistance strategy used by victims is the degree of acquaintance between the victim and perpetrator. When a victim either has or has had an intimate relationship with the perpetrator, she is more likely to use either non-forceful or non-physical resistance strategies (Clay-Warner, 2002; Clay-Warner, 2003; Ruback & Ivie, 1988).

One final characteristic of sexual assault relevant to the current study is how victims of sexual assault label or acknowledge their experience. Victims do not always acknowledge their experience as sexual assault or rape (Dardis, 2011; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003a; Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 1988; Layman, Gidycz, & Lynn, 1996; Littleton et al., 2006; Littleton, Axsom, & Grills-Taquechel, 2009; McMullin & White, 2006; Orchowski, Untied, & Gidycz, 2013b; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). Such women have been referred to as “hidden” or

“unacknowledged” rape victims (Koss, 1985). An unacknowledged rape victim, as defined by a pioneer in the field, Mary Koss (1985), is “a woman who has experienced a sexual assault that would legally qualify as rape but who does not conceptualize herself as a rape victim” (p. 195). Similarly, a hidden rape victim has been defined as a woman who has experienced rape but “that has never reported their experience to a rape crisis center or to police” (p. 193).

When 28 studies of acknowledgement status sampling nearly 6,000 victims were combined for analysis, results suggested that on average 60% of victims were unacknowledged (Wilson & Miller, 2015). However, the percent of sexual assault or rape victims who were unacknowledged ranged across studies from 27% to 88% (Wilson & Miller, 2015). When unacknowledged victims were asked about their perceptions of their assault, victims’ perceptions included that they were unclear whether a crime had been committed or that harm was intended (Cohn, Zinzow, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2013; Fisher et al., 2000), they were unsure that the incident was serious enough to report (Cohn et al., 2013), they defined it as a crime but not sexual assault (Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Layman et al., 1996), they perceived the assault as a serious miscommunication (Layman et al., 1996) or they experienced it as unpleasant but not a crime (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Within Alaskan university students, limited research suggests that students often do not define sexual assault in the same way as they are defined per university policies (Blumenstein, 2016). In other words, it is likely that many Alaskan university students do not label as sexual assault those experiences which meet university and potentially legal definitions of sexual assault (Blumenstein, 2016).

Several characteristics of a victim’s assault appear to be correlated with acknowledgement status. Women who are sexually assaulted or raped by a stranger are more likely to be acknowledged victims than those assaulted by acquaintances (Fisher et al., 2003a;

Kahn, 2004; Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, & Halvorsen, 2003; Kahn, Mathie, & Torgler, 1994; Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 1988; Orchowski et al., 2013b; Sasson & Paul, 2014). Women who experience assaults involving force or violence are more likely to be acknowledged victims compared to victims of offenders who used non-violent tactics (Dardis, 2011; Fisher et al., 2003a; Hammond & Calhoun, 2007; Kahn, 2004; Kahn et al., 1994; Kahn et al., 2003; Littleton et al., 2006; Littleton et al., 2009; Orchowski et al., 2013b; Paul, Zinzow, McCauley, Kilpatrick, & Resnick, 2013; Sasson & Paul, 2014). Women who consumed alcohol prior to experiencing sexual assault are more likely to be unacknowledged compared to victims who had not consumed alcohol or drugs (Hammond & Calhoun, 2007; Kahn et al., 1994; Kahn et al., 2003; Littleton et al., 2006; Littleton et al., 2009; Orchowski et al., 2013b). Greater resistance by the victim has been associated with increased likelihood of acknowledging the experience as sexual assault (Dardis, 2011; Kahn et al., 1994; Layman et al., 1996; Littleton et al., 2006). Additionally, college women have reported a greater tendency to be unacknowledged victims compared to women in general population samples (Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Wilson & Miller, 2015).

Limited data suggests that as the amount of time since assault increases, so does the likelihood that victims acknowledge their experience as sexual assault (Hammond & Calhoun, 2007). In one study, for most victims, time between the assault and acknowledgment was less than one week, though it was not uncommon for six months to pass before women acknowledge, and thus disclose, their experience as assault (Harned, 2005). One specific aspect of the acknowledgment process that may take time is victims' recognition of their own non-consent during the assault. Often this involves the victim assuring herself that she said no and/or was too intoxicated to give meaningful consent (Harned, 2005). One additional factor in the process of becoming an acknowledged victim is the decision to seek social support. In one study of

acknowledgment, the most commonly cited influence on a women's decision to acknowledge her experience as assault was seeking social support and being told that their experience was sexual assault (Harned, 2005).

Acknowledgment status may have important impacts on two important markers of post-assault adjustment: revictimization rates and post-assault distress. Evidence suggests that unacknowledged victims are victims of subsequent attempted rape more frequently than acknowledged victims (Littleton et al., 2009). It is possible that some of this revictimization risk is due to victims' judgments of the offender's actions as legal, resulting in post-assault distress in the form of self-blame (Miller, Markman, & Handley, 2007). Unacknowledged victims may also be more likely to abuse alcohol in ways that put victims at increased risk of revictimization (Littleton et al., 2009). Evidence concerning differences in distress due to acknowledgment status is mixed. Some evidence suggests that acknowledged victims have stronger negative reactions than unacknowledged victims (Kahn et al., 2003). Other evidence suggests that it is the assault experience, rather than acknowledgment status, that influences distress levels (Harned, 2004). Clarification is needed about the relationship between acknowledgment and distress level. However, the potential that acknowledgment status influences distress levels and revictimization potential suggests that acknowledgment status could be an important area of focus for policies directed at detecting and responding effectively to sexual assault (Fisher et al., 2000).

### **Myths and Attributions**

When interacting with the social world, the causes of social behavior are not often clear. Attribution theory and research states that, faced with this ambiguity, we tend to make interpretations regarding the causes of behaviors that guide our own behaviors (Kelly & Michela, 1980). This can be divided into antecedents of attributions, attributions themselves, and

consequences. Antecedents of attributions may include information one has about the situation, beliefs one holds, and motivation. These factors influence the attribution itself, or the perceived cause of a behavior. Finally, the attributions have been linked to consequences including affective consequences, behavioral consequences, and expectancy consequences (Kelly & Michela, 1980).

Attributions are often formed preconsciously (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). They are hypothesized to function in the background of the mind, organizing the social world through specific lenses. These specific lenses range from those applicable to specific, narrowly defined situations (“I am good at math”) to broader, fundamental attributions (“The world is basically good”). One function of attribution systems is to provide relatively stable expectations for the self and the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). One consequence of attribution systems is guidance of behaviors that support effective engagement in the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

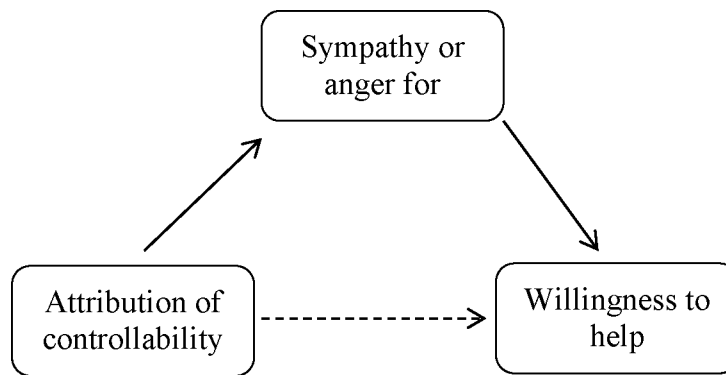
According to one theorist, these attributions are formed through early life experience, primarily with caregivers (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). The assumptive beliefs that develop early in life become the foundational beliefs that organize continuing experience. Although foundational beliefs are amenable to change, these beliefs are less likely to undergo significant change following adolescence. Consequently, information and observation are likely filtered through these beliefs. That which is consistent with foundational assumptions is more likely to be attended to and remembered. Similarly, one consequence of fundamental attributions is expectations about the self and world that are consistent with the attributions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). For instance, given the fundamental attribution that “I am good at math,” I will unconsciously expect myself to perform well on math-related tasks. Such attribution-consistent expectations are often self-fulfilling (Harris, Rosenthal, & Snodgrass, 1986). Several forms of

attributional systems have been proposed that may guide actions in response to sexual assault victims: Weiner's (1980) attributional theory and Janoff-Bulman's (1992) just world hypothesis.

In situations when someone is in need, the consideration to help or not to help can be broken down into a series of intermediate steps (Weiner, 1980). In the first step, one makes an attribution of the cause for the situation of the person in need. Key aspects of this process include cognitively searching for answers to how responsible the person in need is for their situation. When the person in need is seen as responsible for their situation, especially when they are perceived as being in control of outcomes, this leads to a negative emotional reaction, especially anger. However, if the person is seen as not being in control of their outcomes or otherwise not responsible, reactions such as sympathy and pity are more likely. These emotional reactions (anger and sympathy) are conceptualized as underlying inclinations to help. Anger is theorized to reduce willingness to help while sympathy is seen as increasing willingness to help (Weiner, 1980).

Applied to the situation of sexual assault, this sequence may involve evaluating characteristics reviewed above (relationship to the perpetrator, location of assault, victim injury, substance use, victim resistance, etc.) to evaluate whether the victim was in control of the situation and/or responsible for the outcome. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of this process. This model can be applied to decisions regarding whether to help victims of sexual assault (Sperry & Siegel, 2013). For instance, when reading scenarios of sexual assault in which either the victim (high responsibility condition) or the perpetrator (low responsibility condition) suggested using ecstasy, participants in one study reported increased perceptions of credibility, sympathy, and willingness to help the victim in the low responsibility condition (Sperry & Siegel, 2013).





*Figure 2.* Weiner's attribution model. The above model, (as shown in Sperry & Siegel, 2013), suggests that when people are confronted with a person in need of help, decisions about help are based on perceptions of control (responsibility) of their situation and subsequent emotional responses, specifically sympathy or anger. These emotions mediate the helping response, with anger decreasing and sympathy increasing willingness to help.

Janoff-Bulman (1992) focused on three core beliefs as guiding attributions: the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful, and the self is worthy. Each person experiences their world as populated by largely benevolent events and people, cognitively banishing bad things and people into the world of other people (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Regarding the second fundamental belief, the world and the events that happen to people are perceived as having overarching meaning. Specifically, there is believed to be a connection between what happens and what type of people to whom the events happen. Positive events are viewed as happening more often to good people and negative events as happening to bad people. A meaningful world is believed to be one in which justice is done. Due to the belief in meaningfulness, negative events tend to be interpreted as punishment and positive events as rewards (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Another result of the belief in meaningfulness is that events that occur are related to an individual's behavior. Those who behave prudently and in culturally proper ways are perceived as being protected from negative events. Conversely, behaving in reckless or inappropriate ways is perceived as deserving negative outcomes. The link between one's actions and/or one's character and subsequent events provides a sense of control. Lastly, people tend to view themselves in

overwhelmingly positive terms. This belief in the self as a capable and good being is intricately linked to the previous two fundamental assumptions. For instance, believing that one is a good person consequently suggests that, because the world is meaningful and just, good things will happen. Likewise, believing that one is a good person coexists easily with the belief that one's world is benevolent and similarly good (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This theory suggests that when people react to sexual assault victims, observers are believed to be motivated to separate their world (which is believed to be benevolent) from that of the victim. Observers make meaning of the assault by attributing it to the victim's character. Finally, the observer perceives the victim as experiencing the assault as a form of punishment.

A third theory, the process model of emotion regulation, hypothesizes five main experiential factors that would likely influence reactions to sexual assault victims: situation selection, situation modification, selective attention, cognitive change, and response modulation (Gross, 1998). If, for example, a female friend has been sexually assaulted, and a person is uncomfortable with what has happened to their friend, they may select situations in which they do not have to see that friend. When around the victim, the person may modify the situation by deciding to not talk to the person or to selectively talk about safer topics. The person may focus attention on the aspects of the victim that suggest she is coping well enough to not need help, such as moments in which she smiles or laughs. The person may then appraise that she is fine and doesn't need help. An emotional response then occurs because of the situational selection, modification, attentional deployment, and cognitive appraisals. In this example, the emotion may be relief or continued tension. These emotions may be modulated by social reactions serving to ignore the victim's assault experience, deny or minimize her distress, or behavioral reactions such as spending less time with her. In summary, the process model of emotional regulation

hypothesizes that situational selection and modification, and attributional judgments are key to understanding emotional and behavioral reactions towards sexual assault victims (Gross, 1998).

All three theories, the just world hypothesis (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), Weiner's attribution theory (1980), and the process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 1998), provide ways of understanding how cognitions can guide behaviors towards sexual assault victims. However, specific attributional biases, including sexism and rape myths, may change how these attributional processes influence behavior. The influence of these two biases are described below.

### **Biases in attributions: Sexism and rape myth acceptance**

Sexism, a multi-faceted construct that can be defined as the “endorsement of discriminatory or prejudicial beliefs based on sex” (Campbell et al., 1997, p. 89) encompasses several biases regarding gender. Sexism has been observed to change across time, with a distinction between older and modern sexism (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Old-fashioned sexism is a bias towards traditional gender roles, treating men and women differently, and stereotypical beliefs that women are less competent than men (Swim et al., 1995). Modern sexism is a bias characterized by disbelief that women are discriminated against, resentment towards demands women make for equity, and disagreement with policies that aim to support women (Swim et al., 1995). Modern sexism also includes the belief that there is no sexism in society today. That is, that other people are too sensitive and perceive sexism where none exists (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Due to this orientation towards the world, modern sexism likely biases responses to sexual harassment and sexual assault (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Observers of sexual assault scenarios who endorse sexist beliefs may be more likely to blame victims if during their cognitive search for causality, described by Weiner

(1980), the observer judges the woman to have acted in ways that violate what is appropriate for good and moral women (Abrams et al., 2003).

In addition to sexism, another set of beliefs called rape myths may bias observers of sexual assault. These myths have been defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” which contribute to the creation of “... a climate hostile to rape victims” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). While in rare cases some of these beliefs accurately reflect characteristics of sexual violence, research suggests these beliefs have come to be used in society in an overgeneralized and inaccurate manner (Payne et al., 1999). In the first scale designed to measure acceptance of these myths, the myths were explored via attitudinal questions such as: “if a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her”, “A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson”, “Many women have an unconscious wish to be raped, and may then unconsciously set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked”, and “Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to” (Burt, 1980, p. 223).

These myths and their potential function can be better grasped by understanding the primary types of myths that exist. In one study, nine principle forms of rape myths were identified. Most rape myths, 18%, were classified as part of the attitude that rape prevention is women’s responsibility. Most other attitudes correlated with rape myths accounted for less than 10% of rape myths, including the attitude that sex is the motivation for rape, punishment for rape should be harsh and include physical retribution (such as castration), victims precipitate their assaults, power is a motivation for rape, and resistance is a woman’s role during rape (Feild, 1978).

A factor analysis of the original rape myths defined by Burt (1980) found that myths loaded principally onto four factors (Briere et al., 1985). Specifically, 25% of rape myths were found to load onto the attitude of disbelief in rape victims, 19% onto the attitude that victims are responsible for rape, 7% onto the attitude that rape reports are manipulation, and 6% onto the attitude that only certain women are raped (Briere et al., 1985).

More recently, Payne and colleagues (1999) contributed an analysis that re-examined the factor structure of rape myths. Their analysis suggested that rape myths are effectively categorized by the following groupings: “she asked for it”, “it wasn’t really rape”, “he didn’t mean it”, “she wanted it”, “she lied”, “rape is a trivial event”, and “rape is a deviant event” (Payne et al., 1999, p. 59). The importance of such studies is their ability to highlight cultural beliefs regarding sexual assault, such as the victim’s enjoyment of rape and what constitutes deviant characteristics of sexual violence. Additionally, such studies clarify the way society defines rape (Payne et al., 1999). Specifically, rape myths suggest the following narrow definition of sexual assault: it is a violent crime perpetrated by a stranger who attacks an unsuspecting victim outdoors (Koss & Harvey, 1991; Weis & Borges, 1973). The myth is the foundation of one of the few studies of social reaction to sexual violence performed in Alaska (Brems & Wagner, 1994).

Research concerning rape myth acceptance suggests that rape myths continue to influence society, though some societal groups appear more willing than others to accept rape myths. For instance, one of the most consistent findings in rape myth research is that men tend to endorse rape myths to a greater degree than women (Anderson et al., 1997; Anderson & Quinn, 2009; Cowan, 2000; Feild, 1978; Franiuk, Seefelt, & Vandello, 2008; Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Hinck & Thomas, 1999; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Johnson, Kuck, & Schander, 1997;

Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002; McMahon, 2010; Mori, Bernat, Glenn, Selle, & Zarate, 1995; Muir, Lonsway, & Payne, 1996; Vandiver & Dupalo, 2012; Wakelin & Long, 2003).

Rape myth acceptance is not a unitary concept. As described above, rape myths are diverse. As a result, the finding that men endorse higher rape myth acceptance than women is imprecise. Male participants report greater endorsement of specific rape myths, including women unconsciously desire rape, the victim's character is to blame for their rape (Wakelin & Long, 2003), and the victim precipitates rape (Cowan, 2000). It is also possible that men endorse certain classes of rape myths more than women. Specifically, men may express higher endorsement of myths that blame the woman, excuse the man, and justify acquaintance rape (Johnson et al., 1997). Myths that blame the woman include those such as women provoke rape, women want to be raped, and healthy women can resist rape. Myths that excuse the man include those such as most men are capable of rape, and men who rape are sick/emotionally disturbed. Myths justifying acquaintance rape include men having the right to assume a woman wants to have sex with him if she touches him in a sexual way, and if a woman has had previous sex with a man she cannot claim she was raped if the same man has sex with her again (Johnson et al., 1997). Specific factors have been hypothesized as being related to belief in rape myth acceptance among men. These factors include negative attitudes towards male-female relations, traditional attitudes towards sex roles, conservatism, low socio-economic status, power, and dominance (Anderson et al., 1997; Marciniak, 1998).

Within the general population, factors outside of gender also appear to predict rape myth acceptance. Endorsement of rape myths has been linked to older adults (Anderson et al., 1997; Burt, 1980; Marciniak, 1998; Postmus, McMahon, Warrener, & Macri, 2011; Wilson, Linz, Donnerstein, & Stipp, 1992), decreased socioeconomic status (Anderson et al., 1997), and

increased television viewing (Kahlor & Morrison, 2007). Additionally, culture has been linked to differences in rape myth acceptance. African Americans and Asians often endorse higher rape myth acceptance than Caucasian participants (Feild, 1978; Johnson et al., 1997; Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002; Marciniak, 1998; Mori et al., 1995).

Rape myths, when defined broadly as beliefs that one holds about the nature of sexual assault, may sound innocuous. However, theory and experimental research suggests that these myths serve specific functions. Theoretically, these myths have been described as result of cognitive economy. To simplify information about sexual assault, rape myths supply categories within which information can be sorted (Payne et al., 1999). Rape myths have also been theorized to help protect self-esteem by encouraging downward comparison to victims and perpetrators, a process where victims and perpetrators are perceived as being somehow less than or beneath the observer. Finally, the endorsement of rape myths may support the processes of identifying with and fitting into social and cultural groups (Payne et al., 1999).

Research suggests that endorsement of rape myths influences behaviors of individuals. For example, detectives who report higher rape myth acceptance are less likely to charge an alleged perpetrator with assault (Goodman-Delahunty & Graham, 2011). Further, after being exposed to newspaper headlines containing rape myths, men were less likely to judge an alleged offender in a sexual assault as guilty (Franiuk et al., 2008). Where exposure to rape myths may result in dismissive responses to offenders, internalization of rape myths has been linked to increases in reported likelihood of perpetrating rape (Bohner, Jarvis, Eyssel, & Siebler, 2005; Malamuth, 1981). Among men who themselves have high rape myth acceptance, the perception that their peers have similarly high levels of rape myth acceptance is associated with increased likelihood of committing sexual assault (Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006). Additionally,

research reveals that increases in rape myth acceptance have been found to be related to decreased willingness to be socially close to rape victims (Shechory & Idisis, 2006). These studies suggest that exposure to rape myths may result in more lenience towards offenders and offending as well as distancing from victims in need of support. The impact that attributional judgments and rape myths have on victims is an important area of interest for the current study.

### **Attributional judgments, rape myths, and alcohol use**

Alcohol and drug use by victims or perpetrators has a significant impact on the post-assault experiences of the victim, potentially due to the influences of attributions of blame and rape myths on behavior towards victims. These reactions begin with judgments about whether a situation was assault, where responsibility lies, whether to blame either party and to what extent, whether to punish the assailant and, if so, how. When the assailant, victim, or both had been drinking alcohol prior to a sexual assault, people reported lower belief that a rape occurred compared to a situation in which both the perpetrator and victim had not been drinking alcohol (Norris & Cubbins, 1992).

Existing literature has come to conflicting conclusions regarding judgments of blame and responsibility in response to victim and perpetrator alcohol consumption. Some research suggests that alcohol consumption by the victim tends to result in greater blame (Aramburu & Leigh, 1991; Stormo, Lang, & Stritzke, 1997) and responsibility (Sims, Noel, & Maisto, 2007; Stormo et al., 1997) attributed to the victim. When both the victim and offender had been consuming alcohol, the victim is seen as more responsible and blameworthy than the perpetrator (Stormo et al., 1997) or the perpetrator is seen as being less responsible and blameworthy than when the victim is described as sober (Wild, Graham, & Rehm, 1998). There is evidence that gender of the person making judgments matters. In one study, male participants reported perceiving the victim



as more responsible when drunk than when sober (Hammock & Richardson, 1997). Women tended to blame the victim more than the perpetrator when both the victim and perpetrator were described as equally intoxicated (Stormo et al., 1997). Such judgments may relate to expectations that women, compared to men, experience heightened sexual feelings because of alcohol consumption (Abbey, McAuslan, Ross, & Zawacki, 1999). Limited evidence suggests that people may judge the victim not based on her alcohol consumption but based on the alcohol consumption of the offender (Norris & Cubbins, 1992). When the perpetrator drinks, people may judge the victim as being more in control of herself and responsive to the assailant. Consequently, victims who remain with their date after he has consumed alcohol may be seen as showing willingness to have sex (Klappenstine, Schuller, & Wall, 2007; Norris & Cubbins, 1992).

