University Crime Alerts: Do They Contribute to Institutional Betrayal and Rape Myths?

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Abstract

Universities are mandated by the Clery Act (20 USC § 1092(f)) to publicize the occurrence of certain campus crimes. Many universities rely on "Crime Alert" emails to quickly and effectively communicate when a crime has occurred. However, communications of sexual crimes are often narrow (e.g., limited to stranger-perpetrated crimes) and misleading (e.g., containing safety tips that are not applicable to most types of sexual violence). The current paper presents the results of two studies that test the effects of reading crime alert emails on subsequent endorsement of rape myths and institutional betrayal. In Study 1, participants read a typical crime alert email describing a stranger-perpetrated crime, an alternative email describing an acquaintance-perpetrated crime, or a control email describing an event unrelated to interpersonal violence. Men were significantly more likely to endorse rape myths than were women in the control condition, but not in the typical or alternative email condition. In addition, results from Study 1 indicate that issuing crime alert emails following stranger-perpetrated sexual violence leads to a sense of institutional betrayal among students who have experienced acquaintance-perpetrated violence. In Study 2, participants read a typical crime alert email or an alternative digest email. Participants who read the typical email reported higher rape myth acceptance, but not institutional betrayal, than those who read the digest email. There were also significant gender differences in student opinions of each email that suggest the digest email format may serve as a useful tool for engaging male students in the issue of campus sexual violence. Taken together, these studies provide converging evidence that university communication regarding sexual violence can either perpetuate or positively influence attitudes towards sexual violence.

Keywords

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ABSTRACT

Universities are mandated by the Clery Act (20 USC § 1092(f)) to publicize the occurrence of certain campus crimes. Many universities rely on "Crime Alert" emails to quickly and effectively communicate when a crime has occurred. However, communications of sexual crimes are often narrow (e.g., limited to stranger-perpetrated crimes) and misleading (e.g., containing safety tips that are not applicable to most types of sexual violence). The current paper presents the results of two studies that test the effects of reading crime alert emails on subsequent endorsement of rape myths and institutional betrayal. In Study 1, participants read a typical crime alert email describing a stranger-perpetrated crime, an alternative email describing an acquaintance-perpetrated crime, or a control email describing an event unrelated to interpersonal violence. Men were significantly more likely to endorse rape myths than were women in the control condition, but not in the typical or alternative email condition. In addition, results from Study 1 indicate that issuing crime alert emails following stranger-perpetrated sexual violence leads to a sense of institutional betrayal among students who have experienced acquaintance-perpetrated violence. In Study 2, participants read a typical crime alert email or an alternative digest email. Participants who read the typical email reported higher rape myth acceptance, but not institutional betrayal, than those who read the digest email. There were also significant gender differences in student opinions of each email that suggest the digest email format may serve as a useful tool for engaging male students in the issue of campus sexual violence. Taken together, these studies provide converging evidence that university communication regarding sexual violence can either perpetuate or positively influence attitudes towards sexual violence.

KEYWORDS

institutional betrayal, campus sexual assault, rape myths, betrayal trauma, gender, crime alerts

O N APRIL 5TH, 1986, 19-YEAR OLD JEANNE CLERY'S LIFE came to a brutal end when she was raped and murdered by another student in her residence hall at Lehigh University. Jeanne's parents, Howard and Connie Clery, were shocked to learn that the small private university (then about 5,400 students) to which they

had entrusted their daughter's safety had been the site of 38 violent crimes over the previous three years, a figure that the school was not required to disclose to potential or current students. In response, the Clerys founded a non-profit organization, Security on Campus Incorporated, to collect and disseminate information about campus safety. Their work led to the federal Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act (20 USC § 1092(f), commonly known as the Clery Act), which requires all colleges receiving federal funding to keep a publicly accessible record of all crimes that occur on and near campus reflecting at least the past eight years of reported crimes. In addition to publishing these Annual Campus Security Reports, colleges are required to issue timely warnings of crimes that pose a threat to the safety of students and staff. Currently, many universities relay these crime warnings to students through email and text messages.

The Clery Act is meant to keep university students safe from violence, including sexual assault and rape, by providing accurate and timely information about environmental risks. Yet over 25 years after the Clery Act became law, sexual assault continues to be a substantial risk for university women: one-fifth to one-quarter of women experience completed or attempted rape over the course of their college career (Muehlenhard, Peterson, Humphreys, Jozkowski, 2017). This may account for a significant proportion of sexual violence, as over one-third (37.4%) of female rape victims are first raped between the ages of 18-24, years that typically encompass college attendance (Black et al., 2011). Many factors likely account for the discrepancy between the intent of the Clery Act and continued high rates of sexual violence experienced by college women. Do email alerts play a role? This research attempts to answer this question.

Clery Act Accounting Requires Reporting

For a crime to be logged in an Annual Campus Security Report, it must first be reported to authorities. Yet few victims of completed or attempted rape report these crimes to police or campus authorities (Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2002). The variable found to be most strongly associated with reluctance to report is being acquainted with one's perpetrator (Chen & Ullman, 2010; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Unfortunately, this also describes the most common perpetrators of all sexual assault (Gidycz et al., 2001; Black et al., 2011), as well as campus sexual assault, where it is estimated up to 90% of female victims know their offender from class, as friends, as partners or ex-partners, or through mutual friends (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000).

If these crimes were reported, they clearly meet Clery standards for inclusion in Annual Campus Security Reports. Most occur on or near campus; one study found 60% of rapes on campus took place in victims' homes, 30% in other living quarters on campus, and 10% in fraternities (Fisher et al., 2000). It is also clear that these crimes represent an on-going threat to the campus community. Research on repeat perpetration of sexual violence among college students indicates that over 60% of college students who sexually assault an acquaintance will commit additional assaults against others in the future (Lisak & Miller, 2002; Zinzow & Thompson, 2015).

Reporting is Hindered by Rape Myths

A rape myth is a limited or inaccurate definition of what "counts" as rape (Burt, 1980). Examples of these myths include ideas about perpetrators (e.g., they are strangers who use violence to rape), victims (e.g., drinking or walking alone at night is "asking for" rape), and locations (e.g., most rape happens in dark alleys or on empty

roads). Research indicates that women use rape myths to determine whether rape has occurred, even when they know all legal criteria have been met (Deming, Covan, Swan, & Billings, 2013). Women are often reluctant to use "rape" or "sexual assault" to describe coerced or unwanted sexual experiences that involve a romantic partner, when victims are incapacitated by drugs or alcohol, or when the perpetrator does not penetrate the victim with his penis (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, & Halvorsen, 2003). Applying these extra criteria may lead many victims to conclude their experience was not reportable because it did not "count" as rape (Bondurant, 2001).

How Institutional Communications Can Reinforce Rape Myths

Because universities are mandated by the Clery Act to publicly communicate reported safety threats to students, they are in a unique position to disseminate accurate and helpful information about sexual violence. However, universities and colleges can reinforce rape myths by 1) issuing crime alerts following mostly stranger perpetrated sexual assaults; and 2) including victim-blaming safety tips in alert emails. Examples of these rape myth-perpetuating excerpts and safety tips from the crime alert emails issued by various universities across United States include descriptions of rape such as a woman being "approached by an unknown man" and "grabbed from behind by an unknown male;" and safety tips such as "encourage friends to travel in pairs," "avoid walking alone at night," and "travel in a well-lit and populated area." These emails may send an implicit message of what type of crime "counts" as rape and thus deserves a crime alert message. The safety tips offered to protect oneself from strange perpetrators do not apply to acquaintance-based sexual assault, potentially advise students toward behavior that may actually increase their risk of assault (e.g., advising students to have a friend walk them home if they are intoxicated), and place the responsibility for preventing violence solely on the victim. The official appearance and institutional endorsement of these messages may lead students to treat these email alerts as authoritative, unbiased sources of information and therefore trustworthy (Lee, Kim, & Moon, 2000; Nielsen, Molich, Snyder, & Farrell, 2000; Fogg et al., 2001).

Reinforcing rape myths via institutional communications to students not only poses a problem for victim reporting, but also may contribute to the maintenance of rape-accepting attitudes in possible perpetrators of future campus sexual violence (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2013). Non-forensic research by Bohner, Siebler and Scmelcher (2006) suggests that rape myths have a "psychological neutralizing" effect on college men. In Bohner et al.'s study, men who received experimentally manipulated feedback that other college students' level of rape myth acceptance was higher than their own scores, scored high on rape proclivity (i.e., indicating that they would have behaved similarly to a perpetrator described in vignettes of acquaintance rape and that they would have "enjoyed getting their own way"). A comprehensive meta-analysis provides further converging evidence for this pattern; across 28 studies, researchers found a robust association between rape myth acceptance and sexual coercion perpetration (Trottier, Benbouriche, & Bonneville, 2019). The information that is systematically selected for inclusion in campus crime alerts (as well as the information not included) speaks volumes; it serves as a subtle cue of an environment's tolerance rape myths.

At best, typical crime alert emails miss an opportunity to dispel common myths about sexual assault and provide education about the much more common acquaintance assaults. At worst, they may create doubt in victims of acquaintance-perpetrated

sexual assault as to whether their experience "counts" and should be reported or create a "psychological neutralizing" environment that condones or even facilitates acquaintance-based sexual violence. Although the language in these messages may appear neutral and well-intentioned on the surface, it constructs and maintains understandings of what constitutes sexual violence.

Beyond the impact on reporting or even occurrence of sexual violence, these institutional communications could cause additional psychological harm to victims of acquaintance-perpetrated sexual assault. If students perceive institutional communications as failing to prevent acquaintance sexual assault (via proper education or honest reporting of acquaintance-based assaults) or implying that non-stranger perpetrated sexual assault does not "count" as crime, then these emails are examples of institutional betrayal. Smith and Freyd (2013) defined institutional betrayal as "institutional failure to prevent sexual assault or respond supportively when it occurs" (p. 119), including creating an environment where sexual assault seems common or like no big deal (an item on the institutional betrayal questionnaire). Institutional betrayal has been found to exacerbate the effects of sexual assault on post-traumatic distress, particularly anxiety, dissociation, and interpersonal functioning (Smith & Freyd, 2013; Smith & Freyd, 2017).

STUDY 1

Study 1 Hypotheses
The existing literature on sexual assault, rape myths, and institutional communication taken together suggested to us that the timely warnings issued by universities as per the Clery Act may facilitate ongoing rape myth acceptance and be a mechanism of institutional betrayal. Study 1 serves as an initial exploration of this relationship. In Study 1, we had three main hypotheses:

- 1) Typically worded crime alert emails would increase rape myth endorsement among college students, with a stronger effect for male students (i.e., high rape myth endorsement following exposure to a typical alert email as compared to other emails).

- 2) Students who have experienced betrayal trauma (i.e., interpersonal violence perpetrated by someone close to them) would be more likely to report institutional betrayal from the email alert describing a stranger-based assault.

- 3) Students would engage readily with these emails and perceive them as important messages from their university and would report a variety of reasons for engaging with the emails (e.g., for information, safety, etc.).

Study 1 Method

Sample
A sample of undergraduates at a large public northwestern university was recruited via the Psychology and Linguistics Department Human Subjects Pool to complete an online study for research participation credit. Students did not self-select based on knowledge of the content of the study; rather, the study was labeled with the name of a famous conductor, as were all studies created in the same academic year. Students learned about the content only during the informed consent process, and they had the option to withdraw at any point. The university's Office of Research Compliance approved the study, and students indicated informed consent electronically by agreeing to participate after receiving information about the study. The sample of

students consisted of 445 students, mostly female (73.3%), Caucasian (68.5%), heterosexual (90.1%), and college-aged (M = 20.68, SD = 4.29), which reflects the demographics of the Human Subjects Pool.

Manipulation and Measures

Email Conditions

Students were assigned into one of three conditions via a randomization feature of the online survey engine Qualtrics. These conditions differed only in the presentation of one of three emails (referred to as "Typical", "Alternative", and "Control") presented to the students. The email was presented as "an email from [the university]" and students were asked to read it carefully. These emails were matched in length (ranging from 328-385 words), structure, and tone.

Typical email. Students in the "Typical" condition were presented with an email that was modeled on a typical crime alert email issued at the university.[1] It described a sexual assault perpetrated in a public space by an unknown perpetrator whose physical characteristics are provided (i.e., *"white male, about 6' tall, medium build, with light brown hair wearing jeans and a sweatshirt"*) with the aim of helping potentially identify the suspect. Means of providing this information are identified (e.g., police contacts). Safety tips focused on victim behavior follow (e.g., *"You should not walk alone at night"; "Be aware of your surroundings at all times"*). The email ended with information about victim resources such as helplines and telephone numbers for counseling services.

Alternative email. Students in the "Alternative" conditions were presented with an email that described a sexual assault perpetrated in the victim's home by an acquaintance. This description was followed by a statement from the university about sexual assault (*"[the university] takes sexual assault very seriously – this behavior is against the law and against university conduct codes")* followed by means of contacting the police. Safety tips in this email were focused on consent and aimed at both parties (e.g., *"Know that when a person consents to one activity -- e.g., a walk home, an invitation to a party or bar -- it does not indicate consent for sexual activities"; "Be aware that drinking alcohol or consuming other substances impairs judgment in both giving and receiving consent for sexual activities. Make extra effort to clearly communicate intentions and only act on clear consent in these situations"*). The email ended with information about victim resources such as helplines and telephone numbers for counseling services.

Control email. In order to examine the effects of reading about a non-sexual assault related event, students in the control condition read about a gas leak on campus. The length and tone of the description of the gas leak was matched to the other two conditions (e.g., a female student reported the leak; the language describing locations on campus was similar). Students were provided means of contacting the police. Students were provided with safety tips related to gas safety (e.g., *"Use your nose. If you ever detect even a small amount of the odor of nat-*

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[1] This email was directly modeled from a crime email issued by the authors' own institution, with details changed so as to not to describe a crime that had occurred out of respect for the victim's experience.

ural gas in the air, don't stay—get away. Then, contact your natural gas provider. If you don't know that number, dial emergency services, 9-1-1"). The email ended with information about contacting campus resources related to utilities.

Rape Myth Acceptance

A list of 19 myths and six facts about sexual assault were compiled from educational resources such as university sexual violence prevention websites (e.g., "*Most rapes are committed by strangers at night in out-of-the-way places"*). Students indicated their agreement with each myth or fact on a four-point scale (1 = "Completely False"; 4 = "Completely True"). Reliability analysis indicated that agreement with the rape myths was internally consistent (α = .89), but agreement with rape facts was not reliable (α = .53). Therefore, only students' mean responses to the rape myths were included in analyses.