Attributions of blame and responsibility may share a complex relationship with decisions regarding punishment of offenders. In studies asking participants to review a case of sexual assault, and to choose either a “guilty” or a “not guilty” verdict and sentence length, even when increased blame and responsibility was assigned to a perpetrator, such attributions at times did not result in longer sentences (Wild et al., 1998). Regardless of blame and responsibility, alcohol consumption is likely to affect sentencing decisions either directly or indirectly. There is conflicting evidence concerning the nature of the relationship between alcohol consumption and prosecution and conviction decisions. For instance, in one study the lack of substance use was found to increase likelihood to charge and convict offenders (Kelly, Lovett, & Regan, 2005), while in another study the opposite relationship was found (Wall & Schuller, 2000). When reviewing the differential effects of victim versus perpetrator alcohol use, it has been suggested that victim alcohol consumption decreased the likelihood of sexual assault cases being accepted

for prosecution (Beichner & Spohn, 2012; Brown, Hamilton, & O'Neill, 2007; Scott & Beaman, 2004) and offender substance use increased the likelihood of a case being accepted for prosecution (Brown et al., 2007). Regarding victim alcohol consumption, participants in one study reported a large drop in likelihood of returning a guilty verdict when the victim was described as having consumed alcohol (Wenger & Bornstein, 2006). Specifically, the percentage of participants who perceived they would return a guilty verdict dropped from 87% when the victim was sober to 43% when the victim was described as having consumed alcohol (Wenger & Bornstein, 2006).

### **Attributional judgments, rape myths, and resistance**

The type of resistance that victims use during sexual assaults is also likely to affect the social aftermath of their assault, such as the processes of seeking support or justice. For example, in one study, perceptions of victims' degree of fault and intelligence were predicted by the type of resistance they used (Krulowitz & Nash, 1979). Specifically, male participants tended to attribute less fault and greater intelligence to victims who resisted more strongly, while female participants perceived victims to have less intelligence and be more at fault when the victim exhibited high levels of resistance during a hypothetical sexual assault (Krulowitz & Nash, 1979). Historical analyses suggest that not only were rape victims who resisted more strongly deemed to be more believable, legal definitions have used resistance as a barometer for consent wherein less resistance has been viewed as a behavioral indicator of some degree of consent (Abarbanel, 1986). Despite changes to laws removing high expectations for resistance by victims, juror decision-making has continued to exhibit some expectation of resistance by the victim to be regarded as credible (Abarbanel, 1986).

Participants in one study suggested that the expectation of women to resist in specific ways continues to thrive as a social norm. In this study, one in 20 participants agreed with the statement: “When girls are raped, it’s often because the way they said ‘no’ was unclear” (McMahon & Farmer, 2011, p. 77). Ten percent of participants agreed with the statement, “If a girl doesn’t physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can’t be considered rape” (McMahon & Farmer, 2011, p. 77). Approximately 25% of participants agreed, and 10% strongly agreed that “If a girl doesn’t say ‘no’ she can’t claim rape” (McMahon & Farmer, 2011, p. 77). These results suggest that, though most people do not endorse these rape myths, the myths may continue to have significant support.

Evidence suggests perpetrator tactics influence victim resistance strategies. Yet, expectations that victims resist in specific ways serves to ignore the effect the perpetrator’s behavior has on the victim (see resistance section of literature review). Such expectations hold the victim accountable to act in specific ways regardless of the level of violence used by the offender. Expectations that the victims must resist sexual assault regardless of perceived danger to be regarded as credible sets an unrealistically high bar for women. Additionally, such expectations also ignore the impact that prior relationship with the perpetrator may have on resistance strategy. That is, beliefs about what type of resistance victims must use to be regarded as credible ignores the fact that, for most women, the attacker that she is faced with is an acquaintance or romantic partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

### **Attributional judgments, rape myths and acknowledgment**

Research suggests that the real rape stereotype and rigid scripts regarding sexual assault may partly guide decision making about whether an experience constitutes sexual assault (Fisher et al., 2003a; Kahn, 2004; Kahn et al., 2003; Koss et al., 1988). Higher acceptance of rape myths

has also been linked to decreased likelihood of defining a scenario that legally constitutes rape as such (Sasson & Paul, 2014). This should come as no surprise given that victims whose assaults conformed to characteristics of the real rape stereotype were more likely to be acknowledged victims. Specifically, characteristics such as being sober, being attacked by a stranger, experiencing an assault characterized by high physical force, and using active physical resistance strategies have each been linked to increased likelihood of victims acknowledging their experience as sexual assault or rape (Dardis, 2011; Fisher et al., 2003a; Hammond & Calhoun, 2007; Kahn, 2004; Kahn et al., 2003; Kahn et al., 1994; Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 1988; Layman et al., 1996; Littleton et al., 2006; Littleton et al., 2009; Orchowski et al., 2013b; Paul et al., 2013; Sasson & Paul, 2014). These findings suggest that societal attributions and rape myth acceptance influences how victims respond to their own assault experiences. Given the effects that rape myths and stereotypes appear to exert on the labeling processes of both victims and non-victims, these myths were examined in the present study.

### **Social Responses and Implications**

Once a sexual assault has occurred, the decision about whether to disclose the experience and the impact of disclosure on victims has often been studied. Victims report trepidation about disclosing their assault experience due to concerns of others knowing about their assault and fear of receiving negative or unsupportive responses (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). These concerns appear to be more prevalent among victims of sexual assault in college. However, most victims do choose to disclose the assault experience, with estimates suggesting that between 80-91% of victims disclose their experience (Ahrens et al., 2009; Littleton et al., 2006; Starzynski et al., 2005). As with the labeling process, victims who experienced assaults resembling the real rape stereotype are more likely to disclose the experience to others and consult about whether to

report the assault to police (Koss et al., 1988; Paul et al., 2013; Starzynski et al., 2005). Victims in one study, on average, reported that they disclosed to three people (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Most victims appear to either disclose their assault immediately after it occurs, or to wait for a year or more before disclosing (Dunn et al., 1999; Ullman, 1999; Ullman, 1996a). The individuals to whom victims turn for support have often been divided into two categories: informal and formal support sources (Starzynski et al., 2005). Informal support providers include acquaintances, friends, romantic partners, and family members, while formal support sources include religious leaders, medical personnel, police and other law enforcement personnel, and mental health workers (Starzynski et al., 2005).

Victims often have significant concerns and fears about disclosing their assault experiences (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Research has explored these concerns by assessing the responses that victims receive to their disclosures and what impact they have on the victim. Victims of sexual assault report that the way support providers react to their disclosures differs across various support sources. One predominant way that these differences have been measured has been to categorize responses as either positive or negative (Ullman, 1996b; Ullman, 2010). Such categories are based on research asking victims about what types of responses have been helpful or healing and which have been hurtful or unhelpful (Ullman, 1996c). Examples of negative reactions include victim blaming, distraction, stigma, egocentric responses, controlling responses, and being treated differently (Ullman, 1996c; Ullman, 2010). Another way negative responses have been conceptualized is whether they serve to turn against the victim (not acknowledge her experience or support her) or acknowledge her experience while being unsupportive (Relyea & Ullman, 2015). Positive reactions include emotional support, tangible and informational aid, being listened to or encouraged to talk, and validation and belief (Ullman,

1996c; Ullman, 2010). It is important to define each of these types of support due to the vagueness of each description. Additionally, well-intentioned individuals may intend to provide a positive reaction, such as emotional support, to a victim but act in a way that victims experience as negative (Ullman, 2010).

Regarding positive reactions, emotional support includes reactions provided by others that showed empathy for both the victim's experience as well as her own reaction to the experience (Ullman, 2010). At times, victims report that responses that are likely intended to be emotionally supportive are experienced as being pitied, stigmatized, or infantilized (Ullman, 2010). Tangible aid includes actions or assistance provided to the survivor, such as spending time with the victim, helping her get to the police or medical providers, offering her a safe place to stay, or providing resources. Informational support includes providing knowledge-based resources such as information about PTSD or the process of coping and recovering after sexual assault (Ullman, 2010). Listening has been described by victims as being instances during which they are able to disclose their assault experiences, and where their support providers respond in ways that allows them to talk about the assault and feel heard (Ullman, 2010). Victims who experienced responses of belief often reported as positive that the support provider validated that their experience was sexual assault (Ullman, 1996c; Ullman, 2010).

Victim blaming is characterized by overt statements that imply that the victim's behavior, or her character, partially or wholly caused the assault (Ullman, 2010). Distraction has been defined as responses that encourage the victim to not talk or think about their assault (Ullman, 2010). Distraction can suggest to the victim that she is overreacting, coping the wrong way, or posing a burden to others (Ullman, 2010). Stigma includes treating the victim in a way that suggests she is broken or damaged and rejecting the survivor (Ullman, 2010). Egocentric

responses are instances when the victim's disclosure or coping results in the support provider expressing more concern about the impact the disclosure is having on him or herself than on the victim. In such a situation, the victim does not receive the empathy or support that she seeks (Ullman, 2010). In one specific type of egocentric response, getting angry and seeking revenge against the perpetrator, the victim may not only lack the support she sought but also feel loss of control over the consequences of the support provider's reactions (Ullman, 2010). Controlling responses are attempts by the support provider to control the victim or the situation in some way following the assault (Ullman, 2010). This may include attempting to make decisions for the victim or telling her what she must do in response to the assault (Ullman, 2010). Regarding the category "treating the victim differently", victims have reported people pulling away from them or treating them like damaged goods (Ahrens et al., 2009).

Existing research regarding reactions to victim disclosure suggests that such disclosures are most often met with both positive and negative reactions from support providers (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). The relative frequency of each type of reaction is unclear, with some research suggesting positive reactions are more frequently received (Ahrens et al., 2007) and some research suggesting the opposite (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Reactions that are supportive generally or emotionally have been rated as being the most helpful (Ahrens et al., 2007; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Most victims report that while disclosing at least one support provider responded in part with belief, emotional support, tangible aid, and listening (Ullman, 1996c). In contrast to these positive responses, most victims report their disclosures have been met with at least one negative response (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Among negative responses to sexual assault disclosure, some victims have described stigmatization and being treated differently as the most unhelpful (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). When disclosing to support providers, most

victims report receiving controlling, victim blaming, and distracting responses (Ullman, 1996c). Victims of sexual assault may be less socially connected compared to women who have never been sexually assaulted. Specifically, women who have been sexually assaulted at some time in their lives are less likely to be married, contact relatives less frequently, and receive less emotional support from friends and family (Golding, Wilsnack, & Cooper, 2002).

Certain factors may influence the relative amount of positive versus negative reactions that victims receive to disclosures of sexual assault. Victims of assaults that involve some features of stereotypical real rape (perceived threat to life or offender weapon use) receive more positive social responses (Starzynski et al., 2005). Negative responses are reported more frequently by victims experiencing higher PTSD symptom severity and elevated levels of behavioral self-blame (Starzynski et al., 2005). Victims of sexual assault by acquaintances or dates are often seen as more culpable and blameworthy (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). However, victims of more severe assaults have reported receiving fewer positive responses to their disclosures compared to victims of less severe assaults (Ullman, 1996a; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). The way a victim discloses may also influence reactions from support providers. Specifically, victims who spend more time talking about the assault experience and do so in greater depth received a greater number of positive responses (Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Acknowledged victims (those victims who label an experience that legally meets the definition of sexual assault as sexual assault) may more frequently receive egocentric responses to their disclosures compared to unacknowledged victims (Littleton et al., 2006). Victims of minority ethnicity or racial background have reported receiving blaming responses more frequently than victims of majority ethnicity and race (Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). The more people to whom the victim discloses, the greater the number of both



positive and negative responses she is likely to receive (Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Victims who disclose to both formal and informal support sources are likely to receive more negative responses than victims who only disclose their assault to informal sources (Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Starzynski et al., 2005). Potential support providers who witness the victim receiving negative responses from others may be more likely themselves to respond negatively (Brown & Testa, 2008).

The type of support source that victims disclose to may also significantly impact the reactions they will likely receive. Victims frequently describe members of the clergy, mental health professionals, physicians, and rape crisis center staff as helpful (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Counselors have been singled out as one of the most helpful sources of support following sexual assault (Ahrens et al., 2009). Although sexual assault is a crime for which designated laws are in place allowing victims to seek justice, many victims of sexual assault do not turn to the justice system in response to their assault. Nationally it is estimated that between 10-23% of assaults are reported to police, though the rate among college women (between 2-22%) suggests that college women may be less likely to report their assault to police (Ahrens et al., 2009; Anderson & Clement, 2015; Belknap, 2010; Dunn et al., 1999; Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher et al., 2003b; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 1988; Sinozich & Langton, 2014; Ullman, 1996c). Not only are rates of reporting low in both national and college samples of victims, but the U. S. Department of Justice has estimated that between 2003 and 2012 rates of reporting have decreased significantly (Truman et al., 2013). Within one Alaskan college sample, approximately 28% of sexual assault victims disclosed to friends, 11% to roommates, 14% to romantic partners, and less than 1% reported their assault to police (Myrstol & Blumenstein, 2016). While less than half of Alaskan university students who were surveyed had disclosed their sexual assault to

others, when they do disclose it is most likely to friends, intimate partners, and acquaintances (Myrstol & Blumenstein, 2016).

Existing literature has identified factors that are related to the decision to report sexual assault as well as factors that act as barriers to reporting sexual assault. The assaults that are more likely to be reported to authorities are those more closely matching the “real rape” stereotype. Specifically, when incidents involved weapons and the perpetrator was a stranger, victims were more likely to report their assault to the police (Fisher et al., 2003b; Jones et al., 2004; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Paul et al., 2013; L. S. Williams, 1984). Additionally, victims may be more likely to report the assault if the perpetrator was of a different ethnicity than the victim (Fisher et al., 2003b). Victims experiencing depressive symptoms are more likely to disclose their assault to formal support sources, such as police (Starzynski et al., 2005). Reactions that victims receive when they disclose their assault to informal supports (friends, family) may also influence the decision to report the assault to police. In a national sample of women, those victims who received encouragement from others to report their assault were more likely to do so compared to both victims who did not receive encouragement as well as victims who had not disclosed their assault (Paul et al., 2013).

A variety of factors have been correlated with victims not reporting their assault to the justice system (Cohn et al., 2013). Victims who had been using drugs or alcohol report their assaults less frequently than victims of assaults in which alcohol and drugs were not involved (Fisher et al., 2003b; Kilpatrick et al., 2007). It is possible that not reporting sexual assault represents not a choice, but the victim’s lack of acknowledgement of the experience as sexual assault (Cohn et al., 2013). Not reporting may also be a conscious choice motivated by concerns about the criminal justice system, such as lacking proof of the incident, fear of being treated

badly, being unsure about how to report the incident, and being afraid of reprisal by the perpetrator or others (Cohn et al., 2013). Between 36-44% of victims cited concerns about being treated badly by the justice system as a barrier to reporting their assault (Kilpatrick et al., 2007).

When victims do report sexual assault to the police, one study suggests that just over half of victims described responses as helpful (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). However, such disclosures may receive helpful responses more frequently when someone other than the victim initiates the disclosure (Ahrens et al., 2007). However, victims who reported their assault to the police often described experiencing negative reactions, specifically disbelief and responses endorsing rape myths (Filipas & Ullman, 2001).

Given that most victims will not seek support in the justice system, it is possible that other social systems are more influential in the victim's healing process than the justice system. Existing research suggests that when victims disclose their assault, they are more likely to do so to informal support sources (Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Fisher et al., 2003b; Starzynski et al., 2005; Ullman, 1996a). Victims who are experiencing self-blame related to their assault are more likely to disclose to informal sources (Starzynski et al., 2005). When victims choose to disclose to both informal and formal support sources, they tend to disclose first to informal support sources (Ahrens et al., 2007). Among informal sources of support, victims tend to choose friends (Ahrens et al., 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Ullman, 1996a) and less frequently family (Ahrens et al., 2007; Ahrens et al., 2009). In fact, being the recipient of such disclosure is common, with between 13-22% of respondents in a national survey reporting that they have had someone disclose sexual assault to them informally (Kilpatrick et al., 2007).

Disclosures to informal support sources, compared to formal sources, tend to be met with more positive social responses (Ahrens et al., 2007). Compared to other informal support

sources, friends and family have often been described as the most helpful (Ahrens et al., 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Victims report that friends often respond to their disclosures of sexual assault with emotional support, tangible aid, and by simply listening (Ahrens et al., 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). However, among negative responses, victims also report that friends frequently respond to sexual assault disclosure with egocentric responses (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). When asked what the most wished for response to their disclosures, many victims have reported emotional support (Ullman, 1996b). Romantic partners have been described as the most likely source for this wished-for type of support (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). However, romantic partners have been described as moderately helpful and supportive, though providing less tangible aid than other support sources, and often providing high amounts of negative reactions, especially egocentric and controlling reactions (Ahrens et al., 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Family members may hold a unique place in sexual assault victims' lives in terms of adjustment and recovery from sexual assault. Victims who received their most positive reactions from family members have reported higher overall levels of satisfaction with their social support compared to women who received their most positive reactions from romantic partners (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). However, family members have also been described by victims as being the most likely support sources to respond in ways that promote rape myths (specifically those blaming victim clothing choice, blame for being alone with the perpetrator, or disbelief in partner or husband rape) or distraction (Filipas & Ullman, 2001).

Social responses have been shown to influence adjustment following sexual victimization (Orchowski et al., 2013a). Social support has been correlated with better overall recovery, including reduced psychological symptoms and improved overall adjustment (Ullman, 1999). However, negative reactions are likely to have a much greater effect on the victim than positive

reactions, including an increased likelihood of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006; Ullman, 1996c; Ullman, 2010; Ullman, et al., 2007; Zoellner, Foa, & Brigidi, 1999). The relative number of each class of reaction (positive and negative) also may be important. Victims who receive few positive responses following disclosure and frequent negative social responses are at higher risk for revictimization than victims who experience more positive than negative responses (Mason et al., 2009).

Within Alaska, limited evidence exists regarding societal attitudes towards victims of sexual violence or the types of social support victims are likely to receive. In one study in which data were collected by sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE) throughout Alaska, approximately half of victims reported that they were either somewhat worried or worried about receiving disbelief or negative reactions from family and friends (Rosay & Henry, 2007). When asked about the types of responses that they did receive if they disclosed their assault to others, results suggested that these victims received mixed responses. Approximately 26% of victims surveyed reported that they felt blamed, 30% felt minimized, and nearly 75% perceived that others took control in response to the victims' disclosure (Rosay & Henry, 2007).

The previous study may not be representative of the experiences of typical victims in Alaska for two reasons. First, approximately 30% of Alaskans responding to a survey (ANDVSA, 2006) reported that there are no services in their region for sexual assault victims, including the SANE services from which the data from the previous study came (Rosay & Henry, 2007). Second, among those victims who have access to SANE services in their region, few may be referred to these services. According to AST data (Rosay et al., 2008) nearly 80% of reported assaults do not require evidence collection, such as that performed by SANE providers. Also, victim injury photos and sexual assault response team (SART) exam photos were classified

by AST as not applicable in approximately 76% and 77% of reported assaults respectively (Rosay et al., 2008). Put succinctly, a significant portion of Alaskan women neither can access nor have reason to access SANE services following sexual assault.

Attitudes towards victims of sexual assault in Alaska were also measured in a survey-based study presenting a scenario of sexual assault (Brems & Wagner, 1994). The study presented college student participants with either a scenario of theft or sexual assault followed by questions assessing belief in a just world, rape myth acceptance, judgments of personality and intelligence of the victim or perpetrator, and attributions of blame and responsibility towards the victim or the perpetrator. Results revealed that participants tended to attribute greater fault to the theft victim than to the victim of rape and greater blame to the perpetrator of rape than the perpetrator of theft (Brems & Wagner, 1994). These results suggest that Alaskan college students may harbor more positive attitudes towards rape victims. It is possible that these attitudes and attributions may result in more positive responses to disclosure of rape in real situations. However, the scenario provided to participants did not present realistic scenarios of sexual assault. Specifically, the scenario provided mirrored the “real rape” stereotype of a violent crime committed outdoors by an assailant who was a stranger to the victim (Koss & Harvey, 1991; Weis & Borges, 1973). These studies within Alaska leave gaps in understanding regarding how victims who experience assaults conforming to what is statistically more likely (acquaintance assault victims with minor if any injuries who do not report their assault to authorities or seek medical treatment) experience the disclosure and support process.

### **Psychological Outcomes of Sexual Assault**

A variety of factors impact the psychological aftermath of sexual assault. These include disclosure-related processes (fear of negative responses, avoidance of disclosure) and social

support. Victims who have social support tend to experience better overall recovery, including reduced psychological symptoms and improved overall adjustment (Ullman, 1999). Disclosure to friends has been linked to higher self-esteem (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Disclosure to romantic partners has been linked to several improvements in adjustment, notably fewer PTSD symptoms than disclosure to other support sources. Additionally, when romantic partners provide emotional support, victims report significantly more positive affect (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). The experience of receiving emotional support following disclosure has been linked to victims increasingly seeking emotional support as a coping mechanism (Orchowski et al., 2013a). However, a significant minority of victims reported feeling worse after disclosing their assault than they did prior to disclosure (Ahrens et al., 2007).

Specific responses (deemed negative) have been correlated to specific detrimental outcomes for victims' adjustment. Blame has been linked to lower self-esteem (Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Orchowski et al., 2013a) and less frequent use of problem-solving for coping (Orchowski et al., 2013a). Controlling responses have been correlated with increased PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Orchowski et al., 2013a). Victims report that negative responses such as these have greater impact than positive reactions. Specifically, negative reactions appear to increase the likelihood of PTSD (Borja et al., 2006; Ullman, 1996c; Ullman, 2010; Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, & Starzynski, 2007; Zoellner et al., 1999). Disclosing to romantic partners, compared to other support providers, has been correlated with greater amounts of negative affect (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Negative reactions to disclosure from specific support sources have also been correlated with specific negative impacts on victims. Victims who have received negative reactions from friends and family have reported increased self-blame for their assault (Ahrens, 2006). Negative reactions to sexual assault disclosures have been associated with

victims deciding to stop disclosing, potentially due to victims beginning to question how helpful future disclosure will be (Ahrens, 2006). Such responses may also cause victims to doubt that their experience was sexual assault (Ahrens, 2006). Victims of non-stranger rape who disclosed to legal or medical support providers may be particularly vulnerable to victim blaming responses, with one study finding these victims exhibiting higher posttraumatic stress than victims who did not disclose to formal sources (Campbell et al., 1999).

In addition to impacting the victim's adjustment and recovery from sexual assault, social reactions are also related to the victim's risk of being sexually assaulted again (also called revictimization). The risk of revictimization is higher for victims of sexual assault compared to other crimes, with estimated revictimization rates for adult sexual assault victims ranging from 14-50% (Daigle, Fisher, & Cullen, 2008; Mason et al., 2009; Messman-Moore, Brown, & Koelsch, 2005). Those factors that increase this risk even further are potential targets for sexual assault awareness and response programs. Victims who receive relatively fewer positive responses relative to a high number of negative responses are at higher risk of revictimization (Mason et al., 2009). Fear of negative reactions from support providers in response to disclosure has also been linked to increased risk of revictimization (Miller, Canales, Amacker, Backstrom, & Gidycz, 2011). Women that avoid disclosure out of fear of negative responses may be at greater risk due to lower levels of posttraumatic growth (Miller et al., 2011).