Institutional Betrayal (Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire [IBQ], Smith & Freyd, 2013)

The seven items assessing institutional betrayal from the IBQ were presented to students as potential descriptions of the university's attitudes and policies around sexual assault (e.g., "*The university creates an environment where sexual assault seems common or like no big deal"*). Students were asked to indicate how much the item described the university on a four-point scale (1 = "Very False"; 4 = "Very True"). Reliability analysis indicated that the IBQ is an internally consistent scale when used this way (α = .803). Students' responses to these items were averaged to create an institutional betrayal score.

Betrayal Trauma History (Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey [BBTS], Goldberg & Freyd, 2006)

The 14-item BBTS was used to assess traumatic experiences. Because the sample was comprised of college students with a median age in their early twenties, item 13 ("*You experienced the death of one of your children"*) was presented instead as, "*You experienced the death of one of your parents."* Responses were scored to create three levels of traumatic experiences: None (students endorsed "Never" on all 14 items), Low Betrayal (students endorsed one or more items describing an experience low in betrayal such as a natural disaster and none of the interpersonal abuse items), and High Betrayal (students endorsed one or more items describing an experience medium or high in betrayal such as a being deliberately abused by another person). This scoring resulted in relatively equal sized groups.

Personal Engagement with University Emails

Students' experience with the actual crime alert emails released by the university was assessed with a single item (*"Do you read the crime alert emails that the university sends out about reports of sexual assault?"*). Depending upon the response to this item ("Yes" or "No"), a list of reasons was presented that students could select from (multiple choices allowed). For students who indicated they did read the emails, options included: *"The emails are informative;" "The safety tips are helpful;" "They give me an idea of how to avoid sexual assault;" "The emails are relevant to me;"* and *"I want to compare my experiences to those in the emails."* For students who indicated they did not read the emails, options included: *"The emails are not informative;" "The safety tips are not helpful;" "The emails are upsetting;" "The emails*

are not relevant to me;" and "*The emails are too long.*" All students were also provided with an "*Other*" option that included a text box for them to type their answers.

Study 1 Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using *R* Version 3.5.2 (R Core Team, 2018) and *R* packages *stats* (Version 3.5.2; R Core Team, 2018), *tidyverse* (Version 1.2.1; Wickham, 2017), *psych* (Version 1.8.12; Revelle, 2018). To test our hypotheses, we used ANOVA procedures to test hypothesized differences between conditions. Specific effects driving interaction effects were examined with planned contrasts examining the simple effects hypothesized (e.g., examining the perceived institutional betrayal reported by students with histories of betrayal trauma in the typical email condition as compared to other students). No outliers were removed prior to data analysis. Missing data were excluded pairwise for analyses.

Study 1 Results

Rape Myths

We did not find a significant main effect of email type on overall rape myth endorsement, (see Table 1; see Figure 1). There was a significant main effect for gender on rape myth acceptance, such that men endorsed higher levels of rape myth acceptance than women. There was no significant interaction effect, $p = .06$. However, because of our a priori hypothesis, we conducted planned contrasts regarding gender differences in each email condition. The planned contrasts indicated that men did report significantly higher rape myth acceptance than women in the control email condition, $t(433) = 3.61$, $p < .001$. However, contrary to our hypothesis, there was no significant gender difference in the typical email condition.

Table 1. Rape Myths Endorsement Scores by Email Condition and Gender (Study 1)

Condition	Women			Men			Total		
	M	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Typical	1.39[c]	0.38	111	1.48[c]	0.40	33	1.41[a]	0.38	144
Alternative	1.45[c]	0.41	111	1.51[c]	0.40	36	1.46[a]	0.41	147
Control	1.39[c]	0.28	97	1.67[c]	0.50	47	1.48[a]	0.39	144
Total	1.41[b]	0.36	319	1.57[b]	0.44	116	1.45	0.39	435

ANOVA

Condition	[a]$F(2, 429) = 1.86$, p = .16, $\eta^2_p = .01$
Gender	[b]$F(1, 429) = 12.17$, p = .001, $\eta^2_p = .03$
Interaction	[c]$F(2, 429) = 2.84$, $p = .060$, $\eta^2_p = .01$

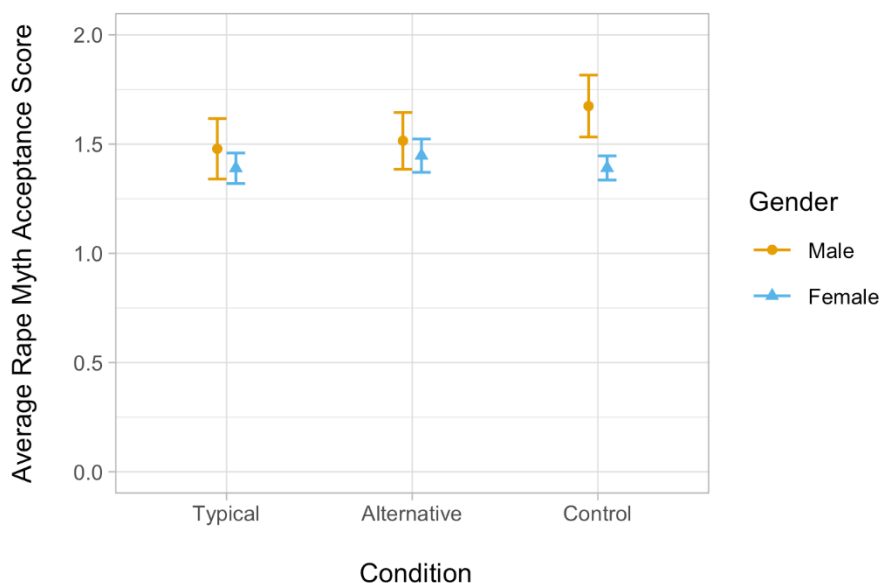Note: η^2_p = partial Eta-squared

Figure 1. Rape Myths Endorsement Mean Scores (with 95% Confidence Intervals) by Gender and Email Condition. Figure created using R packages ggplot2 (Version 3.1.0; Wickham, 2016) and colorblindr (Version 0.1.0; McWhite & Wilke, 2019).

Institutional Betrayal

We did not find a main effect of condition or trauma history on perceived institutional betrayal (see Table 2). There was no significant interaction effect, $p = .084$. However, because of our a priori hypothesis, we conducted planned contrasts regarding betrayal trauma history and email condition. Two simple effect contrasts were consistent with our hypothesis regarding trauma history, email condition and perceived institutional betrayal (see Figure 2). First, we found that within the typical email condition, students with histories of high betrayal trauma perceived more institutional betrayal compared to other students in this condition, $t(429) = 2.56$, $p = .011$. Second, we found that these students (i.e., those with high betrayal histories in the typical email condition) endorsed higher perceived institutional betrayal than any other students across both condition and trauma history, $t(429) = 2.15$, $p = .032$

Table 2. Perceived Institutional Betrayal by Condition and Trauma History (Study 2)

	Betrayal Trauma History											
	None			Low			High			Total		
Condition	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Typical	1.51[c]	0.52	41	1.35[c]	0.41	44	1.66[c]	0.57	60	1.52[a]	0.53	145
Alternative	1.51[c]	0.55	54	1.52[c]	0.51	37	1.54[c]	0.49	58	1.52[a]	0.51	149
Control	1.48[c]	0.42	38	1.52[c]	0.46	41	1.58[c]	0.60	65	1.54[a]	0.52	144
Total	1.50[b]	0.50	133	1.46[b]	0.46	122	1.59[b]	0.55	183	1.53	0.52	438

ANOVA	
Condition	[a]$F(2, 429) = 0.50$, $p = .95$, $\eta^2_p = .001$
Trauma History	[b]$F(2, 429) = 2.49$, $p = 0.084$, $\eta^2_p = .01$
Interaction	[c]$F(4, 429) = 1.15$, $p = .332$, $\eta^2_p = .01$

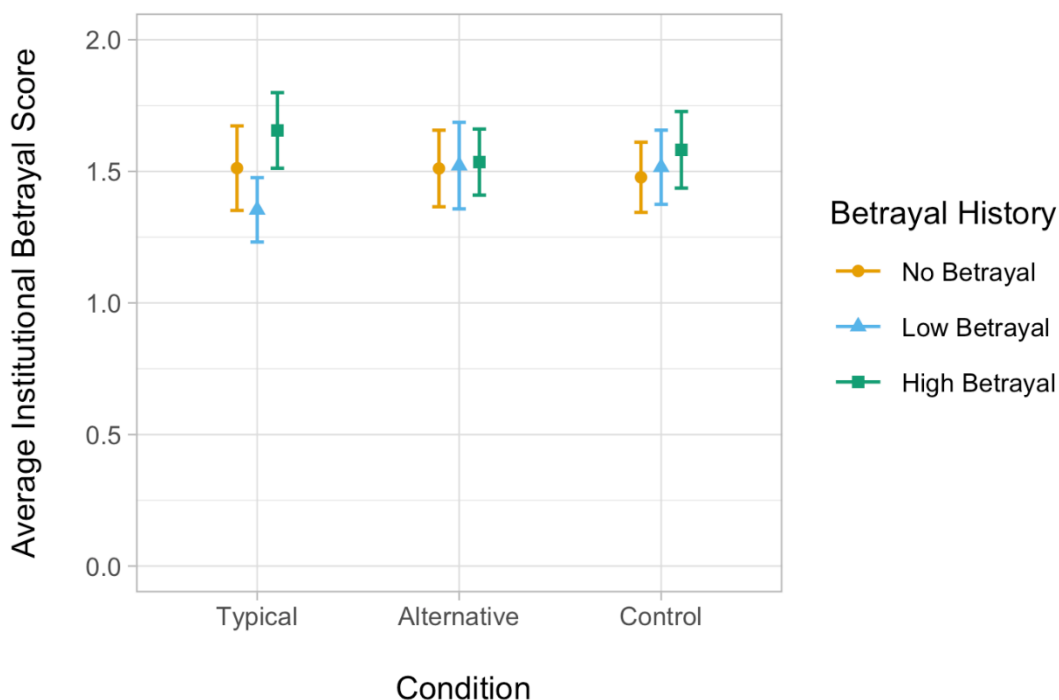Note: η^2_p = partial Eta-squared

Figure 2. Perceived Institutional Betrayal Mean Scores (with 95% Confidence Intervals) by Condition and Betrayal Trauma History. Figure created using R packages ggplot2 (Version 3.1.0; Wickham, 2016) and colorblindr (Version 0.1.0; McWhite & Wilke, 2019).

Email Awareness

We found that 92.8% of college students reported that they read the crime emails sent out by the university. Students reported that they read the emails for the primary purpose of acquiring information followed by seeking helpful safety tips and avoiding sexual assault (see Figure 3).
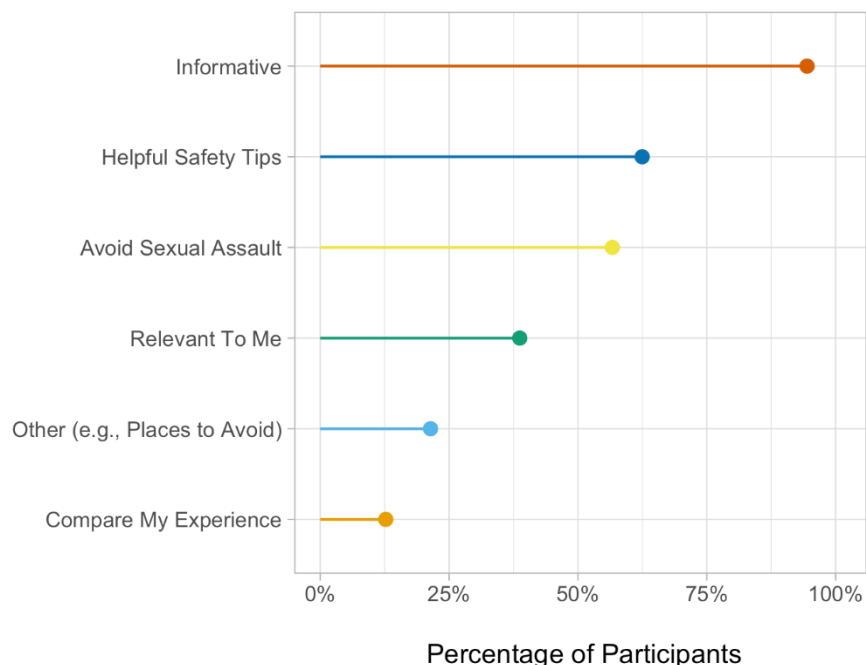
Figure 3. Reasons for reading timely warning emails. Figure created using *R* packages *ggplot2* (Version 3.1.0; Wickham, 2016) and *colorblindr* (Version 0.1.0; McWhite & Wilke, 2019).

Study 1 Discussion

We hypothesized that the timely warning emails increased rape myth endorsement for college students with a stronger effect for men (i.e. high rape myths endorsement following exposure to typical emails as compared to other emails). Our second hypothesis was that those who have experienced betrayal trauma will be more likely to perceive institutional betrayal from exposure to the email alert describing stranger-based assault. Third, we examined how students related to these emails, including their awareness of these alerts at their school as well as their reasons for engaging with these emails.

We did not find a significant effect of the typical email on rape myths endorsement for college students overall or even men in particular, as we had predicted. We failed to find a significant gender difference in either the alternative or typical email condition, as opposed to the control condition, suggesting that reading about any type of sexual violence may reduce men's rape myth acceptance compared to men who read emails about a neutral topic. We also found that people who had experienced high betrayal trauma reported perceiving the highest institutional betrayal after reading the typical email in comparison to other students. We suspect that this effect would be even more striking if these emails originated from a respected institution rather than as part of a study. Lastly, we found that students engaged with university crime emails readily and reported reading them with the primary purpose of acquiring information, helpful safety tips, and avoiding sexual assault.

Beyond missing an opportunity to challenge rape myth acceptance with accurate and sensitive information, results of this study indicate that the typical Clery Act email alerts may be harmful to the large subset of college students who have experienced a betrayal trauma (Black et al., 2010). More recent research on the emerging concept of institutional betrayal indicates that this type of betrayal carries the risk of psychological harm akin to interpersonal betrayal (Andresen, Monteith, Kugler, Cruz, & Blais, 2019; Monteith, Bahraini, Matarazzo, Soberay, & Smith, 2016; Smith & Freyd, 2013; 2017).

 Although these initial findings may seem to have important implications, the final piece of our study suggests that students would be quite receptive to a change in the content of alert emails. Students largely reported reading these emails for information and means of staying safe. The current practice of sending these emails following only the rarest of crimes (i.e., stranger-perpetrated sexual violence) necessarily limits the informative impact of these messages. However, students' self-reported engagement with emails suggests that this mechanism itself might continue to be the best vehicle for delivering accurate and timely information about the full range of sexual violence.