Social reactions, as noted above, are one factor that influences the aftermath of the sexual assault. Several adverse outcomes that potentially follow sexual assault have been identified, among them posttraumatic stress (Breslau et al., 1998), depression (Norris & Slone, 2010; Zinzow et al., 2010), self-blame (Ullman et al., 2007), subjective decreases in health (Kimerling & Calhoun, 1994), and suicidal behavior (Ullman & Brecklin, 2002).



Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mentioned previously as one potential outcome following sexual assault, is a collection of distressing symptoms often reported by survivors of sexual assault. Compared to a variety of traumas that plague human experience, sexual assault is correlated with higher rates of PTSD (Breslau et al., 1998; Frazier et al., 2009; Kelly, Weathers, McDevitt-Murphy, Eakin, & Flood, 2009). It is characterized by exposure to a traumatic event followed by symptoms of intrusion, persistent avoidance, negative alterations in cognition and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity (APA, 2013). Estimates of how many sexual assault victims report experiencing PTSD vary depending upon the time since assault, the sample, and the diagnostic criteria used (Resnick, Kilpatrick, & Lipovksy, 1991). The percentage of victims that have experienced PTSD since their assault ranges between 20-57% (Breslau et al., 1998; Kilpatrick, Saunders, Veronen, Best, & Von, 1998; Norris & Slone, 2010). It is more common for victims of sexual assault to experience some symptoms of PTSD though not enough to meet full diagnostic criteria (Norris & Slone, 2010). The current study, to realistically portray the aftermath of sexual assault, included in its scenarios a description of the post-assault distress that is experienced by sexual assault victims.

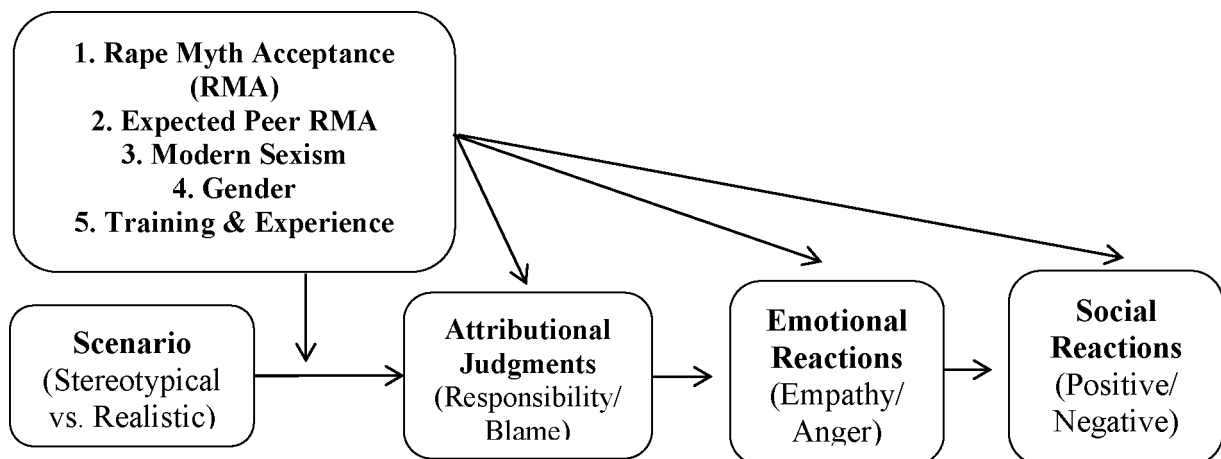


## Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

### Overview of Research Design

In the current study, participants were presented with scenarios depicting sexual assault and asked to provide their judgments, emotional reactions, hypothetical social reactions, and perceptions of peer social reactions towards the victim. The study explored the influences of type of sexual assault, degree of modern sexism and rape myth acceptance, and participant gender, history of sexual assault awareness or response training, or experiences responding to disclosures of sexual assault on responsibility, blame directed, and emotional reactions towards the victim or perpetrator, social reactions to the victim, and expected peer social reactions to the sexual assault scenario.

To accomplish this, the study used an experimental design with between-subjects factors. In one condition, participants were asked to read a stereotypical stranger rape scenario. In a second condition, participants were asked to read a scenario depicting a realistic acquaintance rape. See Figure 3 for a brief overview of the theorized relationships between measures included in the current study.



*Figure 3.* Theoretical model of how reactions are formed. Reactions to each scenario were theorized as being driven by how much blame and responsibility are attributed to the victim and perpetrator. These attributions result in varying levels of empathy or anger. The final product of these factors influenced the type of social reactions that participants are willing to offer the

victim. The strength of the effects of the scenario on these attributional judgments and emotions were theorized to be moderated by variables including rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, gender, training, and experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault.

## **Participants**

Based on a power analysis with 0.80 power, recruitment aimed for 128 participants in this survey. Eligibility criteria included the following:

- Participants must have been enrolled students at UAF (either undergraduate or graduate)
- Participants had to be 18 or older
- Participants must have been capable of reading at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level

Participants were recruited campus-wide. As possible, recruitment targeted general education courses to attract students representing diverse academic disciplines. Also, recruitment processes included flyers posted in various locations around the UAF campus, announcements made in various classes beginning in the Fall of 2017, recruitment e-mails sent to university listservs, and advertisements in campus newsletters (such as the Cornerstone).

A total of 207 individuals opened the online survey and began reviewing its materials. Four of these individuals reported they were not students and were redirected out of the survey. One hundred and ninety-nine participants viewed one of the scenarios at the beginning of the survey. Of those, 163 participants continued to complete the last survey question. Most participants identified as being Caucasian, female, and undergraduate students. Most participants described their relationship status as single and never married. Compared to demographics documented in Fall 2015 (University of Alaska Institutional Research, Planning, and Analysis, 2015), this study underrepresented male students and students who identify as being Alaska Native and American Indian. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics related to demographic variables and Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for training and experience responding to

disclosures of sexual assault. Most participants had experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault as well as some type of training related to sexual violence awareness and response, typically Haven training.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics of Demographics (N=163)*

Characteristic	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	157		23.14	9.37
Gender	157			
Male	49	31.21		
Female	108	68.79		
Other	6	3.82		
Ethnicity	158			
White	133	84.18		
Hispanic or Latino	15	9.49		
Black or African American	4	2.53		
Native American or American Indian	17	10.76		
Asian/Pacific Islander	21	13.29		
Other	11	6.96		
Year in school	163			
Certificate program	4	2.45		
Associates program	6	3.68		
Undergraduate freshman	43	26.38		
Undergraduate sophomore	29	17.79		
Undergraduate junior	30	18.40		
Undergraduate senior	23	14.11		
Graduate student (Master's)	19	11.66		
Graduate student (Doctoral)	7	4.29		
Non-degree seeking	2	1.23		
Marital Status	163			
Single, never married, living alone	66	40.49		
Single, never married, living with family/relatives	36	22.09		
Single, never married, living with someone in a romantic relationship	25	15.34		
Married or domestic partnership	23	14.11		
Previously married, separated, widowed, or divorced	6	3.68		
Other	7	4.29		

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Training and Experience Responding to Sexual Assault*

Characteristic	<i>N</i>	%
Experience responding to disclosure of forcible rape	101	62.3
Experience responding to disclosure of substance-related rape	60	37.0
Taken sexualities or women's & gender studies course	32	19.8
Taken sexual assault awareness or response training	126	77.8
Participated in Green Dot bystander training	30	18.5
Participated in Haven or AlcoholEdu training	114	70.4
Participated in Take Back the Night	7	4.3
Participated in It's On Us	9	5.6
Have training or experience responding to sexual assault disclosure	156	96.2

*Note.* The descriptive statistics provided above represent all participants who provided any data on each individual characteristic. Consequently, these figures may differ from those seen in analyses that only utilize data from participants who answered every single question relevant to each variable under analysis.

## Measures

### Demographics

Participants were asked to fill out a brief demographics form that included questions about their age, gender, ethnicity, class standing (1<sup>st</sup> year through 4<sup>th</sup> year, graduate, etc.), and relationship status. During analysis, a dichotomous class standing variable was created for use in comparison of means testing. In this variable, participants were classified as either undergraduate or graduate (refer to Appendix A).

### Intervention scenarios

Participants were provided one of two intervention scenarios, both of which were adapted from Brems and Wagner (1994). Scenario 1 described a stranger rape scenario which matches the stereotypical "real rape" (Garland, 2005). Scenario 2 described a realistic acquaintance rape. Several details that are unrelated to sexual assault (the jewelry the victim was wearing) were removed, details that were implausible for the context of Fairbanks (such as the victim taking a subway) were removed, and several details were added that were Alaska-specific (adding the name of a restaurant/bar close to the university). The acquaintance rape scenario was designed to

include several of the same details as the stranger rape scenario. Both scenarios asked the participants to imagine that the woman in the scenario is a friend of theirs who went out for dinner and drinks with a date, walked home late the same night, experienced sexual assault, and later developed posttraumatic stress symptoms. The acquaintance scenario was designed to reflect specific details that are common in sexual assault based on review of existing research literature. For instance, the victim was described as being acquainted with the perpetrator. The perpetrator's tactics were portrayed as verbal rather than physical and no weapon was used in the assault. The victim in the acquaintance scenario was depicted as using verbal resistance against the attacker and not experiencing physical injury during the assault. Both scenarios were reviewed by representatives of campus organizations that respond to sexual assault or that implement sexual violence prevention programs. Per discussion of how well the acquaintance assault scenario represented incidents they respond to on campus, changes were made to increase the relevance of the scenario to the university context. The scenarios used in the current study reflect this discussion and its resulting modifications (refer to Appendices B and C).

### **Attributions of blame and responsibility**

Each of the two intervention scenarios was followed by questions designed to assess responsibility and blame attributable to the man and the woman. These questions were based on those used by Brems and Wagner (1994). These questions were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not At all*) and 7 (*Completely*). When the online survey was being created, the response option for these questions was a slide bar between the numbers 1 (*Not At All*) and 7 (*Completely*). After the survey was published, it was discovered that the online platform, Survey Monkey, translated these items into a scale of 0 (*Not At All*) to 100 (*Completely*). To maintain the intended Likert scale format, a variable was created with seven approximately equal intervals. The purpose of

measuring these attributions was to assess if and how they relate to social reactions that victims are likely to encounter. Additionally, these questions assessed the differences in patterns of attributions in stereotyped versus realistic sexual assault scenarios (refer to Appendix D).

### **Emotional reactions to scenarios**

Four questions were administered to assess reactions of anger and empathy towards the victim and perpetrator. These questions were developed specifically for the current study to assess emotional reactions that are theorized to be emotional outcome of attributions of controllability, responsibility, and blame (Sperry & Siegel, 2013). The questions were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) and 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). For ease of interpretation, responses were reverse coded during analysis so that higher numbers indicated more of the emotion being measured (refer to Appendix E).

### **Modified social reactions questionnaire – short form**

The Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ; Ullman, 1996b) was designed to assess reactions received by victims when they disclose their assault experiences to others. The short form of the scale (Ullman, Relyea, & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015) contains 16 questions ( $\alpha = .66$ ) with responses assessed on a scale ranging from 1 (*Very Likely*) to 5 (*Very Unlikely*). For ease of interpretation, responses were reverse coded during analysis so that higher numbers indicated greater likelihood of offering the social reaction being measured. Eight subscales are measured by the questions that combine to form three primary scales. The first primary scale, turning against, contains the subscales blame, stigma, and infantilizing. The second primary scale, unsupportive acknowledgement, contains the subscales control, distract, and egocentric. The final primary scale, positive reactions, contains subscales measuring emotional support and tangible aid. For the purposes of the main analyses, the scale was divided into two primary



subscales: positive social reactions contained four questions ( $\alpha = .57$ ) and the negative social reactions contained 12 items ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

The SRQ was included in the study because of the influence of social reactions on the victim's recovery process after experiencing sexual assault. The SRQ was modified for use in the current study. The original scale was created to measure the amount of positive and negative responses received by victims after being sexually assaulted. However, the wording of the SRQ was modified for the current study to evaluate the hypothetical likelihood of providing a variety of social responses to a friend who has been sexually assaulted. Negative social reactions were measured by the average of two primary scales: the turning against and the unsupportive acknowledgement scales. Higher scores on each of these scales indicate greater likelihood of offering of negative reactions. Positive social reactions were measured using the average of the positive reactions subscale, in which higher scores indicating greater likelihood of offering positive reactions. The purpose of utilizing a modified version of the SRQ was to begin to understand the social context that victims of sexual assault may encounter at UAF (refer to Appendix F).

### **Expected peer social reactions questionnaire**

The Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ) – Short Form (described above) was also modified to assess participants' perceptions of how their peers would likely react towards the woman in the scenario. The instructions for the scale were modified to ask participants to indicate how likely they perceived their friends would be to respond in given ways to the woman in the scenario. The items contained in the Expected Peer Social Reactions Questionnaire are the same as the above Modified Social Reactions Questionnaire, Short Form. In the current study the total scale containing 16 items was found to have good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .77$ ). Good

internal consistency ( $\alpha = .85$  and  $.71$ , respectively) was also found for the negative social reactions subscale, containing 12 items, and the positive social reactions subscale, containing 4 items (refer to Appendix G).

### **Modern sexism scale**

The Modern Sexism Scale (MSS; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995) is designed to measure covert forms of sexism, including lack of sympathy for women's issues and belief that there is more gender equality in the workplace than what exists in reality. The scale contains eight items that load onto three subscales: denial of continuing discrimination, antagonism towards women's demands, and resentment about special favors for women. Items are scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). Five of the eight questions were reverse-coded during data analysis (refer to Appendix H). In the current study, the average of all item responses was calculated to measure prevalence of modern sexist beliefs. For the purposes of performing moderation analysis, a median-split dichotomous variable was also created that reflected high versus low modern sexism.

Internal reliability of the MSS has been established as high when administered in combination with the Old-Fashioned Sexism Scale, with Cronbach's alphas of 0.75 (Swim et al., 1995), 0.82 (Swim & Cohen, 1997). When administered alone, the MSS has evidenced lower internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.65 (Campbell et al., 1997). Although the Modern Sexism Scale has been used in far fewer studies than the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (AWS; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973), a frequently utilized measure of sexist attitudes towards women (McHugh & Frieze, 1997), the time period that the AWS was developed was a primary factor for instead choosing the MSS. The AWS has been identified as a measure of overt sexism. It was hypothesized that such overt sexism is less common in modern

society and therefore less sensitive to attitudes that may exist today (Buckner, 2010). The subtle nature of the MSS was hypothesized to have greater power than other scales to detect these sexist attitudes (Refer to Appendix H).

#### **Social desirability scale – short form**

The social desirability scale, short form (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) is designed to measure social desirability bias in survey responses. It is comprised of 10 questions with true-false response options ( $\alpha = .64$ ). Although the scale is available in long form (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), the short form was chosen for this study to minimize additional time required by participants. Five questions were reverse coded during analysis so that higher responses to all items corresponded to higher levels of social desirability (refer to Appendix I).

#### **Illinois rape myth acceptance scale – short form**

The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS; Payne et al., 1999) is designed to measure the acceptance of rape myths using a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*) (McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999). The scale is available in long form (IRMAS), containing 45 items grouped into seven subscales, and short form (IRMAS-SF; McMahon & Farmer, 2011), containing 22 items. For ease of interpretation, the responses to each item were reverse coded during analysis so that higher numbers reflected more rape myth acceptance. The short form was used in the current study to assess rape myths that reflect four general subscales: She Asked For It (six questions), He Didn't Mean To (six questions), It Wasn't Really Rape (five questions), and She Lied (six questions). The IRMA-SF scale was used to create several variables, each used for different analysis types. A variable representing the average of participants' responses to all items was calculated to assess the prevalence of rape myths and for inclusion in correlation analyses. One variable per subscale was

created to assess the prevalence of categories of rape myths, each of which represented participants' average response to the subscale. A median-split dichotomous variable was created for use in moderation analysis.

Both the IRMAS and IRMAS-SF have evidenced high reliability and validity (Payne et al., 1999). Specifically, the overall Cronbach's alpha for the IRMAS was 0.93, indicating high internal reliability. The items of the IRMAS were chosen to measure a wide range of previously identified facets of rape myth acceptance, including general rape myth acceptance and acceptance of specific classes of rape myths (Payne et al., 1999). The IRMAS-SF has similarly high internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. Tests of the construct validity of the IRMAS-SF demonstrated positive relationships with scales measuring related beliefs and attitudes. Specifically, correlations ranging from 0.47-0.72 were found with scales measuring adversarial sexual beliefs, acceptance of interpersonal violence, sexism and hostility towards women, and sex role stereotyping attitudes (Payne et al., 1999). Both the IRMAS and IRMAS-SF were developed and initially tested within college populations. The IRMAS-SF was developed for studies in which time would not allow for use of the IRMAS and in which measurement of general rape myth acceptance is sought.

Recently, the IRMAS and IRMAS-SF were updated to account for cultural changes (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Subscales that were no longer theoretically relevant were eliminated and wording was modified in items and subscale names to account for changes in relevant colloquial language. Because the measure was developed and tested within a college population and has been recently updated, it was chosen instead of other popular measures of rape myth acceptance (refer to Appendix J).

### **Expected peer rape myth acceptance**

To create a measure assessing perceptions of peer rape myth acceptance, the instructions for the IRMAS-SF (Payne et al., 1999) were modified. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which their friends would agree with each item on the scale. The items themselves were not modified. Participants were presented response options that on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). For ease of interpretation, the responses to each item were reverse coded during analysis so that higher numbers reflected more rape myth acceptance. This scale was used to create several variables, each used for different analyses. A variable representing the average of participants' responses to all items was calculated to assess the perceived prevalence of rape myths among participants' peers and for inclusion in correlation analyses. One variable per subscale was created for assessing the perceived prevalence among peers of accepting categories of rape myths. Each of these variables represented participants' average response to the subscale. A median-split dichotomous variable was created for inclusion in moderation analysis (refer to Appendix K).

### **Prior indirect experience of and training responding to sexual assault**

Two questions from the National Women's Survey-Replication (Kilpatrick et al., 2007) were asked to assess whether participants had experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault. During analysis, a dichotomous variable was created to represent whether participants reported having had any experience responding to disclosures of sexual. Three additional questions were asked of participants to assess prior participation in sexual assault awareness or response training. The response options were "Yes" and "No". The purpose of measuring experience and training as part of the current study was to better understand if and how

experience or training influences likely attributions or social reactions to sexual assault victims (refer to Appendices L and M).

### **Improving sexual assault response on campus**

Participants were asked one open-ended question to explore what they thought could be done to improve response to sexual assault at UAF. Their responses were not bound by length and participants were able to skip the question if desired (refer to Appendix N).

### **Recruitment and Data Collection Methods**

The survey was created and made available to students using the online platform, Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey automatically randomized participants to one of the two conditions (reading a scenario of either a stereotypical stranger rape or a realistic acquaintance rape). All students were asked to provide demographic information at the end of the survey. The median time participants spent completing questions in the survey was 16 minutes. When outliers (participants who met exclusion criteria or dropped out of the survey within the first quarter of the survey) participation time ranged from approximately 5 minutes to 2 hours and 44 minutes.

### **Research Questions and Data Analyses**

#### **Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the demographics of the sample, rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism. These statistics were used to explore the sample characteristics and identify the prevalence of rape myths and modern sexist beliefs. Also, descriptive statistics were calculated for attributions, emotions, and social reactions.

#### **Correlation analyses**

Five correlation analyses were completed for the study. The first two correlation analyses were exploratory in nature and consequently no a priori hypotheses were identified. A Pearson

correlation analysis was completed to examine relationships of age with attributions of fault and blame to the victim and perpetrator, emotional reactions towards the victim and perpetrator, and rape myth acceptance. Another Pearson correlation analysis was completed to examine correlations of social desirability with moderator and response variables. A third correlation analysis was completed to assess relationships between attribution model variables (attributions of fault and blame to the perpetrator and victim, feelings of anger and empathy towards the victim and perpetrator, positive and negative social reactions). It was hypothesized that fault and blame would be correlated with greater anger, less empathy, more negative social reactions, and fewer positive social reactions. A fourth correlation analysis was completed to examine the hypothesis that participants' social reactions would share a significant, positive correlation with their perceived peer social reactions. The fifth correlation analysis was completed to examine the hypothesis that participants rape myth acceptance would share a significant, positive correlation with the perceived rape myth acceptance of their peers.

### **T-Tests**

Three T-Tests were completed for the current study. The first T-Test was exploratory and explored whether differences existed between undergraduates and graduate students in attribution model variables and rape myth acceptance. Two T-Tests were completed to test the hypotheses that male participants would endorse higher rape myth acceptance and modern sexism than female participants.

### **MANCOVA's**

Six multiple analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) were completed for this study. Scenario was included as an independent variable and social desirability as a covariate in all six MANCOVA's, with each testing a different moderator. It was hypothesized that, relative to

participants who read the acquaintance rape scenario, participants who read the stranger rape scenario would attribute more fault and blame to the perpetrator, stronger disagreement that the victim is at fault or to blame, more positive emotions (less anger and more empathy) towards the victim, and more negative emotions (increased anger and decreased empathy) towards the perpetrator, higher likelihood of offering positive social reactions and lower likelihood of offering negative reactions to the victim. The MANCOVAs also assessed whether rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, gender of the participant, sexual assault awareness or response training, or experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault moderated the effect of scenario.

The effects of scenario on the pattern of attributions, emotions, and social reactions were expected to be stronger for those higher in rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, for male participants, and for those without training or indirect experience. In addition, main effects were predicted for each of these variables. Specifically, compared with those who had lower scores, those with higher rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism were expected to react less positively toward the victim (attributing more blame and fault, feeling less empathy and more anger, endorsing decreased likelihood of offering positive reactions, being more likely to offer negative reactions, and perceiving peers will act similarly in regard to social reactions) and more positively towards the perpetrator (attributing less blame and fault and feeling more empathy and less anger). Likewise, participants who were male, or who lacked experience and training, were expected to respond with more negative reactions towards the victim and more positive reactions towards the perpetrator compared with participants who were female or who had experience and training. For the purposes of these analyses, median-split dichotomous variables were created for rape myth



acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, training, and experience responding to disclosures.

### **Qualitative content analysis**

Qualitative content analysis was utilized for the analysis of the 125 responses to the open-ended question regarding how the campus can improve response to sexual assault. The purpose of this analysis was to systematically deduce categories from the participant responses (Cho & Lee, 2014). Two undergraduate students currently enrolled in a Psychology Department offered qualitative analysis course helped to develop and refine the codebook. Prior to beginning coding, the student researcher and undergraduate assistants discussed preconceived notions related to sexual assault. The student researcher and the two undergraduate students engaged in team-based coding using adapted methods from MacQueen, McLellan, Milstein, and Milstein (1998). Meetings were held semi-weekly to review open coding of sets of responses. Once this coding resulted in a set of inductive categories, these categories were applied to the coding of subsequent responses. An iterative process was utilized to refine the initial codebook and create a set of codes that represented the participants' responses. After a refined codebook was created and responses were re-coded, the student researcher provided a random selected set of 20 responses (16%) to one of the dissertation co-chairs to be independently coded as an external audit of codebook reliability. During this independent coding, 70% agreement was found. Differences in coding that arose were discussed until consensus was reached.