However, there were several weaknesses specific to this initial study, and thus results should be interpreted with caution. Importantly, neither the main effects nor the interaction effect were on their own statistically significant, and the effect sizes were small. Despite the fact that this study supported our initial, theoretically-driven contrast analyses, additional research should be conducted in order to replicate and confirm these results in a larger and more diverse sample. Furthermore, in this initial study, we did not use a standardized measure of rape myth acceptance, which could account for the null main effects of email condition. An additional study should use a standard and validated measure of this dependent variable to replicate and extend these findings (see Study 2). Finally, the alternative email in this study differed from typical Clery Act emails in that it described an acquaintance-perpetrated assault in addition to offering non-victim-blaming safety tips. Because both the type of assault described as well as the content of the safety tips in the emails were hypothesized to contribute to subsequent endorsement of institutional betrayal and rape myths, additional research is needed to understand the unique effects of each of these changes.

Despite these significant limitations, results suggest that universities may benefit from re-evaluating the content and format of their Crime Alert emails to reflect a more comprehensive, intentional approach to sexual violence. We anticipate that university leaders will be apprehensive over this recommendation; surely, students would be met with a deluge of emails if each separate sexual assault incident (both acquaintance- and stranger-perpetrated) reported to campus authorities is communicated to students in a typical Crime Alert email (indeed this was a concern of officials at our institution).

STUDY 2

As we were conducting research about emails that were actively being composed and sent by the university's public safety office, we discussed our results with representatives from this department. The office was reluctant to significantly increase the number of emails sent to students and raised concerns around maintaining the confidentiality of students who were either reporting or being accused of sexual assault (as most alleged perpetrators of acquaintance assault were also students). Additionally, to address this logistical challenge, we propose communicating information

about sexual violence to students each term in a summarize, de-identified or "Digest" email format. In Study 2, we conducted an experiment to test the effects of our proposed Digest email on rape myth acceptance and institutional betrayal.

Study 2 Hypotheses

In order to investigate the usefulness of a digest crime alert email, we conducted a study comparing the effects of a digest email to a typical crime alert email on students' ratings of rape myth acceptance and institutional betrayal. We had three main hypotheses:

- 1) Students who read the typical crime alert email would endorse higher rape myth acceptance on a standard measure, with a stronger effect for male students (i.e., high rape myth endorsement following exposure to a typical alert email compared to digest email).

- 2) Students who read the typical crime alert email would endorse more institutional betrayal (i.e., high institutional betrayal following exposure to a typical alert email compared to digest email).

- 3) Students would rate the digest email as more informative, more helpful, more useful, and more relevant than the typical email. Female students would rate the email as more informative, more helpful, more useful, and more relevant than male students.

Study 2 Method

Sample

Similar to Study 1, a sample of undergraduates at a large public northwestern university was recruited via the Psychology Department Human Subjects Pool to participate in this study. Students in introductory psychology and linguistics courses participate in the Human Subjects Pool for course credit. The sample consisted of 440 students, mostly female ($n = 298$; 67.7%) and Caucasian ($n = 298$; 67.7%). Because analyses were separated by gender, participants identifying their gender as "Other" ($n = 2$) were excluded from analyses due to low cell sizes. All participants indicated their consent to participate in the study on an electronic consent form, and the university's Office of Research Compliance (Institutional Review Board) approved all study procedures.

Manipulation and Measures

Email conditions

Students were randomly assigned into one of two email conditions via a randomization feature on Qualtrics. These conditions differed only in the presentation of one of two emails (referred to in this paper as "Digest Email" and "Typical Email") to participants. Participants were instructed to "*Please read the following email and imagine receiving it as a UO student."* The two emails were roughly similar in length (typical email: 502 words, digest email: 586 words).

Typical Email. Similar to Study 1, students in the "Typical Email" condition were presented with an email that was modeled on a typical crime alert email issued by the university (see Study 1 "Typical Email").

Digest Email. Students in the "Digest Email" condition were presented with an email that described the purpose of the email. This description included "*There are times when a crime occurs and an alert is not released to the community. These include when parties know each other, when an arrest has been made, or where an investigation is pending. Towards the goal of providing accurate information about all reported crimes so that you can make informed decisions for your safety, we would like to now provide the following summary of reports made during 2017 Spring term")* followed by campus crime statistics. Safety tips in this email were focused on consent and aimed at both parties (e.g., "*Know that when a person consents to one activity -- e.g., a walk home, an invitation to a party or bar -- it does not indicate consent for sexual activities"; "Be aware that drinking alcohol or consuming other substances impairs judgment in both giving and receiving consent for sexual activities. Make extra effort to clearly communicate intentions and only act on clear consent in these situations")*. Similar to the typical email condition, this email ended with information about victim resources such as helplines and phone numbers for counseling services.

Rape myth acceptance. Participants rated their acceptance of common rape myths on the 22-item Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Participants were asked to read each item on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 4, where 1 corresponds to "Strongly Disagree," 2 corresponds to "Disagree," 3 corresponds to "Agree," and 4 corresponds to "Strongly Agree." The scale consists of four subscales that measure common rape myths: She Asked For It ("*If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand*"); He Didn't Mean To *("When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex*"); It Wasn't Really Rape (*"If a girl doesn't physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can't be considered rape"*); and She Lied ("*A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it*"). Ratings on each item were summed and averaged to create a total IRMA score, and items from each subscale were summed and averaged to create a score for each subscale. These scores ranged from 1 to 4, and higher scores indicated higher endorsement of rape myths. Psychometric analyses in prior studies indicated that the IRMA is theoretically and statistically sound (Payne et al., 1999). In this study, the total IRMA scale score (α = .94), as well the She Asked for It subscale (α = .89), the *He Didn't Mean To* subscale (α = .78), the It Wasn't Really Rape subscale (α = .91), and the She Lied subscale (α = .91), demonstrated satisfactory reliability.

Institutional betrayal. Institutional betrayal was measured using the 12-item Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ; Smith & Freyd, 2013). This study used a modified version of the original 7-item IBQ used in Study 1 (Smith & Freyd, 2013) that includes 5 additional items (Smith & Freyd, 2017). Items from the IBQ were presented to participants as potential descriptions of the university's actions and inactions surrounding the issue of sexual assault (e.g., "*The university creates an environment where sexual assault seems common or like no big deal*"). Participants were instructed to indicate how much the item described the university on a four-point Likert-type scale, where 1 corresponds to "Very False" and 4 corresponds to "Very True." Participants' responses to these items were summed and averaged to create an average institutional betrayal score ranging from 1 to 4, where higher scores indicated higher institutional betrayal. In this study, the scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability (α = .94).

Personal opinions of emails. After reading the email provided, participants were asked to report on their opinions of the email using a variety of investigator-created questions. Participants indicated their agreement with the following statements: *"The email was informative;" "The safety tips were helpful;" "The safety tips gave me an idea of how to avoid sexual assault;" "The email was relevant to me;" "I compared my experiences to those in the email;" "The email was upsetting;"* and *"The email was too long."* Participants rated each item on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 4 ("Strongly Agree"). Participants were also asked to indicate whether or not they read the actual crime alert emails released by the university (*"Do you read the crime alert emails that the university sends out about reports of sexual assault?"*), as well as if they noticed anything different about the email (*"Did you notice that this one was different than the typical crime alert emails?"*).

Study 2 Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using *R* Version 3.5.2 (R Core Team, 2018) and *R* packages *stats* (Version 3.5.2; R Core Team, 2018), *tidyverse* (Version 1.2.1; Wickham, 2017), *psych* (Version 1.8.12; Revelle, 2018). To test our hypotheses, we used ANOVA procedures to test hypothesized differences between conditions. Specific effects driving interaction effects were examined with planned contrasts examining the simple effects hypothesized. Interaction effects with no hypotheses were examined using Tukey Post-Hoc tests. No outliers were removed prior to data analysis. Missing data were excluded pairwise for analyses.

Study 2 Results

Rape Myth Acceptance

We found significant main effects of email type and gender on overall rape myth endorsement (see Table 3). Men reported significantly higher rape myth acceptance than women, and participants in the typical email condition reported significant higher rape myth acceptance than participants in the digest email condition. There was no significant interaction effect, $p = .074$ (see Figure 4).

Subscale Analyses.

We found a significant main effect of gender for all IRMA subscales; unsurprisingly, men had higher scores on each subscale than women. We found an effect of email condition for two of the four IRMA subscales (see Figure 5). For the *It Wasn't Rape* subscale, there was a significant main effect of email type, $F(1, 429) = 2.16$, $p = .009$, such that participants in the typical email condition ($M = 1.31$, $SD = 0.52$) had higher subscale scores than participants in the digest email condition ($M = 1.21$, $SD = 0.42$). For the *She Lied* subscale, there was a significant main effect of email condition, $F(1, 429) = 7.58$, $p = .006$, such that participants in the typical email condition ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.72$) had higher subscale scores than participants in the digest email condition ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.60$). There was also a significant interaction for the *She Lied* subscale, $F(1,429) = 5.50$, $p = .02$ (see Figure 6). Planned contrasts indicated that men who read the digest email had significantly higher scores than men who read the typical email, $t(430) = 2.72$, $p = .023$, but there was no significant effect of email condition for women.

Table 3. Rape Myths Endorsement Scores by Email Condition and Gender (Study 2)

Condition	Women			Men			Total		
	M	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Typical	1.43[c]	0.41	141	1.89[c]	0.54	61	1.50[a]	0.45	217
Digest	1.40[c]	0.38	146	1.70[c]	0.53	71	1.56[a]	0.50	202
Total	1.41[b]	0.40	287	1.79[b]	0.54	132	1.53	0.48	419

ANOVA

Condition	[a]$F(1, 415) = 5.03$, $p = .025$, $\eta^2_p = .01$
Gender	[b]$F(1, 415) = 65.49$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .13$
Interaction	[c]$F(1, 415) = 3.21$, $p = .074$, $\eta^2_p = .01$

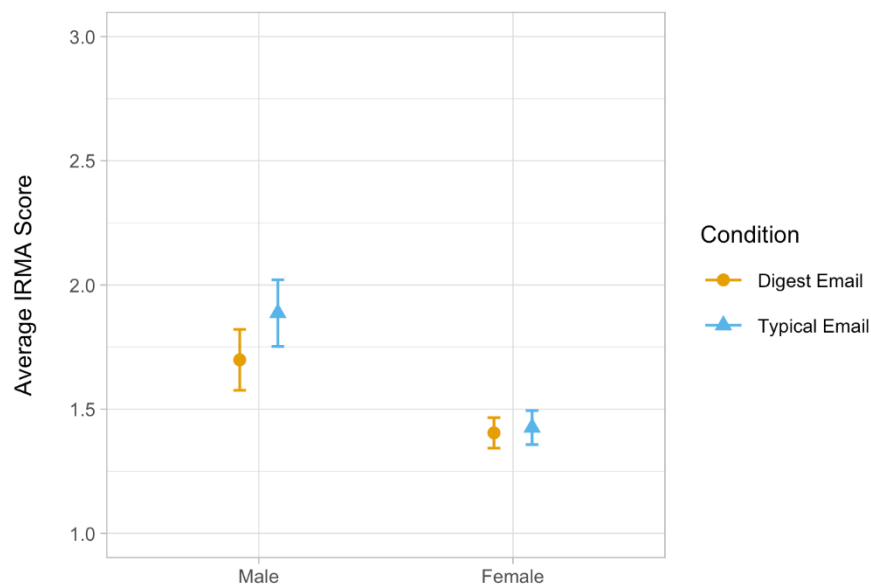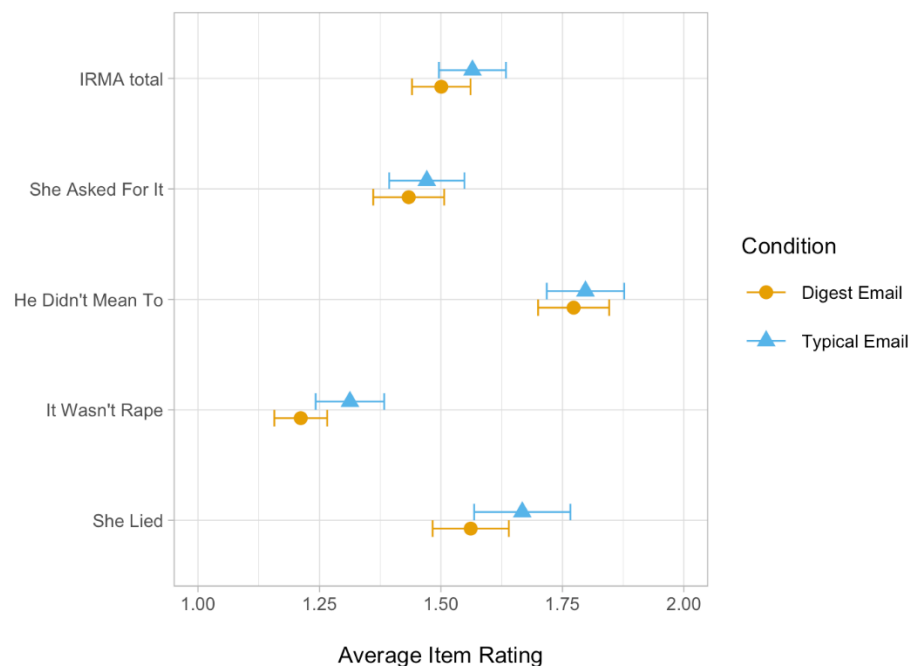*Note*: η^2_p = partial Eta-squared

Figure 4. Average rape myth acceptance scale scores for email conditions with 95% confidence intervals. Figure created using *R* packages *ggplot2* (Version 3.1.0; Wickham, 2016) and *color-blindr* (Version 0.1.0; McWhite & Wilke, 2019).

Figure 5. Average rape myth acceptance scale scores for email conditions with 95% confidence intervals. Figure created using R packages ggplot2 (Version 3.1.0; Wickham, 2016) and color-blindr (Version 0.1.0; McWhite & Wilke, 2019).