### **Community-Based Participatory Research**

This research was designed and implemented using a community-based participatory research framework. Stakeholders were identified at three different stages during the completion of this study. During the first two of these phases, meetings with the stakeholders had several

goals. Stakeholders were briefly familiarized with the study, asked for feedback regarding the relevance of the design to the UAF campus, and asked whether modifications to the design or additional questions would provide information relevant to both the research aims and the role of the stakeholder in sexual assault programming or response at UAF.

In the first phase, during the initial design of the study, the student researcher contacted and met with UAF Chief of Police Keith Mallard and Title IX coordinator Mae Marsh. During this meeting, the student researcher began building community relationships and posed several questions to the community stakeholders. A draft of each sexual assault scenario was discussed, and attention was paid to soliciting feedback about how realistic the acquaintance rape scenario was based on the work that each stakeholder does with sexual assault programming. Significant turnover occurred within many departments at UAF after this stakeholder meeting, during which time the two stakeholders left UAF.

During the second phase of identification of stakeholders and outreach, the student researcher attempted to contact the new chief of the UAF Police Department, the new Title IX coordinator, the UAF Resource and Advocacy Center (RAC) director, and a Residence Life representative. The UAF RAC and Residence Life were the only respondents. The student researcher first met with the director of the UAF RAC, Kara Carlson. As a result of the meeting, several questions were added to the survey that would support the overall mission of the UAF RAC as well as aid in the exploration of whether UAF-specific training results in meaningful changes in response to sexual assault victims. Additionally, Ms. Carlson recommended including as a stakeholder Cody Rogers, the director of UAF Student Activities Office (UAF SAO). In a meeting with Kara Carlson and Cody Rogers, we identified several questions that would be helpful to add to the study that would support both the research aims of the study as well as

support the missions of their programs. Both indicated their interest in further participation in the study, including offering their knowledge to help ensure contextually sensitive and accurate interpretation of the data.

In the third phase of identifying stakeholders and performing outreach, which began in late June, stakeholders from the first two phases of outreach who are still at UAF were contacted. Additional stakeholders, including the Title IX office, Communications and Journalism department, UAF Police department, the UAF Justice department, and the UAF ROTC office, were contacted with offers to share results from this study. During each meeting, results from the current study were presented and discussed, and stakeholders were encouraged to ask questions and provide input on ways in which the data may be beneficial to their students or their department. Ideas for further research will also be discussed with each stakeholder.

Aspects of community-based participatory research were integral to this research design and were utilized in data interpretation, including identification of and partnerships with community members, building on the resources that existed within UAF, building collaborative partnerships throughout the research design and implementation, design of a project that integrated knowledge and action to benefit all partners, and research design that attended to social inequalities within the community (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).

### **Human Subjects Ethics**

Before beginning recruitment or data collection, the current study was submitted to the UAF Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval (IRB numbers 1089141-2 and 1089141-6). American Psychological Association principles of ethical research (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2009) were upheld during this study. All research assistants and personnel involved with collection or analysis of data were required to successfully complete the relevant

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative web-based certification program(s) to ensure protection of all participants. The procedures of this research were supervised by the dissertation co-chairs and reviewed by the university IRB to ensure that confidentiality was protected, and ethics were upheld throughout.

Participants and their information were safeguarded in several ways. Participants were all provided with a consent form (refer to Appendix P) describing the minimal risk of distress due to participation in the study. Past research on sexual assault suggested that the risks to participants in the current study were low. Participants in past research on sexual assault who were asked more invasive questions than the current study (including whether the participant has experienced sexual assault and, if so, what type of physical contact, injuries, and aggression were involved) reported low distress and rarely skipped items due to distress (Edwards, Kearns, Calhoun, & Gidycz, 2009; Kilpatrick et al., 2007). In one population study of the prevalence of sexual assault, approximately 8% of participants reported experiencing survey questions as “emotionally upsetting”, though less than 1% of participants reported that they continued to feel emotionally distressed at the end of the interview (Kilpatrick et al., 2007).

To assess the emotional impact of the current study on participants, they were asked at the end of the survey whether they feel better, the same, or worse than before participating. Most participants (74%) indicated they felt the same, 16% reported feeling worse, and nearly 10% reported feeling better than when they started the survey. While it cannot be known why 16% of participants reported feeling worse or whether they felt distressed because of the survey, it is possible that participants who have been victims themselves felt worse than those participants who have not experienced sexual victimization. In one survey of a large sample of college women, women who have experienced sexual assault at some point in their lives were more

likely to report distress due to participation in a survey about sexual assault (Edwards et al., 2009). However, when asked about the balance of costs and benefits of participating in the research, both women with and without a history of sexual assault reported that the personal benefits of participating outweighed the costs (Edwards et al., 2009). Only two participants discussed their reactions to the current study with the researcher. They shared that their experience of feeling worse was not a result of distress but instead a reflection of their experience of the topic of sexual assault as depressing. While these two participants may not represent all participants who felt worse, it is possible that other participants were not distressed but instead experienced a shift in mood due to the topic of the study.

The consent form also described participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time, including if they feel distressed. The consent form also described that participants were not likely to experience personal benefit outside of satisfaction for having contributed to research. However, participants were given the opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of six \$20 Amazon gift cards. Additionally, to ameliorate distress participants could experience during or following the study, all participants who completed the study received a debriefing form (refer to Appendix Q) containing the contact information for crisis and counseling services.

Throughout the study, the confidentiality and anonymity of responses were protected in several ways. No identifiable information was linked to participants' individual responses. The proposed survey was administered in an online format, which allows for anonymous participation. Participants' responses were saved to both a password-protected online Survey Monkey account and to a password-protected USB drive.



## Chapter 4: Results

### Descriptive Statistics

#### Attribution model

Examination of descriptive statistics suggested that the students at UAF are likely supportive of sexual assault victims (see Table 3). When blame and responsibility were measured on a scale of 1 (*Not At All*) to 7 (*Completely*), participants attributed low fault ( $M = 1.48$ ) and blame ( $M = 1.56$ ) to the woman (victim). Men (assailants) were attributed high fault ( $M = 6.08$ ) and blame ( $M = 6.07$ ). Participants on average agreed that they felt empathy ( $M = 4.61$  on a 5-point scale) for the victim in the scenario and disagreed that they felt anger towards her ( $M = 1.52$ ). The opposite was found regarding feelings towards the perpetrator. Participants saw themselves as somewhat likely ( $M = 4.45$  on a 5-point scale) to offer positive social reactions and somewhat unlikely ( $M = 2.27$ ) to offer negative social reactions to the victim in the scenario. Participants reported they were on average “somewhat unlikely” to offer negative reactions of either the unsupportive acknowledgment type ( $M = 2.24$ ) or the turning against type ( $M = 2.31$ ). While they perceived their peers were also on average “unlikely” to offer these negative reactions ( $M = 2.81$ ), on average participants perceived their friends as slightly more likely than participants themselves to offer both unsupportive acknowledgement ( $M = 2.78$ ) and turning against ( $M = 2.85$ ) reactions.

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics of Attribution Model Variables*

Characteristic	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fault attributed to the woman	1.48	1.15
Fault attributed to the man	6.08	1.88
Blame attributed to the woman	1.56	1.42
Blame attributed to the man	6.07	1.95
Empathy for the woman	4.61	0.67
Empathy for the man	1.57	0.93
Anger towards the woman	1.52	0.84
Anger towards the man	4.35	1.05
Positive social reactions	4.45	0.57
Negative social reactions	2.27	0.62
Unsupportive acknowledgement	2.24	0.67
Turning against	2.31	0.78
Expected peer positive social reactions	4.25	0.70
Expected peer negative social reactions	2.81	0.77
Unsupportive acknowledgement	2.78	0.77
Turning against	2.85	0.96

*Note.* Fault and blame of woman (victim) and fault and blame of the man (perpetrator) were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at All*) to 7 (*Completely*). Empathy for woman, empathy for man, anger at woman, and anger at man were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Social Reactions (positive, negative, expected peer positive, and expected peer negative) are all measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Very Unlikely*) to 5 (*Very Likely*).

### **Rape myth acceptance**

Participants were asked to respond to the 22 questions contained in the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale (Payne et al., 1999). Descriptive statistics (see Table 4) show the averages of the entire scale as well as of each of the four subscales. On average, participants tended to disagree with rape myths ( $M = 2.01$ ). Participants were least accepting of rape myths within the subscale *It Wasn't Really Rape* ( $M = 1.47$ ) and most accepting of myths within the *She Lied* subscale ( $M = 2.34$ ). The finding that on average UAF students “disagree” with rape myths overall can be compared to the undergraduate participants in the validation study of the updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, in which participants reported more agreement with rape myths, the average participant being “unsure” about rape myths (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). As in the current study, undergraduates in the validation study reported the most



agreement with items on the She Lied subscale and the least agreement with the It Wasn't Really Rape items (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). More than 20% of the sample responded that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the following rape myths: “If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble”, “If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex”, and “If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally”. While participants in the current study perceived their friends on average to be slightly more accepting of all rape myths, participants perceived their friends to also be most accepting of the “She Lied” myths and least accepting of the “It Wasn't Really Rape” myths.

Table 4  
*Descriptive Statistics of Participant and Expected Peer Rape Myth Acceptance*

Characteristic	<i>N</i>		<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>Min</i>		<i>Max</i>	
	Self	Peer	Self	Peer	Self	Peer	Self	Peer	Self	Peer
Total Score	168	164	2.01	2.22	0.69	0.78	1.00	1.00	3.91	3.77
She Asked For It	168	164	2.01	2.27	0.91	1.04	1.00	1.00	4.50	4.83
He Didn't Mean To	167	164	2.16	2.37	0.74	0.79	1.00	1.00	4.00	4.50
It Wasn't Really Rape	167	164	1.47	1.67	0.59	0.74	1.00	1.00	3.40	4.00
She Lied	167	164	2.34	2.51	0.98	1.03	1.00	1.00	4.80	5.00

Note. Self refers to the participants' mean scores on the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. Peer refers to participants' mean scores on the Expected Peer Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. Both were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

### **Modern sexism**

Participants were presented with the eight items on the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim, et al., 1995). To explore the prevalence of modern sexist beliefs among UAF students, descriptive statistics were calculated (see Table 7, p. 88) using the mean of this scale. Results showed that, on average, participants disagreed with statements expressing modern sexism ( $M = 2.18$ ).

## Correlation Analyses

### Age, attributions, and rape myth acceptance

A correlation analysis was conducted to explore relationships of age with attribution model variables and rape myth acceptance (see Table 5). One significant, though small, correlation was found. As participant age increased, participants tended to experience less anger at the perpetrator.

Table 5

*Pearson Correlations Between Age, Attribution Variables, and Rape Myth Acceptance*

Variable	Fault of man	Fault of woman	Blame of man	Blame of woman	Empathy For man	Empathy For woman	Anger at man	Anger at woman	Rape myth acceptance
Age	-.063	.066	-.053	.095	.097	.107	-.171*	-.010	.076

*Note.* Age was measured as a continuous variable with selection options between 18 and 99.

\* $p < .05$

### Social desirability

A Pearson's correlation analysis was run to examine the intercorrelations between the social desirability, response variables, and moderating variables (see Table 6, p. 87; Table 7, p. 88; and Table 8, p. 89). Many significant correlations were found, most of which were moderate or small (Cohen, 1992). The results for each of these groups of variables will be described below with reference to the original hypotheses.

Social desirability was not correlated with most of the attribution model variables, with the exception of small, negative correlations with fault attributed to the woman (see Table 8, p. 89) and expected peer negative social reactions (see Table 7, p. 88). As social desirability increased, participants tended to attribute less fault to the woman and expect their friends would attribute fewer negative reactions towards the woman in the scenario (see Table 7, p. 88). Overall, results suggest that participants' response patterns were not highly intercorrelated with social desirability.

Many of the response variables assessing attributions and emotional reactions were significantly correlated, and typically the strengths of the correlations were moderate (Cohen, 1992). Examination of these correlations will be discussed in two sections. First, correlations among the variables related to attributions and emotional reactions to the woman in the scenario will be examined. Second, correlations among the variables related to attributions and emotional reactions to the man in the scenario will be examined.

Significant correlations between attribution and emotion variables related to the woman in the scenario were identified and were consistent with hypotheses (see Table 6, p. 87). As participants attributed more fault to the woman, they attributed more blame to her, felt less empathy for her, and felt more anger towards her. Significant relationships were found between blame, empathy, and anger such that as participants attributed greater blame to the woman, they also felt less empathy and more anger. A significant negative relationship was found between empathy and anger regarding the woman in the scenario such that as empathy increased, participants indicated feeling less anger towards the woman in the scenario.

Pearson's correlation analyses also revealed significant relationships between variables related to attributions of blame and judgment, emotional reactions, and social reactions (see Table 8, p. 89). For instance, positive correlations suggested that increases in empathy for the woman were related to increased anger towards the man and greater likelihood of offering positive social reactions to the woman. Negative correlations suggested that as participants attributed less fault, less blame, felt less anger towards the woman, and felt less empathy for the man, their likelihood of offering positive social reactions to the woman in the scenario was higher. Expected peer positive social reactions was found to mirror most of these relationships, though relationships with empathy for the woman and anger at the woman were not significant.

As hypothesized, positive correlations were found suggesting that increased attributions of fault, blame, and anger towards the woman as well as empathy towards the man were related to increased likelihood of negatively reacting towards the victim. Also consistent with attribution theory, negative correlations were found that implied participants who felt less empathy for the woman and anger for the man were more likely to offer negative social reactions to the victim.

Inspection of intercorrelations between attribution variables related to the man in the scenario revealed similar relationships. Consistent with attribution theory, as fault attributed to the man increased, participants tended to attribute more blame, feel less empathy, and feel more anger towards the man in the scenario. Also, as participants attributed more blame to the man, they expressed less empathy and more anger towards him. Finally, a strong negative relationship was identified between empathy and anger felt about the man in the scenario such that participants who felt greater empathy tended to feel less anger towards the man.

Examination of the relationship between moderator variables and response variables revealed several significant correlations (see Table 8, p. 89). Specifically, as participants expressed higher modern sexism and rape myth acceptance, they attributed greater fault and blame, felt more anger and less empathy towards the woman, and conversely expressed greater empathy and less anger towards the man in the scenario. Correlations between expected peer rape myth acceptance and attribution model variables mirrored the correlations between participants' rape myth acceptance and attribution model variables (see Table 8, p. 89).

Pearson correlation analysis was also used to examine correlations among moderator variables and social reactions (see Table 7, p. 88; and Table 8, p. 89). Modern sexism and rape myth acceptance were highly intercorrelated (see Table 7, p. 88), with participants endorsing higher modern sexism reporting higher rape myth acceptance. Consistent with predictions,

participants who endorsed more modern sexist beliefs and rape myth acceptance saw themselves and their friends as less likely to offer positive social reactions and more likely to offer negative social reactions to the hypothetical victim in the scenario.

### **Participant and expected peer reactions**

Pearson correlation analyses were performed to examine relationships between participants' reactions and expectations about their peers regarding social reactions and rape myth acceptance (see Table 7, p. 88). Several statistically significant correlations were found. Positive social reactions and expected peer positive social reactions shared a positive correlation. A positive correlation between negative social reactions and expected peer negative social reactions was also identified. These results suggest that participants believed their responses to a hypothetical victim were like those of their friends. A positive correlation was found between the participants' rape myth acceptance scores and the level of rape myth acceptance they expected their friends to have. This suggests that UAF students expected that their peers would have similar levels of rape myth acceptance as their own.

### **Relationship of Demographic Factors**

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare rape myth acceptance and modern sexism in male participants and female participants. Consistent with predictions, men had higher rape myth acceptance scores ( $M = 2.32, SD = 0.64$ ) than women ( $M = 1.87, SD = 0.63$ );  $t(155) = 4.14, p < .01, d = 0.71$ . Also consistent with predictions, men reported higher modern sexism scores ( $M = 2.62, SD = 0.93$ ) than women ( $M = 1.99, SD = 0.70$ );  $t(155) = 4.73, p < .01, d = 0.77$ .

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare mean scores on attributions, emotional reactions, and rape myth acceptance in undergraduate and graduate students. No

significant differences were found between undergraduate and graduate students in their attributions, emotional reactions, or rape myth acceptance. See Table 9 (p. 90) for means, standard deviations, and test statistics.

Table 6  
*Pearson Correlations Between the Attribution Variables*

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Fault woman	Fault man	Blame woman	Blame Man	Empathy woman	Empathy man	Anger woman	Anger man
Fault of woman	154	1.48	18.70	-	-.187*	.657**	-.127	-.518**	.333**	.613**	-.281**
Fault of man	179	6.08	29.57		-	-.052	.920**	.182*	-.320**	-.206**	.243**
Blame of woman	143	1.56	22.62			-	-.174*	-.290**	.263**	.381**	-.247**
Blame of man	177	6.07	30.59				-	.182*	-.354**	-.223**	.224**
Empathy for woman	184	4.61	0.67					-	-.227**	-.485**	.289*
Empathy for man	184	1.57	0.93						-	.408**	-.595**
Anger at woman	184	1.52	0.84							-	-.246**
Anger at man	184	4.35	1.05								-

*Note.* Fault of woman, fault of man, blame of woman, and blame of man were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not At All*) to 7 (*Completely*). Empathy for woman, empathy for man, anger at woman, and anger at man were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 7

*Pearson Correlations Between Moderator Variables, Social Reactions, and Social Desirability*

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Modern sexism	Rape myth acceptance	Expected peer rape myth acceptance	Positive social reactions	Negative social reactions	Expected peer positive social reactions	Expected peer negative social reactions	Social desirability
Modern sexism	169	2.18	0.83	-	.697**	.406**	-.229**	.340**	-.244**	.055	.116
Rape myth acceptance	168	2.01	0.69		-	.670**	-.329**	.541**	-.238**	.165*	.049
Expected peer rape myth acceptance	164	2.22	0.78			-	-.221**	.355**	-.313**	.478**	-.027
Positive social reactions	171	4.45	0.57				-	-.123	.540**	-.089	.106
Negative social reactions	171	2.27	0.62					-	-.191*	.322**	-.004
Expected peer positive social reactions	169	4.25	0.70						-	-.199**	-.008
Expected peer negative social reactions	169	2.81	0.77							-	-.205**
Social desirability	167	15.04	2.13								-

*Note.* Modern sexism, rape myth acceptance, and expected peer rape myth acceptance are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “*Strongly Disagree*” to “*Strongly Agree*”. Rape myth acceptance and expected peer rape myth acceptance represent the average of the responses to the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and expected peer Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, respectively. Social reactions (positive, negative, expected peer positive, and expected peer negative) are all measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Very Unlikely*) to 5 (*Very Likely*). Each of the social reactions scales represents an average of the responses to the items in each of the respective scales. Social desirability represents the sum of the items of the Social Desirability Scale.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$



Table 8

*Pearson Correlations of Moderators, Social Reactions, and Social Desirability with Attribution Variables*

Variable	Fault of woman	Fault of man	Blame of woman	Blame of man	Empathy for woman	Empathy for man	Anger at woman	Anger at man
Modern Sexism	.272**	-.002	.154	.022	-.369**	.171*	.287**	-.224**
Rape Myth Acceptance	.461**	-.139	.359**	-.117	-.388**	.290**	.484**	-.315**
Expected Peer Rape Myth Acceptance	.233**	-.087	.260**	-.084	-.177*	.227**	.300**	-.170*
Positive Social Reactions	-.453**	.117	-.304**	.077	.242**	-.254**	-.295**	.187*
Negative Social Reactions	.466**	-.122	.392**	-.106	-.336**	.220**	.427**	-.167*
Expected Peer Positive Social Reactions	-.239**	.055	-.256**	.040	.112	-.280**	-.144	.179*
Expected Peer Negative Social Reactions	.109	.024	.096	.081	-.124	.057	.115	0.070
Social Desirability	-.182*	-.102	-.043	-.149	-.036	.055	-.010	.021

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 9

*T-Test Statistics of Attribution Variables of Undergraduates and Graduate Students*

	Undergraduate			Graduate			<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Fault Attributed to the Woman	110	1.45	1.11	22	1.55	1.5	130	-0.33	0.74
Fault Attributed to the Man	124	6.08	1.86	26	5.77	2.21	148	0.75	0.46
Blame Attributed to the Woman	100	1.37	1.00	21	1.52	1.54	119	-0.58	0.57
Blame Attributed to the Man	123	6.12	1.89	26	5.81	2.23	147	0.75	0.46
Anger at the Woman in the Scenario	125	1.56	0.87	26	1.35	0.69	149	1.17	0.24
Anger at the Man in the Scenario	125	4.38	1.03	26	4.58	0.95	149	-0.92	0.36
Empathy for the Woman	125	4.58	0.70	26	4.81	0.40	149	-1.63	0.11
Empathy for the Man	125	1.50	0.86	26	1.42	0.76	149	0.45	0.66
Rape myth acceptance	125	2.04	0.67	26	1.81	0.73	149	1.59	0.11

## MANCOVA's

### Scenario and rape myth acceptance

A MANCOVA test (2 scenarios X 2 rape myth acceptance level) examined main effects and interaction effects on attributions of fault and blame, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions. Social desirability was included in the analysis as a covariate. Contrary to hypotheses, results revealed no main effect of scenario,  $F(12, 110) = 0.89$ ,  $p = .56$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ , or interaction effect,  $F(12, 110) = 1.23$ ,  $p = .27$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$  on the outcomes. However, rape myth acceptance had a significant effect on the collection of outcome variables,  $F(12, 110) = 6.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .40$ . The covariate, social desirability, was found to have a significant impact on the collection of outcome variables,  $F(12, 110) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $\eta^2 = .21$ .

Consistent with hypotheses, level of rape myth acceptance had significant effects on fault and blame attributed to the woman, anger and empathy felt for the woman, anger and empathy felt for the man, positive and negative social reactions, and expected peer positive social reactions,  $F_s(1, 121) = 20.38, 7.68, 27.35, 13.54, 10.85, 4.21, 12.88$ , and  $47.59$ , respectively. All  $p_s < .01$  with the exceptions of empathy for the man and expected peer positive social reactions,  $p = .037$  and  $.011$ , respectively. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 10. As hypothesized, the participants who endorsed higher rape myth acceptance attributed more fault and blame to the woman in the scenario. Similarly, they felt more anger and less empathy for the woman than participants with low rape myth acceptance. Conversely, they reported experiencing less anger and greater empathy for the man in the scenario than participants who endorsed low rape myth acceptance. Consistent with predictions, participants who reported higher rape myth acceptance perceived themselves as less likely to respond to the woman in the scenario with positive social reactions and more likely to respond with negative reactions. Participants who

reported higher rape myth acceptance perceived their friends as less likely to express positive social reactions to the woman in the scenario.

The covariate, social desirability, had a significant effect on expected peer negative social reactions,  $F(1, 121) = 12.37, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$  as well as on fault attributed to the woman,  $F(1, 121) = 8.24, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$ . Higher levels of social desirability were related to lower levels of fault attributed to the woman and lower levels of expected peer negative social reactions.

Examination of the univariate analyses revealed the interaction of scenario and rape myth acceptance had a significant effect on expected peer negative social reactions  $F(1, 121) = 4.44, p < .037, \eta^2 = .035$ . Contrary to hypotheses, participants who expressed low rape myth acceptance perceived that their friends would be more likely to offer negative social reactions to the stranger rape victim ( $M = 3.01$ ) than to the acquaintance rape victim ( $M = 2.55$ ). However, there were no differences in expected peer negative social reactions for the stranger ( $M = 2.86$ ) versus acquaintance rape victim scenario ( $M = 2.93$ ) among participants who had high rape myth acceptance.

Table 10

*Means and SD's of Attribution Variables Across Two Levels of Rape Myth Acceptance (High and Low)*

Variable	Low Rape Myth Acceptance		High Rape Myth Acceptance	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fault Attributed to the Woman	1.03	0.18	1.83	1.50
Blame Attributed to the Woman	1.12	0.78	1.67	1.36
Anger at the Woman in the Scenario	1.13	0.39	1.80	0.99
Empathy for the Woman	4.78	0.45	4.32	0.86
Anger at the Man in the Scenario	4.70	0.83	4.17	1.13
Empathy for the Man	1.30	0.70	1.59	0.82
Positive Social Reactions	4.63	0.39	4.31	0.65
Negative Social Reactions	1.97	0.48	2.58	0.51
Expected Peer Positive Social Reactions	4.45	0.58	4.17	0.67

### **Scenario and expected peer rape myth acceptance**

A MANCOVA test (2 scenarios X 2 expected peer rape myth acceptance level) examined main effects and interaction effects on attributions of fault and blame, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions. Social desirability was included in the analysis as a covariate. Results revealed no main effect of scenario,  $F(12, 106) = 0.72, p = .73, \eta^2 = .08$ , or interaction effect,  $F(12, 106) = 0.96, p = .50, \eta^2 = .10$ , on the response variables. Expected peer rape myth acceptance had a significant effect on the collection of outcome variables,  $F(12, 106) = 3.96, p < .01, \eta^2 = .31$ .

Consistent with hypotheses, level of expected rape myth acceptance had significant effects on fault and blame attributed to the woman, anger felt towards the woman, empathy felt for the man, positive and negative social reactions, and expected peer positive and negative social reactions,  $F_s(1, 117) = 6.14, 4.32, 11.91, 6.31, 5.09, 16.06, 10.72, \text{ and } 27.82$  respectively.

All  $ps < .01$  except fault and blame attributed to the woman, empathy felt for the man, and positive social reactions,  $ps = .015, .04, .013,$  and  $.026$ . Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 11. As hypothesized, the participants who perceived their peers as having high rape myth acceptance attributed more fault, more blame, experienced more anger towards the woman, and felt more empathy for the man in the scenario. Consistent with predictions, participants who perceived their peers had high rape myth acceptance were less likely to respond to the woman in the scenario with positive social reactions, more likely to respond with negative reactions, and believed their peers would offer similar social reactions.

Table 11  
*Means and SD's of Attribution Variables Across Two Levels of Expected Peer Rape Myth Acceptance (High and Low)*

Variable	Low Expected Peer Rape Myth Acceptance		High Expected Peer Rape Myth Acceptance	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fault Attributed to the Woman	1.18	0.57	1.72	1.48
Blame Attributed to the Woman	1.14	0.52	1.57	1.33
Anger at the Woman in the Scenario	1.23	0.54	1.72	0.98
Empathy for the Man	1.26	0.64	1.58	0.81
Positive Social Reactions	4.58	0.44	4.35	0.65
Negative Social Reactions	2.08	0.52	2.50	0.56
Expected Peer Positive Social Reactions	4.49	0.50	4.12	0.71
Expected Peer Negative Social Reactions	2.49	0.75	3.15	0.65

### **Scenario and modern sexism**

A MANCOVA test (2 scenarios X 2 modern sexism level) examined main effects and interaction effects on attributions of fault and blame, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions. Social desirability was included in the analysis as a covariate.

Results revealed no main effect of scenario,  $F(12, 111) = 0.66, p = .79, \eta^2 = .07$ , or interaction effect,  $F(12, 111) = 0.51, p = .93, \eta^2 = .05$ , on the collection of response variables. Modern sexism had a significant effect on the collection of outcome variables,  $F(12, 111) = 3.32, p < .01, \eta^2 = .26$ .

Consistent with hypotheses, level of modern sexism had significant effects on fault and blame attributed to the woman, empathy and anger felt towards the woman, empathy and anger felt for the man, negative social reactions, and expected peer positive social reactions,  $F_s(1, 122) = 16.58, 11.14, 7.11, 14.43, 4.01, 5.93, 29.12, \text{ and } 5.30$  respectively. All  $p_s < .01$  except empathy and anger felt towards the man and expected peer positive social reactions,  $p_s = .047, .016, \text{ and } .023$ . Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 12. As hypothesized, the participants who reported high modern sexism attributed more fault and blame to the woman, experienced more anger towards the woman, and experienced less empathy for the woman. They also reported less anger and more empathy towards the man in the scenario. Consistent with predictions, they were more likely to respond to the woman in the scenario with negative reactions and believed their friends were less likely to express positive social reactions to the woman in the scenario.

Table 12

*Means and SD's of Attribution Variables Across Two Levels of Modern Sexism (High and Low)*

Variable	Low Modern Sexism		High Modern Sexism	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fault Attributed to the Woman	1.06	0.30	1.75	1.46
Blame Attributed to the Woman	1.06	0.30	1.68	1.47
Empathy for Woman	4.74	0.48	4.40	0.85
Anger at the Woman	1.20	0.45	1.70	1.00
Empathy for the Man	1.30	0.66	1.58	0.86
Anger at the Man	4.65	0.93	4.27	1.06
Negative Social Reactions	2.01	0.51	2.50	0.54
Expected Peer Positive Social Reactions	4.44	0.58	4.18	0.68

**Scenario and gender**

A MANCOVA test (2 scenarios X 2 gender) examined main effects and interaction effects on attributions of fault and blame, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions. Social desirability was included in the analysis as a covariate. Results revealed no main effect of scenario,  $F(12, 102) = 0.54, p = .89, \eta^2 = .06$ , or interaction effect,  $F(12, 102) = 1.09, p = .38, \eta^2 = .11$ , on the collection of variables. Consistent with hypotheses, gender had a significant effect on the collection of outcome variables,  $F(12, 102) = 2.99, p < .01, \eta^2 = .26$ .

Specifically, gender had significant effects on attributions of blame and feelings of anger towards the man, and negative social reactions,  $F_s(1, 113) = 5.40, 4.94, \text{ and } 8.83$  respectively,  $p$ 's = .022, .028, and  $<.01$ , respectively. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 13.

Contrary to hypothesis, men attributed more blame to the perpetrator than women did. Consistent with hypotheses, men felt less anger towards the perpetrator and were more likely to react negatively towards the victim than were women.



Table 13

*Means and SD's of Attribution Variables Across Genders (Men and Women)*

Variable	Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Blame Attributed to the Man	6.51	1.23	5.56	2.38
Anger at the Man	4.15	1.11	4.57	0.92
Negative Social Reactions	2.53	0.45	2.20	0.59

### **Scenario and training**

A MANCOVA test (2 scenarios X 2 training) analysis was completed to examine main effects and interaction effects on attributions of fault and blame, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions. Social desirability was included in the analysis as a covariate. Review of the number of participants in each cell revealed that in many cells there were fewer participants than the number of dependent variables. Cell sizes ranged from 10 to 67 participants. As a result, the analysis was not interpretable.

### **Scenario and experience responding to disclosures**

A MANCOVA test (2 scenarios X 2 experience responding to disclosures) analysis was completed to examine main effects and interaction effects on attributions of fault and blame, emotional reactions, social reactions, and expected peer social reactions. Social desirability was included in the analysis as a covariate. Examination of the number of participants in each cell revealed that, while the ability to detect interactions with this analysis is limited, the analysis had sufficient power to detect main effects (the number of participants per cell ranged from 17 to 67).

Results revealed no main effect of scenario,  $F(12, 105) = 0.56, p = .87, \eta^2 = .06$ , or interaction effect,  $F(12, 105) = 0.94, p = .94, \eta^2 = .05$ , on the collection of response variables. Experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault had a significant effect on the collection of outcome variables,  $F(12, 105) = 3.48, p < .01, \eta^2 = .28$ .

Consistent with hypotheses, experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault had significant effects on empathy for the man, anger at the man, anger at the woman, and negative social reactions  $F_s(1, 116) = 5.75, 7.99, 3.06, \text{ and } 5.38$ , respectively. All  $p_s < .01$  except for that corresponding to anger towards the woman,  $p = .038$ . Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 14. As hypothesized, the participants who had experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault experienced less empathy and more anger towards the man, experienced less anger at the woman, and perceived themselves as less likely to offer the victim negative social reactions.

Table 14  
*Means and SD's of Attribution Variables Across Two Levels of Experience Responding to Sexual Assault Disclosures (No Experience and Experience)*

Variable	No Experience Responding		Experience Responding	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Empathy for Man	1.74	0.96	1.28	0.55
Anger at Man	4.12	1.19	4.59	0.84
Anger at Woman	1.69	0.84	1.40	0.82
Negative Social Reactions	2.59	0.50	2.16	0.57

### Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze responses to the open-ended question, “What do you believe would help improve responses to sexual assault victims here at UAF”. A total of 125 responses were provided, ranging in length from one-word to paragraph length (four or more sentences). Qualitative content analysis yielded 12 codes (some with subthemes), which are listed in Table 15. A brief description of the seven codes with the highest number of responses is provided below.

Table 15  
*List of Qualitative Codes and Frequencies*

Code	Frequency
Training	50
Training (general code)	5
Training in bystander efficacy	8
Training done in specific ways	7
Training for specific purposes	15
Training targeting specific people	15
Changing community	34
Changing community in general	5
Changing community by decreasing victim blaming or shaming	7
Changing community by creating a sense of community	5
Changing community by humanizing	6
Changing community initiated by employees	10
Changing community initiated by students	1
Title IX	30
Title IX (general code)	10
Title IX responding quickly	8
Title IX repercussions	12
Awareness	20
General awareness	6
Awareness of the issue	3
Awareness of resources	11
Resources	16
Resources (general code)	6
Resource accessibility	10
Demonstrate trustworthiness	15
Demonstrate trustworthiness (general code)	3
Demonstrate trustworthiness in responsibility	4
Demonstrate trustworthiness in transparency	8
Tone	15
Tone – positive about UAF response	3
Tone – negative about UAF response	12
Uncertain or unaware	15
Other	6
Confidentiality	5
Fairness	5
Campus environment	3

### **Training**

Training was described in 50 responses as something that would improve response to sexual assault at UAF. This code contained five subthemes, including training targeting specific groups, designed for certain purposes, encouraging bystander efficacy, changes to the way training is completed, and general comments about training related to sexual assault. As a group,

all responses about training described organized educative efforts aimed at promoting increased knowledge, skill, sensitivity, compassion, or awareness as being helpful. Most training responses suggested that students and employees need to be included in this training. Other responses described that the need to include other groups in the training. For example, one participant wrote:

Campaigns other than a giant red flyer in our face that says don't rape. That is almost mocking the situation and doesn't give us any idea of how victims feel. We need to have group talks and actually realize how people feel. Maybe a [*sic*] cross the line exercise would be good so we can see how similar and vulnerable we all are. We need to truly connect with each other and not just read and make a joke about a flyer or click through haven training just to get it over with. Doing things in person with real victims and advocates would be more real and telling than passive "learning" and "education".

Several participants described the need to include both male and female students or focus just on male students, while others stated that including victims and advocates in education is important. Participants advocated that training should have a variety of purposes, including teaching people how to talk to friends who have experienced sexual assault, what defines sexual assault, common misconceptions or rape myths, and how to notice and respond to sexual assault. Teaching bystander intervention was mentioned frequently, where participants described the need to teach people they can and should intervene or act to prevent assault. Participants frequently cited the need for UAF to take a new approach to training. Participants often advocated for training to be done in-person, possibly in groups, where discussion, question and answer, or experiential exercises meant to encourage authentic connection and emotional exploration would be included.

## **Changing community**

Changing the UAF community was described in 34 responses as something that would improve response to sexual assault at UAF. It emerged as a multifaceted category, with six different subthemes of responses. Most of these responses specified that the administration, faculty, or “the university”, which was interpreted to refer to UAF employees, need to be the ones making changes to the campus social environment. Employees were frequently described as not taking sexual assault seriously and needing to make it a priority. Participants called upon UAF employees to talk more with students about sexual assault, seek out as exemplar universities that have low rates of assault to implement at UAF what works for those universities, and be catalysts of systemic change. Responses described the need to change the UAF community into one in which students know it is alright to ask for help, leaders and advocates are personable and welcoming, and there exists a sense of shared humanity and caring. For example, one participant wrote, “Putting a face and a little bit about themselves to the people who would be in charge of advocacy so that people are less afraid to talk about it.” Additionally, another group of responses described a “rape culture” or “stigma” as existing on campus and that a community in which people believe victims and understand it is not their fault would help.

## **Title IX**

Changes related to Title IX processes were described in 30 responses as something that would improve response to sexual assault at UAF. These responses encompassed three subthemes: changes to Title IX repercussions, general Title IX changes, and quickness of Title IX response. Of these responses, the most frequently mentioned category of responses described changes to the repercussions of Title IX investigations. Respondents discussed wanting punishment to be more “strict” or “harsh”, often mentioning expulsion. One participant wrote,

“Harsher punishments for abusers and rapists; immediate expulsion [*sic*] and removal from dorms.” Several responses about repercussions focused on the need for UAF to follow through, implying or explicitly stating that it has not done so in the past. Most responses about Title IX were general in nature, some describing the need for confidentiality while others stating the need for more transparency. It appears that confidentiality focused on the victim during the Title IX processes, while transparency was wanted about the procedures of Title IX or the fact that an assault may have occurred. A minority of these general responses cited the need for victims to be treated differently during Title IX processes, specifically with less blame and more aid in connecting victims to resources. The final subtheme of the Title IX responses emphasized the need for the Title IX process to begin more quickly after a report has been made and to take less time to complete an investigation.

### **Awareness**

Awareness was included in 20 responses as something that would improve response to sexual assault at UAF. These responses were comprised of three subthemes, including awareness in general, awareness of the issue, and awareness of resources as being helpful. Most frequently mentioned was the need for greater awareness of resources available for victims of sexual assault. Several participants mentioned that people are not currently aware of resources, such as the Resource and Advocacy Center. For example, one participant responded, “Find ways to make the students more aware of the resources, most people don't know about them”. Within the subtheme of general awareness, most responses spoke about “more awareness” without providing details. In a third subtheme, participants noted that it would be helpful to increase awareness of the issue or the prevalence of sexual assault and domestic violence.

## **Resources**

Resources were described in 16 responses as something that would improve response to sexual assault at UAF. These responses contained the subthemes accessibility of resources and general ideas related to resources. Participants often emphasized that resources should be “easier” to access or that students should have “ease and quickness of access” to resources. Some responses implied that resources are currently difficult to access due to wait lists, cost, or time. Counseling was the most frequently mentioned resource that needed easier or quicker access. One participant responded, “Ease and quickness of access to counseling [*sic*] (no 3-day in advance [*sic*] appointments)”. General comments about resources often lacked specificity, simply describing “resources” without elaboration on type. Some general responses specified that existing resources should be better while others that they should be advertised in common areas. Several responses stated that UAF provides adequate resources, while others stated the need for support providers (such as counselors or individuals to talk to that are not clinicians and not mandatory reporters).

## **Demonstrate trustworthiness**

Demonstrating trustworthiness was described in 16 responses as something that would improve response to sexual assault at UAF. All responses included the implied or stated need for UAF to make up for past failings that eroded trust. Three sub-themes were identified, including the need for transparency, responsibility, and general comments about demonstrating trustworthiness. Transparency responses implied that UAF had hidden or covered up previous sexual assault cases, which participants implied needed to change. One participant stated, “If reports of sexual assault on campus weren't swept under the rug. If students were taught that it is never a person's fault for being raped and that victims should never be treated like liars or

criminals”. Transparency responses also suggested UAF needed to made up for failures to be transparent about the Title IX process, related decision-making, and ways that victims will be protected. The second subtheme, responsibility, described a perceived failure of broader groups of UAF employees to live up to its responsibilities related to sexual misconduct. For example, the UAF administration was described as not supporting victims or taking sexual assault seriously, UAF employees not following their written procedures for responding to disclosures of sexual misconduct, campus resources not doing their job quickly or well, and UAF deferring responsibility to students. A third subtheme contained general responses regarding the need for demonstrations of trustworthiness, including decreasing the long waiting time for counseling, improving the lack of privacy experienced in counseling, making sexual assault a priority at UAF, and following through with protocol for response to sexual assault.

### **Tone**

In 15 responses, coders identified a tone underlying the response. This code is unique in two ways. Unlike other codes, it often captured latent, rather than manifest, elements of the participants responses. Second, this code is not directly answering the question asked of participants (“What do you believe would help improve responses to sexual assault here at UAF?”). However, tone was viewed as an indicator of the emotions participants have regarding the issue of sexual violence, which stakeholders are likely to encounter during outreach, training, and creation of policy. Two subthemes were identified: responses with a positive tone and those with a negative tone. Positive tone often conveyed that UAF does a good job in some area of training or availability of resources. Responses with a negative tone conveyed frustration, nihilism, or despair about response to sexual assault at UAF. For example, one participant wrote, “Nothing can help us”.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore attributions as well as the emotional and social reactions that victims at UAF are most likely to receive in response to disclosures of sexual assault. Several hypotheses were developed to assess the impacts of sexual assault type, rape myth acceptance, peer rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, training, and demographic traits on attributions, emotional reactions, and social reactions towards individuals in a hypothetical sexual assault scenario. Existing literature informed these hypotheses and the study design. The following sections review the results of the current study. Interpretations are offered based on existing literature as well as both strengths and limitations of the research design.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

#### **Gender**

Gender was hypothesized to significantly impact attributions and social reactions to victims of sexual assault. Conversely, it was hypothesized that they would attribute predominantly negative attributions towards the victim and experience elevated anger and low levels of empathy for her. Women were hypothesized to respond in the opposite manner. Consistent with hypotheses, men felt less anger towards the perpetrator than women did and were more likely to offer negative social reactions towards the victim in the scenarios. Several counterintuitive findings related to gender were discovered in the current study. Men attributed more blame to the man in the scenarios than did women. This is surprising given past research suggesting that men tend to attribute less blame to the perpetrator (Gerber, Cronin, & Steigman, 2004) and accept rape myths which serve to excuse the perpetrator (Johnson et al., 1997). No significant differences were discovered between male and female participants in attributions and emotional reactions related to the woman in the scenario. This finding contradicts some existing

research, including a similar study in which male participants viewed the victim in a vignette depicting date rape as more culpable than female participants (Angelone, Mitchell, & Lucente, 2012). Men have reported more acceptance of rape (Anderson et al., 1997; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), greater tendency to view the rape victim more negatively (Anderson & Quinn, 2009), and higher attributions of blame when victims have been drinking (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hammock & Richardson, 1997) in past research.

Possible explanations for the lack of difference between genders found in the current study include limitations of the sample, effects of drop-out, and characteristics of the scenarios viewed by participants. It is possible that the relatively low number of men who participated in the current study limited the power to detect differences across genders. Additionally, given that the media was saturated during data collection with stories of men being punished for sexual misconduct, men who feel more negative attributions and emotions towards victims of sexual assault may have been more likely to drop out of the study. The use of physical force by the perpetrator in both scenarios could have resulted in male participants perceiving the perpetrator as using high levels of coercion, resulted in the male participants attributing greater blame to the perpetrator and attributing fault in similar ways as the female participants. Additionally, the scenarios each stated that it was a friend of the participant who experienced sexual assault. This detail was not included in many past scenario-based studies of attributions to sexual assault victims. It is possible that participants of both genders were impacted by this detail and consequently assigned less blame and fault than they would otherwise have if the victim were a stranger to the participant. This effect may have been generated by participants' identification with their friends, including the victim in each scenario, which has led participants to place more blame on the perpetrator in past research (Grubb & Harrower, 2008).

### **Age and class standing**

Age and class standing were examined to explore relationships they may have to attributions, emotional reactions, social behaviors, rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism. These analyses were exploratory in nature and revealed several relationships. A negative correlation was found between age and anger at the man in the scenario, suggesting that younger UAF students experience more anger at the man in the scenario than older UAF students. No significant relationships were found between age and attributions of fault or blame, empathy, or rape myth acceptance. When undergraduate students were compared to graduate students, no significant differences were found in their attributions, emotional reactions, and rape myth acceptance.

These findings add to past literature that has shown mixed results in investigations of age and attitudes towards sexual assault. For instance, in a classic article, Burt (1980) found that older and less educated participants tended to be more accepting of sexual violence and rape myths. A later review of literature concluded that age and education level did not consistently predict attitudes towards rape (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). In a recent meta-analysis of rape myth acceptance, education, but not age, was found to be predictive of rape myth acceptance (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Those with higher levels of education were found to have lower rape myth acceptance (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). However, the meta-analysis reviewed studies that differed from the current study regarding student status and the scale used to measure rape myth acceptance. These are important discrepancies considering that some scales of rape myth acceptance utilize outdated language and thus may lack power to detect acceptance of rape myths in younger generations. When examining a study that mirrors the current study in important ways (the sample was comprised of only college students who were administered the Illinois

Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Short Form [McMahon & Farmer, 2011]), younger students were found to have higher rape myth acceptance than older students (Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017). While it is possible that among UAF students age and class standing are not related to attributions and rape myth acceptance, it is also possible that the current study failed to detect differences between age groups and classes of students due to low participation of older students and graduate students. Approximately 75% of participants in the current study were under the age of 25 and only 15% were graduate students.

### **Training and experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault**

While no estimate has previously been generated at UAF regarding the number of students who have responded to disclosures of sexual assault, the large proportion of participants who have had this experience is consistent with data from the Alaska Department of Public Safety, which estimates that 75% of Alaskans have experienced or have had someone they know disclose to them experiences of sexual assault or domestic violence. Although this is a broader statistic than was measured in the current study, it is likely that most residents of Alaska will at some time be exposed to violence against women by either personal experience or acting as a support when acquaintances disclose experiences of violence. It is possible that experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault encourages identification with the victim, which may result in more blame attributed to the perpetrator (Grubb & Harrower, 2008).