Figure 6. **Average *"She Lied"* subscale scores for email conditions by gender with 95% confidence intervals. Figure created using *R* packages *ggplot2* (Version 3.1.0; Wickham, 2016) and *colorblindr* (Version 0.1.0; McWhite & Wilke, 2019)**
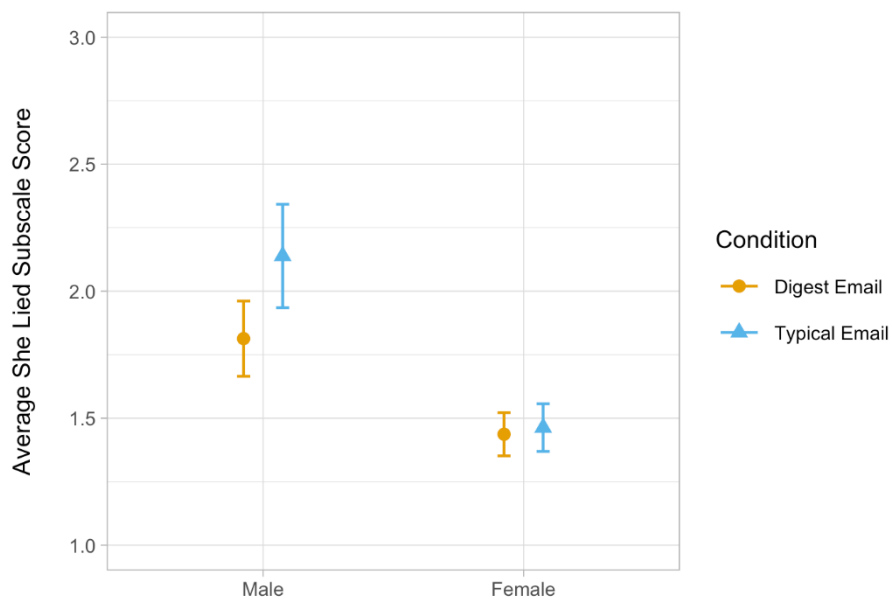
Personal Opinions of Emails

Among participants, 56.5% of men (n = 78) and 70.8% of women (n = 211) indicated that they typically read the crime reports that the university sends. Of participants in the typical email condition, 26.2% of men (n = 22) and 33.1% of women (n = 48) indicated that they thought this email was different than typical crime emails. Of participants in the digest condition, 51.3% of men (n = 39) and 56.2% of women (n = 86) indicated that they thought this email was different than typical crime emails.

Table 4. Institutional Betrayal Scores by Email Condition and Gender (Study 2)

Condition	Women			Men			Total		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Typical	1.50[c]	0.52	144	1.66[c]	0.68	61	1.50[a]	0.45	205
Digest	1.57[c]	0.62	152	1.52[c]	0.61	74	1.56[a]	0.50	226
Total	1.41[b]	0.40	296	1.79[b]	0.54	135	1.55	0.60	431

	ANOVA
Condition	[a]F(1, 427) = 1.90, p = .168, η^2_p = .001
Gender	[b]F(1, 427) = 0.36, p = .551, η^2_p = .001
Interaction	[c]F(1, 427) = 2.92, p = .088, η^2_p = .01

Note: η^2_p = partial Eta-squared

Email was informative

There was a significant main effect of gender for ratings of how informative the email was, F(1, 431) = 4.51, p = .034; women (M = 3.25, SD = 0.57) rated the emails overall as more informative than men (M = 3.12, SD = 0.62). There was no significant main effect of email condition, and there was no significant interaction.

Safety tips were helpful

There was a significant main effect of gender for ratings of how informative the email was, F(1, 430) = 7.14, p = .008; women (M = 3.21, SD = 0.55) rated the emails overall as more helpful than men (M = 3.07, SD = 0.57). There was also a significant interaction effect, F(1, 430) = 5.48, p = .020 (see Figure 7a). Because we did not have hypotheses regarding an interaction effect, we conducted pairwise Tukey Post-Hoc tests (with adjusted significance levels). Women who read the typical email (M = 3.32, SD = 0.56) rated the email as significantly more helpful than men who read the digest email (M = 3.09, SD = 0.49; p = .020), men who read the typical email (M = 3.03, SD

= 0.66; p = .004), and women who read the digest email (M = 3.11; SD = 0.52; p = .007).
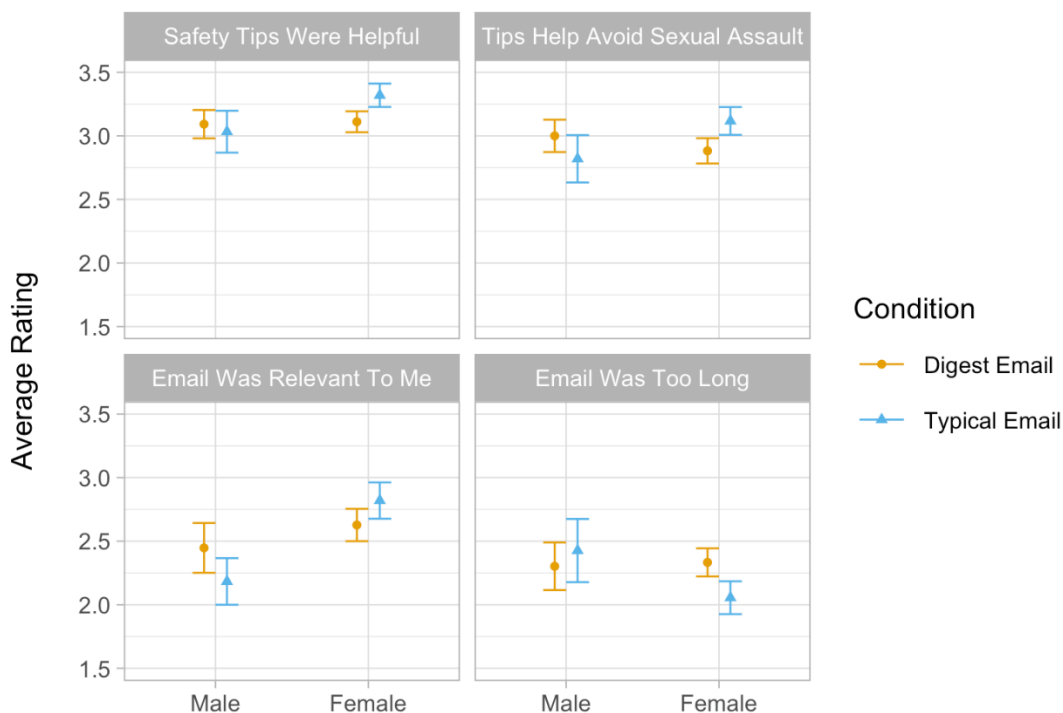

Figure 7a-d. **Average ratings for email opinions by email type and gender with 95% confidence intervals. Figure created using *R* packages *ggplot2* (Version 3.1.0; Wickham, 2016) and *colorblindr* (Version 0.1.0; McWhite & Wilke, 2019).**

Safety tips gave me an idea of how to avoid sexual assault

There were no significant main effects of gender and email type on ratings of safety tips. However, there was a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 431)$ = 9.50, p = .002 (see Figure 7b). Pairwise Tukey Post-Hoc tests (with adjusted significance levels) were conducted. Because we did not have hypotheses regarding an interaction effect, we conducted pairwise Tukey Post-Hoc tests (with adjusted significance levels). Women who read the typical email (M = 3.12, SD = 0.67) rated the email higher than men who read the typical email (M = 2.82, SD = 0.74; p = .010), and women who read the digest email (M = 2.88; SD = 0.63; p = .015).

Email was relevant to me

There was a significant main effect of gender for ratings of how informative the email was, $F(1, 429)$ = 22.38, p < .001; women (M = 2.72, SD = 0.84) rated the emails overall as more relevant than men (M = 2.33, SD = 0.82). There was also a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 429)$ = 6.99, p = .009 (see Figure 7c). Pairwise Tukey Post-Hoc tests (with adjusted significance levels) were conducted. Women who read the typical email (M = 2.82, SD = 0.87) rated the email as more relevant than men who read the typical email (M = 2.18, SD = 0.72; p < .001), and men who read the digest email (M

= 2.45; *SD* = 0.87; *p* = .009). Men who read the typical email rated the email less relevant than women who read the digest email (*M* = 2.63, *SD* = 0.80; *p* < .001, *p* = .003).

Compared my experiences to those in the email

There was a significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 429) = 10.65$, *p* = .001; women (*M* = 2.43, *SD* = 0.85) compared their experiences to the email more than men (*M* = 2.14, *SD* = 0.91). There was no significant main effect of email condition, and there was no significant interaction.

The email was upsetting

There was a significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 429) = 10.65$, *p* = .001; women (*M* = 2.43, *SD* = 0.79) rated the emails overall more upsetting than men (*M* = 2.17, *SD* = 0.92). There was no significant main effect of email condition, and there was no significant interaction.

The email was too long

There was a significant main effect of gender for ratings of how long the email was, $F(1, 430) = 4.21$, *p* = .040; men (*M* = 2.36, *SD* = 0.91) rated the emails as longer than women (*M* = 2.20, *SD* = 0.76). There was also a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 430) = 5.86$, *p* = .016, *p* = .009 (see Figure 7d). Pairwise Tukey Post-Hoc tests were conducted. Women who read the typical email (*M* = 2.06, *SD* = 0.79) rated the email less long than men who read the typical email (*M* = 2.43, *SD* = 0.99; *p* = .015), and women who read the digest email (*M* = 2.33; *SD* = 0.70; *p* = .013).

Study 2 Discussion

In Study 2, we hypothesized that students who read the digest email alert would report lower rape myth acceptance than students who rated the typical crime email alert. We also hypothesized that students who read the digest email alert would report lower institutional betrayal than students who rated the typical crime email alert. Third, we hypothesized that female participants and participants who read the digest email would report the email as subjectively more helpful and relevant than male participants and participants who read the typical email, respectively.

We found a significant effect of email condition on rape myth acceptance, with a stronger effect for men on certain subscales, as we predicted. In particular, we found that the digest email attenuated agreement with *It Wasn't Rape* and *She Lied* myths. Contrary to our hypothesis, we did not find any effect of email condition on institutional betrayal. Lastly, we found that there was a main effect of gender on student opinions of the email. Women generally found the emails to be more helpful, informative, and relevant than men; women also rated the emails as more upsetting than men, likely because women are at a disproportionate risk for sexual violence.

Unexpectedly, we found several significant interaction effects when analyzing student opinions of emails. Female participants found the typical email to be generally more helpful and relevant to them, whereas male participants found the digest email to be generally more helpful and relevant to them. There are multiple potential explanations for this pattern of results. Although women continually receive messages warning them about stereotypical rape scenarios consistent with rape myths, they are likely to perceive safety tips to prevent such a crime as helpful, even if this perception is not based in the reality of what is actually helpful in preventing sexual violence.

However, the fact that men typically found the digest email to be more helpful and relevant offers hope; the digest email as a means through which to engage men in the discussion of sexual violence and provide them with accurate information. Perhaps the most straightforward interpretation may be that the safety tips in the typical email condition were about things that a target of sexual assault (more often a woman) could do to stay safe, whereas the safety tips in the digest condition were about how to avoid committing sexual violence (more often perpetrated by men).

Again, it should be noted that these results should be interpreted in light of this study's specific limitations. Although this study expanded upon Study 1 by testing a novel digest email and incorporating a standard measure of rape myth acceptance, we did not include a measure of trauma history and were unable to replicate the effect of Study 1. Furthermore, the digest email in this study differed from typical Clery Act emails in that it described a statistical summary of all reported incidents of sexual violence, in addition to offering non-victim-blaming safety tips targeting both men and women. Thus, we are unable to draw any unique conclusions about these individual components. In addition, many of our measures of email opinions were based on single items, which should be expanded upon and revised in future investigations. Finally, similar to the overarching limitations in Study 1, the observed effect sizes were small, and we emphasize the need for replication, particularly with pre-registered confirmatory hypotheses.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The Clery Act was written with the intent of decreasing sexual assault on college campuses. The timely warning emails are an essential part of the Clery Act, as they aim to provide students with information regarding recent crimes as well as tips on how to avoid being a victim. However, the results of this study indicate that timely warning emails released by the universities are falling short of their intended purpose. The typical emails, usually describing violent stranger-perpetrated assaults, appear to leave rape myths unchallenged and perpetuate themes of institutional betrayal. While it is unlikely the case that these emails are inciting sexual violence, research has established that rape myth endorsement is related to rape proclivity (i.e. their tendency to behave in same way as perpetrator of sexual assault; Boener, Siebler, & Schmechler, 2006). At the very least, it appears that releasing the emails solely in conjunction with stranger-perpetrated crimes is neglecting a potential educational opportunity, as well as potentially causing harm to the subset of students with a prior history of interpersonal trauma.

Educational institutions have an inherent responsibility and a vested interest to provide their students with an environment conducive to learning. While the mission of the Clery Act is to uphold such an environment, it appears that the typical means of complying with this act may be having a very different impact than intended. As part of Study 2, we proffered an alternative form of communication in the form of a digest email that is associated with lower levels of rape myth acceptance, and that male participants found particularly relevant and useful. Although it was not associated with lower ratings of institutional betrayal as we had predicted, it is of note that there was no difference in institutional betrayal between the digest condition (which by its nature described many sexual assaults) compared to the email that described just one sexual assault. We point this out to dispel fears sometimes expressed by administrators that publicly disclosing the occurrence of all types of sexual violence occurring on campus will negatively impact students' perceptions of the school. We hope that our research will be used to make much needed changes in timely warning

email alerts as we should use higher education and institutional research to guide institutional policies and strategies (Hossler, Kuh, & Olsen, 2001).

Limitations and Future Directions

In addition to the study-specific limitations discussed above, both studies share a significant limitation that should be noted – a largely Caucasian, middle class sample of college students from a northwestern University. Although college students are the target population who are consuming these emails, generalizability would be increased by examining the impact of Clery Act emails across a variety of campus types. Another limitation may have been low ecological validity in that students were aware the emails presented were not about actual crimes and thus their resulting self-reports (particularly of their emotional response) and behavior may not reflect real life. Despite other limitations, including small effect sizes and constrained measures, we hope that this study can facilitate further discussion about campus email alerts and serve as a catalyst for additional research. This is the first study of our knowledge to study the content of university crime emails, and a suggested future direction may be implementing changes to the actual Clery Act emails released by universities and measuring their impact in real life.

CONCLUSION

This paper described an examination of the hidden impact of a federally mandated mechanism of communication about sexual violence that occurs between educational institutions and students. By viewing this practice through the lens of institutional betrayal, both the potential for harm and healing change are revealed. The Clery Act was established to push universities to examine the crimes committed on their watch and to share this information with the community, with the intended purpose of increased safety through increased awareness. Over time, it appears that many universities have instead resorted to "mere compliance" with this act and release crime alert emails only when it is absolutely clear they are mandated. It is our hope that this research will inspire researchers, educators, and administrators to examine their own compliance with the *spirit* of the Clery Act towards the goal of truly cultivating safe university environments where students are fully informed and thus empowered.

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Jennifer J. Freyd, PhD, is the Founder of the Center for Institutional Courage, Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon, Visiting Scholar at Stanford Medical School, and Faculty Affiliate of the VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab at Stanford University. She is also a Member of the Advisory Committee, 2019-2023, for the Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education, National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, and leader of the Program on Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Sexual Violence at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, 2019-20, where she was a Fellow, 1989-90 and 2018-19. Freyd is a widely published scholar known for her theories of betrayal trauma, institutional betrayal, institutional courage, and DARVO.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

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