Qualitative analysis revealed that participants believed training would help improve response to sexual assault at UAF, though responses suggested that the online training students currently are required to take is not generally experienced as helpful. Most responses suggested that students support both students and faculty engaging in training for sexual violence awareness, response, and/or prevention. Responses also emphasized that training should target

specific groups (male students) or include specific individuals (victims). Responses proposed that training for specific purposes would be helpful at UAF, such as teaching students how to support friends who have been victimized, defining sexual assault, identifying rape myths, how to notice signs of sexual assault, and how to intervene. Changes to the training format were also suggested. Participants mentioned that conducting trainings in person, possibly in groups, for discussion or experiential exercises would be beneficial. While the planned quantitative analysis involving training effects could not be completed, as most students had completed some form of training, analysis of open-ended responses suggest that students believe training can help improve responses to sexual assault at UAF. Participants expressed the need for changes in terms of to whom training is provided, how it is provided, and the content that it includes.

### **Attribution Theory**

Correlation analyses were used to examine the types of attributions that participants make towards perpetrators and victims of sexual assault. Consistent with attribution theory, participants who attributed low levels of fault and blame to victims tended to feel empathy but not anger, towards her. Decreased attributions of blame and positive emotional reactions were related to increased likelihood of offering helpful rather than hurtful social reactions to the victim. This pattern of attributions is consistent with attribution theory. According to one theory regarding how attributions influence helping, participants may have evaluated the victim in each scenario with controllability of the assault in mind (Weiner, 1980). Specifically, the victim who was attributed low fault and blame may have been judged as not responsible for her the assault, resulting in increased feelings of empathy. This pattern of attributions is associated with increased likelihood of offering help. It is also possible that participants made sense of the scenarios by filtering them through beliefs that the world is benevolent, meaningful, and that

people get what they deserve (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Put another way, participants may have perceived the assault as something that happens in the victim's, but not participants', world because the victim is bad in some way that the participant is not. Attributions such as these may occur through a mixture of conscious and unconscious processes, which may suggest that shaping attitudes requires methods that target both processes. In the current study, the attributions and emotional reactions involved in forming responses to victims were also highly correlated with modern sexism and rape myth acceptance. It is likely, then, that efforts to modify attributions towards sexual assault victims would be more effective if education and awareness about these stereotypes are included. For instance, over 20% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the following myths: if a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex; if a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble; and if a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally. Targeting these myths may involve examination of attributions that such behavior by the victim makes them bad or deserving of negative outcomes or examination of how the man's control of his behavior is related to attributions about his culpability.

### **Modern Sexism**

Two hypotheses were made regarding the influence of modern sexism. First, I hypothesized that endorsement of higher levels of modern sexism strengthen the influence of type of sexual assault scenario. Level of modern sexism endorsement was not found to significantly interact with type of scenario. Regardless of type of sexual assault, participants who reported high modern sexism reported more negative attributions, emotional reactions, and social reactions towards the woman in the scenario. This is consistent with existing research suggesting that observers may react more negatively to women who are perceived to have acted in ways that

violate sexist stereotypes (Abrams et al., 2003). Those participants in the current study who held strong beliefs regarding women's roles may have perceived the victim in each scenario to be in violation of those roles, resulting in negative attributions and emotional reactions.

Additionally, higher modern sexism endorsement was related to more positive emotional reactions towards the perpetrator across both scenarios. While existing research suggests that traditional, less than egalitarian gender attitudes results in decreased attributions of blame of the perpetrator (Angelone et al., 2012), the current study adds to this literature in providing preliminary evidence that denying the existence of discrimination against women is related to positive emotional reactions to the perpetrator in a sexual assault scenario. Participants with higher levels of modern sexism also believed their friends would be less likely to express positive social reactions to the woman in the scenario. Finally, male participants reported higher levels of modern sexism than female participants. The results of the current study suggest that modern sexism is not prevalent at UAF, though victims of assault are likely to be experience blame, anger, and hurtful social reactions from those students who endorse high levels of sexism.

### **Rape Myth Acceptance**

Currently, there is no existing research about the level of rape myth acceptance among Alaskans. This is concerning given it has been suggested that rape myth acceptance is involved in the likelihood of perpetrating sexual assault (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), willingness to report sexual assault (Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013), and maintenance of a rape supportive culture (Burt, 1980). Without this information, it appears that Alaskans have limited ability to combat sexual assault. The current study aimed to gather information about rape myths within a university setting in Alaska. It was hypothesized that rape myth acceptance would magnify the impact of scenario on participants' attributions and reactions to the victim. High rape myth

acceptance was hypothesized to result in less blame and responsibility attributed to stranger rape victims, more empathy and less anger towards the stranger rape victim, and more positive and fewer negative social reactions offered. High rape myth acceptance was found to predict negative attributions, emotional reactions, and social behaviors towards the victim in the scenarios. Contrary to expectations, the impacts of rape myth acceptance did not differ significantly between the stranger and acquaintance scenarios. Across scenarios, higher rape myth acceptance was related to more fault and blame attributed to the victim, more anger and less empathy for the victim, and lower likelihood of offering positive social reactions and increased likelihood of responding with negative reactions to the victim. Participants who reported higher rape myth acceptance perceived their friends as less likely to express positive social reactions to the woman in the scenario.

The second hypothesis regarding rape myth acceptance was that male participants would report higher rape myth acceptance than female participants. As predicted, male participants reported higher rape myth acceptance than women. However, it is noteworthy that both genders in the current study reported on average that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with rape myths.

The current study is, to the best of the author’s knowledge, the first to examine the role of rape myth acceptance in attribution processes within the context of Alaskan college students. Male participants were found to express higher rape myth acceptance than female participants, which is consistent with other studies of college campuses (Hayes et al., 2013; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Vandiver & Dupalo, 2012). In addition to this finding, the current study adds to existing literature by providing preliminary information about those rape myths that are likely to be the most and least influential in shaping Alaskan college students’ responses to sexual assault



victims. Rape myths based on the idea that the victim lied or that the perpetrator did not intend to assault the victim were on average the most accepted rape myths among participants. Several of the “She Asked For It” myths were also among the most accepted myths (including “If a girl asks like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble” and “If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex”). Conversely, this study suggests that responses to sexual assault victims at the UAF campus are less likely to be biased by myths that deny the victim’s experience was rape.

### **Student Perceptions of Peers**

It was hypothesized that participants would perceive their friends as similar to themselves in level of rape myth acceptance and likelihood of offering positive or negative social reactions. Findings confirmed these hypotheses. Participants perceived their rape myth acceptance level was like that of their friends, and the effects of peer rape myth acceptance on attributions, emotions, and social reactions paralleled the effect of their personal rape myth acceptance attitudes. Additionally, participants’ self-reported likelihood of offering positive social reactions was correlated with perceptions of their peers’ likelihood of offering the same reactions.

High expected peer rape myth acceptance was hypothesized to result attribution patterns that parallel those of rape myth acceptance (lower attributions of responsibility, positive emotional reactions, and more positive and fewer negative social reactions to the victim as well as increase attribution of responsibility and negative emotions towards the perpetrator). Results were consistent with these hypotheses.

Given that participants reported low levels of rape myth acceptance and the belief that their friends endorse similarly low levels, it is surprising that the qualitative responses suggest that participants perceived that a rape supportive culture exists on campus. Specifically, several

participants mentioned that the UAF community needed to communicate that asking for help is OK, that people care about one another at UAF, and decrease rape culture and stigma on campus. This suggests that at least some students perceive their peers as being uncaring (possibly towards victims of sexual assault), that rape culture is alive at UAF, and that there is negative stigma among students against victims. It is important to note that participants in the current study indicated that their perceptions of their *friends'* stigma (rape myth acceptance) and likelihood of negative social behaviors (social reactions) was often higher than the participants', though on average still low. It is possible that, given that the qualitative analysis revealed the belief that stigma against victims exists, participants perceive more stigma in the campus environment overall than in their close peer circle.

Information about the level of rape myth acceptance that students perceive others as having may be relevant to sexual assault education and prevention efforts. Perceptions of friends' rape myth acceptance have been linked to likelihood of perpetrating sexual assault (Eyssel, Bohner, & Siebler, 2006). For instance, in one group of male university students, higher self-rated rape myth acceptance was associated with a higher likelihood of committing sexual assault. When told that others had higher rape myth acceptance, participants rated their likelihood of perpetrating sexual assault or acting sexually coercive as higher (Edwards & Vogel, 2015; Eyssel et al., 2006). Conversely, perpetrators of sexual assault tend to falsely believe that their friends hold similar attitudes towards rape and rape myths (Dardis, Murphy, Bill, & Gidycz, 2016). Two theories may highlight the function of comparisons between participants and their friends. If participants are not sure of their internal opinion about sexual assault, social comparison theory suggests that participants may use their perceptions of friends' attitudes to shape their own attitudes (Festinger, 1954). However, it may be the case that participants are aware of their own

opinions about sexual assault, in particular that they do not support rape myths. Pluralistic ignorance may be present among participants, meaning that they believe their peers accept rape myth acceptance. Such a belief may lead participants to conform to the imagined group norm by acting in ways that shame or blame the victim (Allport, 1924; Gilovich, Keltner, Chen, & Nisbett, 2013). Pluralistic ignorance may exert a stronger influence in sociocultural contexts that value toughness (Gilovich et al., 2013). As a semi-rural area, the norms regarding masculinity may increase the influence of pluralistic ignorance by encouraging traditional masculinity and attention to public image (Levant & Habben, 2003). In the context of the current study, it is possible that education and prevention efforts highlighting how low the average UAF student's level of rape myth acceptance is would help to shape the attitudes and norms that influence likelihood of perpetrating sexual assault.

In addition, student responses regarding what would help response to sexual assault at UAF suggests that there is still room to raise awareness of sexual assault. Specifically, some students advocated for increased awareness of the issue and how prevalent sexual assault is. Participants also stated that there is a need to increase awareness of resources at UAF for victims, with some participants stating they perceive students are not aware of resources.

### **Student Perceptions of UAF**

Qualitative content analysis was performed on 125 responses to the question “What do you believe would help improve responses to sexual assault here at UAF?” Many responses focused on the way that offices at UAF, such as Title IX, or broad groups of employees should initiate change related to response to sexual assault. Participants described the need for changes to the repercussions of Title IX investigations at UAF, stating that punishment should be more “harsh” and match procedures outlined in Title IX policies. The need for victims to have

confidentiality during Title IX processes was mentioned frequently. Participants wanted UAF to exercise transparency about the occurrence of sexual assault on campus or the procedures of Title IX investigations. Participants stated that they perceive UAF needs change to make up for past failures or transgressions related to sexual misconduct.

As with Title IX related transparency, students asked for the university to stop covering up or shirking responsibility in response to sexual assault on campus. Some responses called upon employees of the university to talk more to students about the issue, find universities that have low rates of sexual assault to base our training and policies after, model systemic change, and be more personable and welcoming to UAF students. While no research has formally examined the how UAF students view the role of the institution in sexual assault response, the results described above suggest that at least a portion of students view the university as involved in both the perpetuation of problematic response to sexual assault as well as the potential solutions.

### **Impact of Sexual Assault Scenario**

We examined participants' responses to a stranger versus acquaintance rape scenarios to test the hypothesis that participants' attributions, emotional reactions, and social reactions would differ based on scenario type. It was hypothesized that attributions, emotional reactions, and social reactions related to the victim would be more negative in the acquaintance scenario compared to the stranger scenario. Contrary to hypotheses, type of scenario was not found to have a significant impact on participants' attributions of blame, fault, emotional reactions, or social reactions. This suggests that participants reacted similarly to hypothetical victims of acquaintance rape as they did to hypothetical victims of stranger rape. This contradicts past research in which victims who are acquainted with the perpetrator tend to be attributed more

blame for the assault (Grubb & Harrower, 2008; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). There were several contextual factors, which will be presented below, that may have resulted in participants being more aware of how prevalent acquaintance rape is and decreased the expectation that it is uncommon and not real rape.

### **Influences on Impact of Scenario**

Several factors were identified in the existing literature as likely influencing responses to sexual assault victims, including rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, gender, and having had either sexual assault training or experience in responding to disclosures of sexual assault. Additionally, community stakeholders identified an interest in exploring whether expected peer rape myth acceptance was related to responses to victims. It was hypothesized that each of these factors would moderate the hypothesized impact of scenario. As stated above, the scenario on its own did not significantly impact attributions, emotional reactions or social reactions, nor were its effects moderated by attitudes, demographics, or experiences. Both local and national sociocultural events, which are described in sections below, may have contributed to the lack of difference found between reactions to the two scenarios.

### **Contextual Factors Related to Sexual Assault Response at UAF**

Several contextual factors may have sensitized students to issues of sexual assault and thus influenced the results as described above. Four contextual factors will each be described below. First, the UAF administration's efforts to improve sexual assault and harassment protocols, awareness, and preventative efforts on campus will be examined. Second, the degree to which UAF students have attended to issues of sexual violence will be examined. Third, the training that most participants had engaged in related to sexual violence will be discussed. Finally, the overlap between the data collection period and the #MeToo and #TimesUp

movements will be explored. Review of these contextual factors is intended to highlight possible influences on the current study. Tentative hypotheses about the relationship between these events and the current study are provided.

### **Office of Civil Rights compliance review of UAF**

In 2014, UAF was among over 60 universities selected to be reviewed by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The university's compliance with Title IX regulations, particularly those related to sexual misconduct, were the focus of the review. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Chancellor Rogers sent a university-wide memo announcing that UAF would be under review by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) for Title IX compliance. In the memo, he specified that the primary concern in the review was the "university's effort to eliminate sexual harassment and sexual assault on campus" (Rogers, 2014). It was at approximately this time that UAF began to focus intensely on sexual violence prevention and response. As a result, the university administration initiated several awareness and prevention efforts.

Specifically, the university focused on eight core areas that needed improvement to be compliant with federal regulations. These areas included changes to board and university policies, university Title IX procedures, published notices of nondiscrimination, publishing an anti-harassment statement, employment of a Title IX coordinator, professional development for staff with Title IX responsibilities, training for all students, faculty, and staff, and notification of responsible employees. Within several months of Chancellor Rogers' memo, faculty and staff were notified that they were required to engage in online Title IX training provided by SkillSoft. The University of Alaska (UA) system signed a memorandum of understanding with the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA) in October of the same year.

The agreement was intended to provide the UA system with “local sexual assault and violence services” and “prevention and bystander intervention training” (New agreement, 2014, n.p.).

Early in 2015, UAF employees were sent letters notifying them of their status as responsible employees. This duty mandated all employees, with few exceptions, to report sexual misconduct that they become aware of to the UAF Title IX coordinator (University to officially designate, 2015, n.p.). A short time later, the UA system e-mailed its first Climate Survey to 15,000 students and employees (University concludes first, 2015). The survey, which was mandated by 2014 Title IX regulations, asked the UA community about perceptions of sexual misconduct in the UA system (University concludes first, 2015). In August of 2015, students were required to complete EverFi’s training modules, which included Haven Healthy Relationships and AlcoholEdu. To ensure student completion of training, a rule was put in place to assess a \$150 fine to the student account of any student who did not complete the training.

The focus on sexual assault continued throughout 2015 even after UAF chancellor Rogers’ retirement. During the Fall 2015 semester and early into the Spring 2016 semester, UAF offered “9 substantial programs through the Wood Center” and engaged in a marketing campaign that has been commended by the Office of Civil Rights (UAF, 2016, January). On October 20, 2015 interim chancellor Mike Powers sent a letter to the entire UAF community about sexual assault. In it, he apologized for UAF’s failure to properly address sexual assault. As part of his effort to remedy the issue, he announced that *The Hunting Ground*, a documentary about sexual assault on college campuses, would be screened at UAF (Powers, 2015). While the film was screened several times on campus, on November 19<sup>th</sup> the screening was followed by a webcast of interim chancellor Powers being interviewed by CNN about sexual assault on campus.

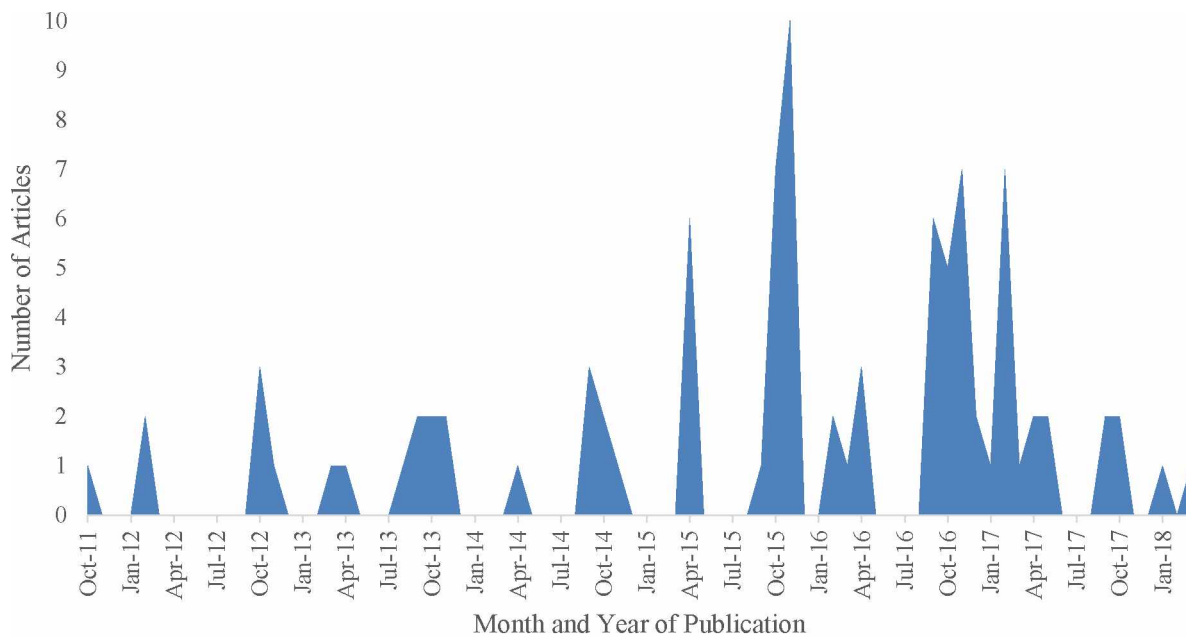
The university's focus on combating sexual assault was directed in part by UAF president Jim Johnson, who wrote an open letter in April of 2016 to UAF employees describing failures of the university to comply with Title IX. President Johnson explicitly acknowledged in the letter that sexual assault is "all too common" in Alaska and that one of his goals was to provide "learning environments safe from sexual assault" (Johnson, 2016, n.p.). UAF focused on providing sexual violence training in the Residence Halls in both passive and interactive formats during the early fall 2016 semester (UAF, 2016, October). Simultaneously, building coordinators from each UAF campus building were asked to hang large posters about Title IX issues in visible areas (Thomas, 2016). See Appendix S for examples of these posters. While the administration made changes such as these, review of the student newspaper and student governance documents highlights student discontent and student activism have played important roles in the Title IX changes and education at UAF.

### **Student involvement in changes to sexual violence training and prevention**

While the compliance review at UAF by the Office of Civil Rights may be an event that re-awakened awareness of sexual violence issues on campus, there is evidence that these issues had been visible at UAF for years prior to the administration undergoing the OCR compliance reviews. A search of the articles published in the campus newspaper, the UAF Sun Star, revealed that since 2011 there have been at least 92 articles published that reference sexual assault, rape, the Green Dot program, and Title IX compliance issues related to sexual violence (see Figure 4 for a timeline of publication dates). This is especially remarkable given that the Sun Star is only published once weekly and is small. Each issue contains potentially 5-10 articles plus cartoons, a letter to the editor, police blotter, and advertising. In the year prior to the beginning of data collection for the current study, it is likely that students at UAF were heavily exposed to the issue



of sexual violence through reporting of incidents, opinions, and coverage of Title IX-related events, training, and UAF policy changes.



*Figure 4.* Articles related to rape and sexual assault in the UAF Sun Star.

Although a portion of the Sun Star’s reporting over the nearly 7-year period focused on the administration and its decisions surrounding the OCR’s compliance review, it also highlighted incidents of sexual violence on campus and student activism that followed such violence. Interestingly, it appears that during the beginning of the OCR review student leaders perceived the need to advocate for inclusion of students in the Title IX changes. For instance, despite calling the OCR compliance review the “best thing to happen” to UAF, one Sun Star reporter stated she heard about the review from the Huffington Post before hearing it from her campus (Chavis, 2014). In December of 2014, The Coalition of Student Leaders voted to request that all students involved in student leadership be provided the same Title IX training as staff (Resolution 2014-04 Title IX Training 12-1-14).

One year after the review began, reporting on the subject suggested that some students perceived the administration's efforts were neither sufficient nor effective. Administrators at a town hall event were described as "fumbling", "cold", "defensive", and "falling back on buzzwords" (Fisher, 2015, n.p.). During the first year that students were required to complete the online training that is currently in use (see section titled UAF student training regarding sexual violence), it is possible that some students perceived the idea of "rape culture" was misunderstood by fellow students. In a November 3, 2015 letter to the editor, a student described that rape culture is not about rapists lying in wait outdoors for a victim, but about drinks with a friend ending with non-consensual sex (Hansen, 2015). The author specifically describes the ways that rape myths make it more damaging for the victim than the offender if the victim reports their assault (Hansen, 2015).

Review of Sun Star articles related to sexual violence in the first two years following the OCR suggested that students were both unsettled by the current university climate and becoming involved in activism. For instance, one student formed a support group in late 2015 for victims of sexual assault (Hartman, 2015). University Relations invited students to participate in a forum to aid in the selection of Title IX advertisements and brochures that were later posted on campus (UAF, 2016, October). The Coalition of Student Leaders voted to request that the university create a free or low-cost, required course covering topics related to campus safety, sexual violence, and violence prevention (Resolution 2016-04 Campus Safety Course). The Coalition shared with UAF administration a survey of students, which revealed that half of students wanted training to treat sexual assault and harassment as a separate training topic than alcohol and drug awareness. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Associated Students of UAF Senate brought a resolution before UAF's chancellor to remove the fine for students who did not complete haven

and replace it with either a hold on students' registration or other non-monetary penalties (Hartman, 2016b). In the resolution, the Senate cited that 66% of surveyed students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the use of the \$150 fee (Hartman, 2016b).

Perhaps most emblematic of UAF student unrest about the administration's stance on sexual misconduct was a rape case that was first reported in September of 2016 (Granger, 2016a). "The accuser", Jessie Wattum, had posted her story to Facebook on October 19<sup>th</sup>. In it, she stated that, after reporting her assault to Title IX, the perpetrator had recently been allowed to return to live in the same dorm building she lived in with no warning (Hartman, 2016a). Students began to picket on the stairs in front of the student commons to protest UAF administration's handling of Jessie's assault. Students who were interviewed at the time described the university's Title IX changes as "just talk" but perceived that "nothing has really been done" in response to the student's victimization (Hartman, 2016a, n.p.).

Jessie Wattum's Facebook post shared similar sentiments, saying "The Title IX office has done its best to ignore, delay, and silence all of our efforts, and every meeting and email to the Dean of Students, Laura McCollough, left us hanging for days or weeks with no answers" (as cited by Buxton, 2016, n.p.). Soon after, the interim chancellor sent a campus-wide e-mail, reassuring students that UAF is "following our Title IX and student discipline process" (Granger, 2016b). A wave of negative posts reportedly began on UAF's Facebook page, seemingly in response to perceptions of how UAF administrators handled Wattum's case. The final article related to the case, published in February 2017, suggested that students continued to feel dissatisfaction towards UAF administration: "While this case triggered public outcry among the student community, including protests, UA Regent and Title IX chair John Davies says that UAF followed the proper guidelines according the Title IX policies" (Granger, 2017).

The events surrounding the OCR review appears to have created discord between UAF administration and students in regard to how to handle sexual misconduct. Students continued to actively shape how the UAF community prevents and responds to sexual misconduct on campus. Notably, a Title IX commission was formed during the fall semester of 2016 (Mertes, 2017). The commission was comprised of student government officers and tenured faculty and was created “to determine whether or not UAF has adhered to policy in its handling of Title IX investigations” (Freel, 2017, n.p.). The commission’s final report, authored in May 2017, suggested that further training is necessary for university employees to reduce biases in employees’ response to complainants and assailants in sexual misconduct cases (ASUAF Title IX Commission, 2017).

#### **UAF student training regarding sexual violence**

Due to the OCR compliance review and student activism related to sexual misconduct issues, most participants in the study reported that they had completed training related to sexual assault prior to completing the survey. Starting in 2015, all UAF faculty, staff, and students were mandated to complete some form of sexual violence training. The training regarding sexual misconduct, Haven, is an online module consisting of slides, videos, and short quizzes. EverFi, the company who provides Haven training, states on their website that Haven serves to “...educate students about healthy relationships, the importance of consent, and the role of bystander intervention ...” in a way that results in “positive learning outcomes in in core subject areas [including] bystander intervention ability/intent, survivor empathy and support, and social norm perceptions” (Sexual assault prevention suite, 2018). Haven training focuses on seven topics: the importance of the user’s values, aspects of healthy and unhealthy relationships, gender socialization, highlighting misinformation about sexual assault, sexual consent, bystander

intervention, and ways students can engage in activism (Zapp, Buelow, Soutiea, Berkowitz, & DeJong, 2018).

Particularly significant is that Haven asks participants to match statistics to statements, such as statements asking what percentage of women are assaulted by someone they know and what percentage of college assaults occur indoors. Additionally, Haven asks participants to consider their communication style and how they may react if an acquaintance discloses that they have been sexually assaulted. While analyses regarding the impact of training on attributions, emotional reactions, and social behaviors towards victims could not be completed, it is possible that completion of Haven training increased awareness among participants that sexual coercion by acquaintances is considered sexual assault. Such awareness may have encouraged participants to attribute low fault to the victim in each scenario, view the victim as deserving of empathy, and thus the participants in response to each scenario were more willing to offer positive helping behaviors to the victim.

A search of PsycInfo's database revealed two research articles which assessed the effectiveness of Haven training for changing attitudes about sexual violence (Oberdieck, 2017; Zapp et al., 2018). In one of the two studies, the research was conducted at Missouri State University, where Haven training was required for all freshman and transfer students beginning in the fall of 2014 (Oberdieck, 2017). Participants were assigned to either an abridged version of Haven training or to a control group. All participants were asked to read vignettes of either stranger or acquaintance rape, followed by questions asking about the blameworthiness of the victim and assailant, whether the victim should report the incident, how the participant would label the vignette (with options of rape, sexual assault, or consensual sex), and rape myth acceptance. Participants assigned to the abridged Haven training did not significantly differ in

victim blame, assailant blame, reporting recommendations, labeling of the vignette, or rape myth acceptance compared to control group participants. Although it is possible that abridged Haven training was ineffective at changing attributions or rape myth acceptance, the author acknowledged that many participants in the study had completed the full Haven training prior to participating in the study (Oberdieck, 2017).

In the second of the two studies, pre-Haven and post-Haven intervention data was gathered from 80 higher education institutions (Zapp et al., 2018). Students were surveyed regarding their rape myth acceptance (using questions adapted from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale; McMahon & Farmer, 2011), perception of social norms related to sexual violence, ability to intervene in sexual assault situations, intention to intervene, and perceptions of their peers' ability to intervene. The ability and intent to intervene, empathy and support expressed for victims, and perceptions of social norms related to sexual assault improved significantly after Haven training in 98%, 84%, and 75% of schools, respectively. The effect sizes of the changes were often large or medium for changes in intervention ability and intent, but small for changes in perceptions of social norms and empathy for the victim. Students in only 34% of schools expressed significant decreases in acceptance of sexual assault myths. The authors note that the lack of significant change and small effect sizes generally found may have been "due to the infrequent endorsement of these myths at baseline" (Zapp et al., 2018, p. 14). None of the questions utilized to assess rape myths appear to relate to the most prevalent category of rape myth found among UAF students in the current study, which was the category "She lied".

While research regarding the effectiveness of Haven training in changing attitudes towards sexual assault is arguably in its infancy, the findings of the above studies are relevant to

discussion of UAF student response to sexual misconduct training and the current study. There are signs that UAF students see room for improvement in sexual violence response and prevention training. Participants reported in the current study that they believe training could be improved in several ways. They stated the format should be in-person rather than online. Participants advocated for including experiential components. Often, participants described needing to target specific groups, such as men. These suggestions are supported by a recent review of literature related to college and university sexual assault prevention, which suggested that interventions should target single-gender groups, be provided by a professional facilitator, and include multiple sessions of lectures, scenarios, videos, presentations, interactive dramas, role-playing, workshops, and worksheets or brochures (Vladutiu, Martin, & Macy, 2011).

This is consistent with past reports in the Sun Star of reactions to Haven training. In an op-ed, for instance, it was suggested that the Haven training is experienced as “an inconvenience” to many students and should be more interactive (Palmer, 2018). These results differ from findings of a recent University of Alaska campus climate survey, in which approximately 68% of respondents described “training on university policies and procedures regarding incidents of sexual misconduct, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking” as either moderately useful or very useful (Myrstol, 2018, p. 39). Given the substantial angst described by UAF students in the UAF Sun Star, UAF student governance, and UAF participants in the current study, it is possible that the 27% of participants who identified as UAF students in the climate survey represent a substantially different subset of UAF compared to the current study.

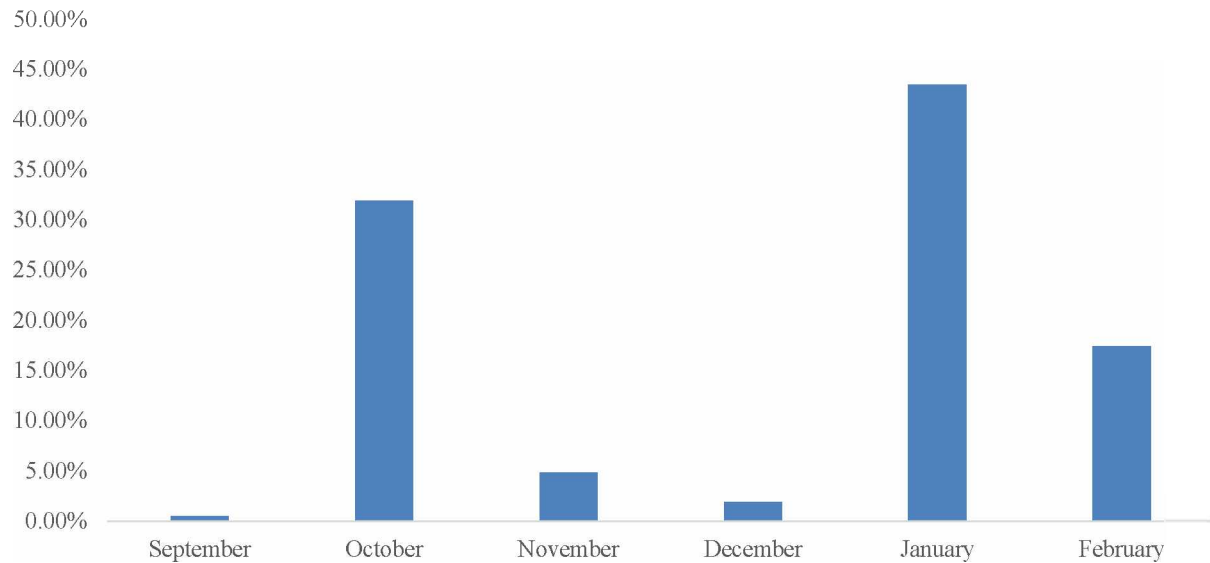
Examination of the studies cited above suggests tentative ways in which the results of the current study may have been influenced by the training most participants have completed. Haven training aims to change misperceptions of sexual assault and rape myths which have been linked

to more negative views of the acquaintance rape victim. Completion of Haven training, therefore, could have resulted in participants in the current study reporting no difference in their attributions and reactions to the different scenario types. However, the few research studies that assessed Haven training suggest it has limited ability to reduce bias in responding to such scenarios. Haven training appears most effective in changing willingness and intent to intervene if witnessing a sexual assault, which may be part of the reason by approximately 72% of participants in the current study reported they would be “very” or “extremely” comfortable intervening if they witnessed sexual assault. Furthermore, while the low level of rape myth acceptance found among participants could also hypothetically be attributed in part to having completed Haven training, the findings from research cited above provide little evidence to support the positive role of Haven training in reductions in rape myth acceptance.

### **#MeToo and #TimesUp**

Two cultural movements may have significantly impacted participants’ awareness of sexual assault: #MeToo and #TimesUp. The #MeToo movement, as it is known today, can be said to have started October 5th, 2017 when the New York Times published an article about Harvey Weinstein’s sexual abuse of women in the film industry (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018). On January 2nd, 2018 a group of several hundred celebrities announced they were creating a legal fund that would allow victims of workplace sexism to seek legal recourse. The collective of celebrities and the ensuing social movement became known as the Times Up movement (Garber, 2018). These movements overlap significantly with the timeline of the current study, which was posted online for participants to complete in September 2017. When including participants who partially completed the survey, 75% of participation occurred in either October 2017 or January 2018 (see Figure 5). Interest in the issue of sexual violence peaked during these months, as



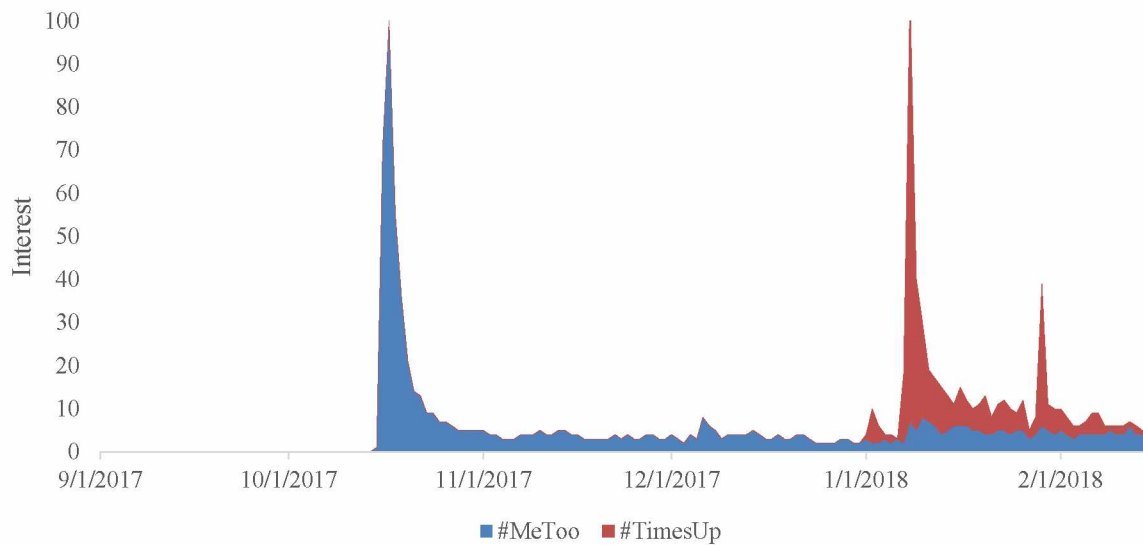


*Figure 5.* Percent of total participation in each month of data collection. Note that total  $N = 207$ .

shown in Figure 6. It is possible that participants' exposure to stories of sexual violence in the news, ensuing social media conversations, and potential discussions with friends resulted in heightened awareness of sexual violence during the exact times they were participating in this study.

The focus in Sun Star news stories on sexual misconduct perpetrated by acquaintance of their victims may have heightened participants' awareness of how frequently sexual assault is perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Consequently, participants may have been more inclined to understand acquaintance rape and less likely to rate the acquaintance rape victim negatively. Some research suggests that group discussions of media portrayals of sexual assault may increase empathy for the victim, decrease empathy for the perpetrator, and shift attributions of responsibility away from the victim and toward the perpetrator (Apanovitch, Hobfoll, & Salovey, 2002). It is possible, then, that conversations in the few years among UAF students regarding various media representations of sexual assault resulted in positive changes in

attributions and reactions towards acquaintance rape victims, potentially decreasing differences in public perception between acquaintance and stranger rape victims.



*Figure 6.* Google Trends showing interest in the terms “#TimesUp” and “#MeToo”. Source: <http://trends.google.com>.

### **Summary of Findings**

The current study examined attributions, emotional reactions, and social behaviors of UAF students to hypothetical sexual assault scenarios. The following are findings from the main analyses:

1. Participants’ responses to victims appear consistent with attribution theory (Weiner, 1980). Most participants attributed low fault and blame towards the hypothetical victim. They experienced empathy but little anger towards the victim. Most participants intended to offer positive social reactions and rating themselves as unlikely to offer hurtful or negative social reactions. As predicted by attribution theory, attributing low culpability to the victim was correlated with empathic emotional reactions toward the victim and increased likelihood of offering helpful social behaviors.

2. Regardless of whether the hypothetical victim experienced stranger or acquaintance assault, endorsing high levels of rape myths and or expecting that friends accept high levels of rape myths was related to blaming and faulting the victim, feeling anger towards the victim and empathy for the perpetrator, decreased likelihood of positive helping behaviors and increased likelihood of hurtful behaviors towards the victim.
3. Participants who accepted high levels of modern sexism differed from participants who reported low levels of modern sexism. Regardless of type of assault the victim experienced, high level of modern sexism was associated with attributing more fault and blame to the victim, feeling less empathy and more anger at the victim, and a greater likelihood of negative social reactions to the victim. Participants who endorsed high levels of modern sexism also tended to express less anger and more empathy towards the perpetrator in both types of sexual assault scenarios.
4. The lack of significant findings in two areas should be noted. First, participants' attributions, emotional and social reactions, and expected peer social reactions to the stranger rape scenario did not differ significantly from reactions to the acquaintance rape scenario. Second, participants attributions of culpability to the perpetrator, with one exception, did not differ based on scenario, rape myth acceptance, expectations of peer rape myth acceptance, modern sexism, or experience responding to disclosures of sexual assault. The one exception was that males placed more blame on the perpetrator than did females across scenarios.
5. Participant gender was related to significant differences in blame, but not fault, attributed to the man. Surprisingly, male participants blamed the perpetrator more

- than female participants, but felt less anger. Male participants also expressed higher levels of rape myth acceptance and modern sexism than female participants.
6. Participants who have had someone disclose experiences of sexual assault to them differed from participants who had not had such experience, particularly in their emotional responses to victims. Having responded to such disclosures was related to feeling more anger and less empathy for the perpetrator and feeling more empathy for the victim. Such experience as also related to decreased likelihood of offering negative social reactions to the victim.
  7. When asked what would help responses to sexual assault at UAF, participants most often described training related to sexual misconduct, the community of UAF, Title IX investigative processes and personnel, awareness, and resources as central to improving response to sexual assault.

### **Implications & Recommendations**

Results of the quantitative section of this study suggest that victims of sexual assault are unlikely to be attributed fault or blame by their fellow students. Their peers are likely to experience empathy and unlikely to express anger at the victim. Finally, victims are likely to experience positive social reactions (such as being provided information, being listened to, etc.) and unlikely to experience negative reactions from their peers. Victims at UAF who experience the predominantly positive reactions indicated in this study may be less likely to feel badly after disclosing their assault, be revictimized, or experience worsened symptoms of PTSD, depression, or anxiety (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2007; Mason et al., 2009; Orchowksi et al., 2013a).

Sharing in education and awareness campaigns that the majority of participants did not blame the

victim, feel angry, or react negatively may prevent pluralistic ignorance by establishing positive attributions, emotional reactions, and helping behaviors towards victims as the norm at UAF.

Although these results imply that victims are likely to have a positive environment within UAF, some of the results give cause for concern. First, while the prevalence of modern sexism and rape myth acceptance is low, there are certain rape myths that a sizeable number of participants agreed with. It is recommended that training and education focus on altering these rape myths, as acceptance of such rape myths is linked to negative responses to victims of sexual assault. Second, the responses to the open-ended question in the study suggested the presence of negative feelings towards various aspects of UAF in relation to sexual assault prevention and response. Reasons for these differences between the qualitative and quantitative portion of the current study cannot be stated with certainty, one potential implication is that the results from the quantitative aspects of the current study should be regarded tentatively.

An alternative explanation is that the scope of the current study did not capture those aspects of the campus environment that are unsupportive towards victims. Where participants indicated in the quantitative sections of the study they as students generally create a supportive atmosphere for victims, their open-ended responses suggest discontent with employees of UAF and centers on campus that respond to sexual assault. The long history of Sun Star articles detailing student angst towards the UAF administration and Title IX office supports this interpretation. Another potential interpretation of this discrepancy is that it signals that students have witnessed or experienced negative attitudes and reactions towards survivors by students who did not participate in this study. Approximately 40 participants who began the study dropped out before the end. It is possible that, particularly given the criticism within the #MeToo movement of sexual assault perpetrators and individuals who defend them, participants who have

high rape myth acceptance, attribute high of blame towards victims, view the perpetrator as not responsible, or feel high empathy for perpetrators dropped out of the study more often than participants with positive views towards the victim.

While the prevalence of rape myth acceptance was low in this study, future education and training on campus are encouraged to target the most prevalent rape myth category (She Lied) and individual rape myths (“If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble”, “If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex”, and “If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally”) in future training and campaign efforts. Existing literature suggests that single-gender intervention programs may be most effective at reducing rape myths (Vladutiu et al., 2011).

The results of published literature reviews suggest that most programs target rape myth acceptance. However, it is possible either targeting a wider variety of biased attitudes (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) or targeting behavior is necessary to change attitudes towards rape (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2008; Vladutiu et al., 2011). The current study suggests that attributions towards rape victims and perpetrators are linked to biases such as rape myth acceptance, beliefs about peer rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism. This finding is consistent with a meta-analysis that concluded that a variety of cognitive biases, including sexism, racism, and homophobia, intersect with rape myth acceptance (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). It is possible that education and prevention programs will be most effective if a variety of implicit biases are targeted within the training. As a result, it is recommended that, when possible, education and prevention training target biases related to gender, sexuality, race, rape myths, and attitudes towards rape.

It is also recommended that educational programs consist of multiple sessions that are each long in length (Vladutiu et al., 2011). Attribution theory suggests that cognitive biases, such as rape myths, likely serve a purpose to the beholder. Generally, they may serve as frameworks for interpreting the world, though they may also provide comfort in the belief that sexual assault only happens to others (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Consequently, it stands to reason that these belief systems are resistant to change. Additionally, it is recommended that administrators of these programs assess the outcomes of these programs in a way that will be sensitive to changes in a variety of implicit biases. For instance, the use of pre- and post-training assessments would help evaluate the effectiveness of training.

Similarly, many students expressed they would respond positively to a victim in the hypothetical scenario. Participant responses and published reviews of sexual assault education suggest that education should include training regarding how to respond to victims who disclose sexual assault experiences (Fisher et al., 2008). UAF stakeholders are encouraged to teach students the impact that different social reactions tend to have on victims. Participants in the current study may be unaware of which behaviors are likely to be experienced as positive or negative by victims. By teaching participants about which behaviors victims often experience as helpful versus unhelpful as well as highlighting the positive responses that UAF students are inclined to give, stakeholders may increase the deliberateness and confidence with which UAF students provide these responses to victims who disclose their assaults. This may also help students to examine and re-consider those reactions that are typically identified by victims as negative but that participants may have believed to be helpful. Finally, teaching students to identify which behaviors are likely to be experienced as negative by victims will help prevent students from offering negative reactions

## **Strengths & Limitations**

The current study was designed to inform interventions related to sexual assault awareness and response at UAF. The scenarios and collection of data from any UAF student interested in participating enhances the strength of this study. One important strength of the current study is that it contributes to an important area of research in Alaska of which little is known. Past research within Alaska has reflected the experiences and perceptions of a small subset of victims of sexual assault (those who reported their assault to law enforcement or were assaulted by a stranger). As a result, a strength of the current study was its focus on perceptions of and reactions to victims of both stereotypical stranger rapes and more realistic acquaintance rapes.

Results and findings from the current study are bound by the limitations of self-report methodology, which is subject to biases such as social desirability. This is especially notable given potential environmental influences during the past two years in which there has been intense focus on sexual assault claims. People's awareness of these issues might have been heightened, potentially resulting in increased social desirability. However, the impact of social desirability is likely low in this study, as seen in the very few significant but modest correlations found between social desirability, fault of the woman, and expected peer negative social reactions. Because social desirability was included as a covariate in all MANCOVA analyses, it cannot explain the impact of rape myths or modern sexism on attributions and reactions. Additionally, due to differences between the process of observing a friend struggle with sexual assault and the artificial nature of reading a scenario and imagining how one might think and act in response, the validity of these results must be interpreted with this limitation in mind.



The scenarios may have been written in a way that inadvertently influenced responses to the victim. In the stranger rape scenario, the woman was alone when walking to her home, unlike in the acquaintance rape scenario. The woman choosing to be alone while walking home may have resulted in negative judgment towards the woman that was not present in the acquaintance rape scenario. The increase in blame attributed to the woman in the stranger rape scenario may have been partially the reason that attributions, emotional reactions, and social reactions did not differ significantly between the two scenarios.

Several aspects of the data set gathered in this study may also have resulted in limitations. The number of analyses completed in the current study may have increased the chances of finding a significant correlation by chance alone. Additionally, hypothesis testing prior to performing each MANCOVA revealed that several assumptions of the test were violated. Univariate assumptions were violated for equality of variance and univariate outliers. Multivariate assumptions were violated for the MANCOVA's, as well, such as the test for outliers, assumption of linearity, and equality of covariances.

While these violations suggest the results presented above should be interpreted with caution, several considerations support the validity of the MANCOVA findings. Regarding the univariate equality of variance, holding the univariate findings to a more stringent p value is one method of ensuring the findings are interpreted with due caution. Most of the univariate tests that informed the above interpretations met this more stringent requirement. To identify the univariate outliers, responses were transformed into z scores and any score over 3.29 was examined as an outlier. The forced-choice nature of response options for each of the questions containing outlier responses suggests that these responses were not entered in error and should therefore not be removed from the data set. Also due to the forced-choice nature of the response

format within a small range of Likert options, the amount of deviation seen in the outliers is limited and was not judged to be radical enough to alter the major findings. Multivariate assumption testing was completed. Tests of Mahalanobis distance further suggested that the multivariate outliers were unlikely to be influencing the data. Finally, as a test MANCOVA's are not sensitive to violations of equality of covariances, indicating that the data from these tests can be considered valid.

### **Future Directions**

The current study adds foundational knowledge regarding the factors that influence how UAF students respond to disclosures by sexual assault victims. One key area of research that would likely benefit education and awareness raising efforts on campus is longitudinal research that surveys entering freshman who have not yet participated in training such as Haven, AlcoholEdu, or Green Dot. Such research would allow for examination of pre- to post-training shifts in attributions, emotional reactions, and social reactions to victims of sexual assault. Student responses to the current study suggest that some students do not find the current online training module to be effective. Longitudinal research would allow for examination of whether the current training is effective in changing attitudes.

Given the significant presence that the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements have had during the past year, future research is encouraged to examine the exposure that students have had to these movements and their reactions to these movements. One impact of these movements has been the advocating for and publicizing of punishment in response to many high-profile sexual misconduct cases. In all of these instances known to the researcher, these perpetrators have been men. It is plausible that the impact of this zeitgeist has differed across gender identities and thus results in different reactions to sexual assault than prior to these movements.

By gathering this information, stakeholders would be better equipped to speak to the attitudes and opinions of diverse student groups on campus.

Although UAF students expressed largely positive attributions towards the hypothetical victim in these scenarios, their open-ended responses suggest that they perceive it to be largely the responsibility of UAF employees and administrators to improve responses to sexual assault on campus. In addition, one participant suggested that UAF has placed too much responsibility on students for responding to sexual assault. Such responses suggest that future research might ask employees, such as administrators, counselors, and Title IX staff, to share their perspective about what would help improve response to sexual assault at UAF.

## **Conclusions**

Sexual assault is a critical issue in Alaska, though an area of little research. Developing an understanding of the attitudes and emotions that perpetuate rape supportive environments is important not only for prevention of sexual violence, but also for helping victims. The results of the current study are consistent with attribution theory, suggesting that targeting attributions of culpability and negative emotional reactions towards victims would help encourage positive reactions towards victims of sexual assault. Additionally, the results indicated that those with higher rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism reacted less positively toward the victim (attributing more blame and fault, feeling more anger, endorsing increased likelihood of offering negative reactions) and more positively towards the perpetrator (feeling more empathy). Fortunately, the prevalence of rape myth acceptance, expected peer rape myth acceptance, and modern sexism were found to be low. The type of assault experienced by the victim, stranger or acquaintance, did not significantly alter attributions, emotional reactions, or social reactions. While this suggests that victims at UAF

likely experience a positive environment, results also indicated that there may be stigma at UAF which was not detected by the current study. It remains important, therefore, to target rape myths in education and awareness efforts, seeking to establish as a norm that most students do not accept these beliefs.

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## Appendix A: Demographics

1. What is your age? [*Participant could choose one of values 18-99*]
2. What is your gender?  
 Male       Female       Other  (*Please specify*):
3. Please specify your ethnicity/race (*check all that apply*):  
 White       Hispanic or Latino       Black or African American   
 Native American or American Indian       Asian / Pacific Islander   
 Other  (*Please specify*):

4. What year are you in school?

	Response Options
1.....	Certificate program
2.....	Associates program
3.....	Undergraduate freshman
4.....	Undergraduate sophomore
5.....	Undergraduate junior
6.....	Undergraduate senior
7.....	Graduate student (Master's)
8.....	Graduate student (Doctoral)
9.....	Non-degree seeking

5. What is your marital status?

	Response Options
1.....	Single, never married, living alone
2.....	Single, never married, living with family/relatives
3.....	Single, never married, living with someone in a romantic relationship
4.....	Married or domestic partnership
5.....	Previously married, separated, widowed, or divorced, not in a current relationship
6.....	Previously married, separated, widowed, or divorced, not in a current relationship
7.....	Previously married, separated, widowed, or divorced, in a romantic relationship
8.....	Other (Please specify)
9.....	Non-degree seeking

## **Appendix B: Acquaintance Rape Scenario**

*Instructions:* Please read the following scenario.

After going out on a dinner date, a friend of yours went out to the Marlin for a few drinks with her date until around midnight. The weather was warm and the sky was clear, so she and her date decided to walk the short distance to her home together. She was dressed in a sexy, strapless black dress and carried a small purse. The two walked along College road, enjoying the summer air. Once at her door, the woman invited the man in to say goodnight. Both flirted with each other, sat down on the couch, and began making out. When the man began to feel her up, she pushed his hand away and asked him to stop. He pushed her down and took her clothes off. Although the woman continued to say “stop” and attempted to push him off of her, the man had sex with her, penetrating her vaginally. When he was done, he put his clothes back on and left.

For weeks after that night, your friend was irritable. At times she was withdrawn, not calling or responding to texts for several days. She refused to go to the Marlin or even walk by it alone. She seemed to obsess over what had happened that night. At times she appeared to be off in her head somewhere, though visibly tense. When asked what was on her mind, she often would respond by talking through the details of what happened to her that night. She often seemed down and at times would burst into tears. She always seemed to be somewhere else, whether it was thinking about the details in her head or vigilantly surveying the faces of people around her. She became snappy more easily and more frequently as time went by.

## **Appendix C: Stranger Rape Scenario**

Adapted from Brems & Wagner, 1994

*Instructions:* Please read the following scenario.

After going out on a dinner date, a friend of yours went out for a few drinks at the Marlin until around midnight. Since the weather was warm and the sky was clear, she decided that she would walk rather than call a cab. She was dressed in a sexy, strapless black dress and carried a small purse. As she walked along College road enjoying the summer air, a man suddenly came up behind her and grabbed her, putting his hand to her throat. The woman immediately began to scream for help. The man put his hand over her mouth, told her to be quiet, and to cooperate. He pushed her to the ground violently, slapping and kicking her repeatedly. All along he threatened to kill her if she tried to fight him. He tore off her clothing, and began having sex with her by penetrating her vaginally. When she tried to fight him, he renewed his threats. When he was done, he ran away.

For weeks after that night, your friend was irritable. At times she was withdrawn, not calling or responding to texts for several days. She refused to go to the Marlin or even walk by it alone. She seemed to obsess over what had happened that night. At times she appeared to be off in her head somewhere, though visibly tense. When asked what was on her mind, she often would respond by talking through the details of what happened to her that night. She often seemed down and at times would burst into tears. She always seemed to be somewhere else, whether it was thinking about the details in her head or vigilantly surveying the faces of people around her. She became snappy more easily and more frequently as time went by.

## Appendix D: Questions Assessing Blame and Responsibility

(based on Brems & Wagner, 1994)

*Instructions:* Read the following questions. Click and drag the circle on the bar below the question to indicate your degree of agreement.

1. How much do you consider what happened to be the fault of the woman?

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7  
Not at all Completely

2. How much do you consider what happened to be the fault of the man?

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7  
Not at all Completely

3. How much does the blame for the man's actions rest on the man?

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7  
Not at all Completely

4. How much does the blame for the man's actions rest on the woman?

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7  
Not at all Completely

## Appendix E: Emotional Reactions to the Scenario Questions

*Instructions:* Indicate the level with which you agree with each of the following statements by selecting one of the provided responses.

1.....	Strongly Agree
2.....	Agree
3.....	Unsure
4.....	Disagree
5.....	Strongly Disagree

1. I feel empathy for the woman.
2. I feel empathy for the man
3. I feel anger towards the woman
4. I feel anger towards the man

## Appendix F: Social Reactions Questionnaire – Short Form

(Ullman et al., 2015)

*Instructions:* Read the following list of behaviors below. Indicate how likely you would be to respond in each of the following ways to the woman from the above scenario by selecting one of the responses provided.

1.....	Very likely
2.....	Somewhat likely
3.....	Neutral
4.....	Somewhat unlikely
5.....	Very unlikely

1. Tell her she could have been more cautious
2. Reassure her that she is still a good person
3. Feel as though you don't know how to interact with her now that she has told you.
4. Tell her that she has to move on with her life
5. Comfort her by telling her that you think things will get better
6. Feel compelled to take control of decisions about how she should react to the assault
7. Become so upset that you are unable to calm down.
8. Feel pulled to make decisions about how she should react to the assault
9. Tell her that she should be more cautious to prevent the experience from occurring again.
10. Offer her information about resources
11. Tell her to stop thinking about it
12. Express so much anger at the perpetrator that you would have difficulty calming down.
13. Feel it might be overwhelming to spend time with her now that she has told you
14. See her as more fragile than before she told you
15. Help her get information of any kind about coping with her experience
16. Worry that she is not able to take care of herself and suggest how she should take care of herself

**Appendix G: Expected Peer Social Reactions Questionnaire – Short Form**

(Ullman et al., 2015)

*Instructions:* Read the following list of behaviors below. Indicate how likely you expect **your friends** would be to respond in each of the following ways to the woman from the above scenario by selecting one of the provided options.

1.....	Very likely
2.....	Somewhat likely
3.....	Neutral
4.....	Somewhat unlikely
5.....	Very unlikely

1. Tell her she could have been more cautious
2. Reassure her that she is still a good person
3. Feel as though they don't know how to interact with her now that she has told them.
4. Tell her that she has to move on with her life
5. Comfort her by telling her that they think things will get better
6. Feel compelled to take control of decisions about how she should react to the assault
7. Become so upset that they are unable to calm down.
8. Feel pulled to make decisions about how she should react to the assault
9. Tell her that she should be more cautious to prevent the experience from occurring again.
10. Offer her information about resources
11. Tell her to stop thinking about it
12. Express so much anger at the perpetrator that they would have difficulty calming down.
13. Feel it might be overwhelming to spend time with her now that she has told them
14. See her as more fragile than before she told them
15. Help her get information of any kind about coping with her experience
16. Worry that she is not able to take care of herself and suggest how she should take care of herself

## Appendix H: Modern Sexism Scale

(Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995)

*Instructions:* Indicate the level with which you agree with each of the following statements by selecting one of the provided responses.

1.....	Strongly Agree
2.....	Agree
3.....	Unsure
4.....	Disagree
5.....	Strongly Disagree

- \*1. Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States.
- 2. Women often miss out on good jobs due to sexual discrimination.
- \*3. It is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner on television.
- \*4. On average, people in our society treat husbands and wives equally.
- \*5. Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement.
- 6. It is easy to understand the anger of women's groups in America.
- 7. It is easy to understand why women's groups are still concerned about the societal limitations of women's opportunities.
- \*8. Over the past few years, the government and news media have been showing more concern about the treatment of women than is warranted by women's actual experiences.

\*Items were reverse-coded during analysis.



## Appendix I: Social Desirability Scale

(Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972)

*Instructions:* Indicate your agreement with each of the following statements by checking the box next to either “true” or “false”.

Response Options	
1.....	True
2.....	False

- \*1. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.
- \*2. I always try to practice what I preach.
- \*3. I never resent being asked to return a favor.
- \*4. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different than my own.
- \*5. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.
- 6. I like to gossip at times.
- 7. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.
- 8. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.
- 9. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way
- 10. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.

\*Item was reverse coded during analysis.

## Appendix J: Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Updated

(McMahon & Farmer, 2011)

*Instructions:* Indicate the level with which you agree with each of the following statements by selecting one of the provided responses.

1.....	Strongly Agree
2.....	Agree
3.....	Unsure
4.....	Disagree
5.....	Strongly Disagree

1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.
2. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.
3. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.
4. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.
5. When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.
6. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.
7. When guys rape, it is usually because of a strong desire for sex.
8. Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
9. Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.
10. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.
11. It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing.
12. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.
13. If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape.
14. If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.
15. A rape probably doesn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.
16. If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.
17. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.
18. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.
19. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.
20. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.
21. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.
22. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.

## Appendix K: Expected Peer Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Updated

(McMahon & Farmer, 2011)

*Instructions:* Indicate how much you perceive **your friends** would agree with each of the statements by selecting one of the provided responses.

Provided Response Options	
1.....	Strongly Agree
2.....	Agree
3.....	Unsure
4.....	Disagree
5.....	Strongly Disagree

1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.
2. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.
3. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.
4. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.
5. When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.
6. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.
7. When guys rape, it is usually because of a strong desire for sex.
8. Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
9. Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.
10. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.
11. It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing.
12. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.
13. If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape.
14. If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.
15. A rape probably doesn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.
16. If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.
17. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.
18. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.
19. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.
20. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.
21. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.
22. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.

## Appendix L: Questions About Experience Responding to Sexual Assault Disclosure

Kilpatrick et al., 2007, p. 42

*Instructions:* Read the following questions. Select the response that matches your experience or training related to sexual assault response or awareness.

Provided Response Options	
1.....	No
2.....	Yes

1. Has a woman or girl ever directly told you that someone forced her to have sexual intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex when she didn't want to?
2. Has a woman or girl ever directly told you that someone had sexual intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex with her when she didn't want to after she was extremely high or passed out due to alcohol or drug use?

**Appendix M: Training Related to Sexual Assault**

*Instructions:* Read the following questions. Select the response that matches your experience or training related to sexual assault response or awareness.

Provided Response Options	
1.....	No
2.....	Yes

3. Have you ever taken a human sexualities or women/gender studies course
4. Have you ever taken part in training for sexual assault awareness or response?
5. Which of the following UAF sexual assault prevention efforts or events have you heard of and/or participated in? Check “other” if you have participated in other sexual assault prevention efforts.

	I have heard of this	I have participated in this
UAF Green Dot program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Haven & AlcoholEdu training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take Back the Night event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It’s On Us	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other ( <i>please specify</i> ):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix N: Campus Resources and Response

1. Which of the following resources do you perceive are available to UAF students who have experienced sexual violence?
  - Resource and Advocacy Center
  - Center for Non-Violent Living
  - Student Health and Counseling Center
  - On-campus Community Mental Health Center
  - 24-hour Crisis Careline
2. If you were to witness a rape/sexual assault, how comfortable would you be intervening?  
Response options: Extremely, Very, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all
3. How likely do you perceive it is that another UAF student would intervene in the event other students witnessed a rape/sexual assault?  
Response options: Extremely, Very, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all
4. If a friend of yours disclosed to you they had experienced sexual assault, how likely would you be to refer that friend to the UAF Resource and Advocacy Center?  
Response options: Extremely, Very, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all
5. Is the UAF Resource and Advocacy Center a confidential resource?  
Response options: True, False
6. What do you believe would help improve responses to sexual assault here at UAF?  
(the question has a box within which participants can type their open-ended response)

## Appendix O: Assessing the Affective Impact of Survey

*Instructions:* Read the following question. Check the box that most closely corresponds to your answer.

1. Compared to when you started this survey, how do you feel now?

Better

Same

Worse

## **Appendix P: Informed Consent**

Informed Consent Form  
University of Alaska Fairbanks  
Department of Psychology  
Informed Consent for Participants in Research Study

Research Title: Social responses to campus situations

Principal Investigators: Drs. Ellen Lopez and Inna Rivkin

Thank you for your interest in this study! Before you agree to participate, it is important that you understand the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks of the research. The informed consent document is a written summary of this information. E-mail the researchers if you have any questions or if there are things you do not understand. You are encouraged to print a copy of this document for your records.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participating in this research is entirely voluntary. You may stop any time without consequence. Stopping will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to you. The researchers do not promise that you will receive any benefits from this research.

### **Description of Research**

The purpose of this research is to examine UAF student responses to campus situations. We are especially interested in student responses to scenarios in which a friend is going through a difficult situation. The survey is 20-30 minutes long.

### **Nature of Participation**

You will read a brief story and then you will be asked a series of questions. You will be asked to report your reactions to the people and events in the story. You will be asked how your friends would react to the people involved in the story. You will be asked about training and life experiences relevant to the story.

### **What are the Possible Risks?**

You may experience unpleasant feelings as a result of reading the story. You may come across a question that you find unpleasant or upsetting. You are free to skip questions that you do not want to answer. You may stop the survey at any time.

### **What are the Possible Benefits?**

No benefits are promised from this study. You can enter a raffle to win a \$20 Amazon gift certificate. You may experience satisfaction knowing that you contributed to research on an important topic. The data from this study may help improve education, outreach, and awareness programs at the university. The results of this research may help increase safety and wellness of the university.

### **Confidentiality**



Your participation is confidential and anonymous. Your responses will not be linked to your name in any way. All survey responses will be kept in two ways. Responses will be gathered online in a password-protected account. Responses will be analyzed on a password protected computer housed within a locked room. After the study ends responses will be stored on a password protected USB drive in a locked room. This data will be kept in accordance with the standards of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, federal regulations, and the American Psychological Association. Keep in mind the research is not focused on the responses of any one person. The research is focused on patterns of responses across multiple people.

**Availability of Information**

Please direct any questions you may have to the researcher or the UAF supervisors:

*Researchers:*

Dr. Ellen Lopez (Advisor)      [edlopez@alaska.edu](mailto:edlopez@alaska.edu)      (907) 474-7318

Dr. Inna Rivkin (Advisor)      [idrivkin@alaska.edu](mailto:idrivkin@alaska.edu)      (907) 474-6178

Marie Skanis (Primary  
Researcher)      [mlskanis2@alaska.edu](mailto:mlskanis2@alaska.edu)

*UAF Institutional Review*

*Board*      [bjwatson@alaska.edu](mailto:bjwatson@alaska.edu)      (907) 474-7832  
Bridget Watson  
Senior Research Compliance  
Officer

1. I am 18 years old or older.\*

Response options: Yes or No (from drop-down menu)

2. I am a UAF student.\*

Response options: Yes or No (from drop-down menu)

3. I have read and understood the informed consent form and wish to participate.

Response options: Yes or No (from drop-down menu)

\*: These questions are programmed to require an answer in Survey Monkey. Responses of no to any of these questions will result in participants being redirected to the disqualification page.

## Appendix Q: Debriefing Form

### Description of the Study

Thank you for taking part in this study! The study was designed to examine attributions people make to victims of different types of sexual assault. It also examines whether those attributions lead to different emotional reactions and helping behaviors. Assumptions, which we may or may not be aware of, often drive these attributions. They can influence whether people label an event "sexual assault" and consequently whether people are willing to offer help or not to victims. For instance, this study explores whether participants who view a scenario that matches a stereotypical, though less common, rape scenario express more positive attributions, emotional reactions, and helping behaviors towards victims than participants viewing a more realistic rape scenario. This study was designed to present a scenario which **participants** label. Specifically, participants must decide whether it is sexual assault or something else. Deciding how to label the scenario is hypothesized to influence the reactions described above. Also, this study explored several characteristics that often influence the strength of reactions to sexual assault victims. Do people with training or experience responding to sexual assault tend to make more positive attributions to victims or feel more empathy? Are they more willing to help? Similarly, the study explores the impact of stereotypical beliefs. Do people who accept stereotypical beliefs about rape and rape victims experience more negative attributions about victims? Do they feel more anger towards them? Do they express less willingness to help? Also, the study examines the impact of beliefs about women. Do beliefs about women affect attributional judgments and emotional reactions? Do they affect helping behaviors? Finally, are UAF students aware of resources for sexual assault victims? What can be done to improve UAF responses to sexual assault?

This exploration of how attributions and emotions influence helping behaviors can inform future sexual assault awareness and response programs on campus. Because this is an ongoing study, we ask that you not discuss this study with anyone. Students you know may be asked to participate in the future. Prior knowledge of this study will render their data useless. Thank you again for participating in this study and contributing to this research.

If you have any questions or would like to know the results of the study, contact the researcher of the UAF supervisors:

#### *Researchers:*

Dr. Ellen Lopez (Advisor)      [edlopez@alaska.edu](mailto:edlopez@alaska.edu)      (907) 474-7318

Dr. Inna Rivkin (Advisor)      [idrivkin@alaska.edu](mailto:idrivkin@alaska.edu)      (907) 474-6178

Marie Skanis (Primary  
Researcher)      [m1skanis2@alaska.edu](mailto:m1skanis2@alaska.edu)

If you are experiencing distress, the following crisis intervention and counseling resources are locally available (all of which provide confidential resources):

Careline Crisis Intervention Hotline  
(907) 452-HELP (4357)

UAF Student Health and Counseling Center  
(907)474-7043  
Whitaker Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

UAF Community Mental Health Clinic  
(907)474-1999  
Gruening Building Suite 215

UAF Resource and Advocacy Center  
(907)474-6360  
Wood Center Room 130

Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living  
(907)452-2293  
726 26<sup>th</sup> Ave., Suite 1

## **Appendix R: Opportunity to Enter Raffle**

If you would like to be redirected to an external link for the opportunity to enter a drawing for one of six \$20 Amazon gift cards please click the link below.

[Click here to be redirected to raffle entry page](#)

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

If you choose to enter the raffle for one of six gift cards, please note that your e-mail address will be provided to the researcher as having completed the survey. Your e-mail address will not be linked to your answers.

In order to maintain the quality of this study, do not disclose research procedures to anyone who might participate in this study in the future. Such disclosure could bias the results.

## Appendix S: Title IX Poster Examples

# WHAT IS TITLE IX?

**No sex discrimination. No sexual assault. *Period.***

It's federal law.

It's not just about sports.

The law says no sex-based discrimination.

Violence is discriminatory. It holds you back.

Not just rape — it's harassment, stalking, threats, too.

People of any sex, gender, identity or expression are protected.

Because equal rights are for all.

**IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING DO SOMETHING** Know your rights. [www.uaf.edu/titleix/](http://www.uaf.edu/titleix/) or 474-7300

The University of Alaska does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, physical or mental disability, marital status, change in marital status, pregnancy or parenthood, genetic code or retaliation. This policy affects employment policies and actions, as well as the delivery of educational services at all levels and facilities of the university. For a full explanation of what can, apply and contact information on how to file a report visit [www.uaf.edu/titleix/rights/office-of-non-discrimination](http://www.uaf.edu/titleix/rights/office-of-non-discrimination). UAF is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer and educational institution. Produced by UAF University Relations, 04/2014.

# ~~DON'T GET RAPE'D~~

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