

ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: HOW YOUNG WOMEN MAKE MEANING OF SEXUAL
ASSAULT CAMPAIGNS: USING A CULTURAL STUDIES
APPROACH TO (RE)DEFINE PERCEPTIONS OF RISK,
HEALTH, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

Rowena Lyn Briones, Master of Arts, 2010

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The purpose of this study was to understand how women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds make meaning of sexual assault communication. In this exploratory study, one component of the circuit of culture – consumption – was examined using the cultural studies approach to investigate how women perceived the various cultural codes, symbols, languages, and images associated with sexual assault. The study used qualitative focus groups and one-on-one interviews with African American, Hispanic, Asian American and white women from a large university. Findings revealed that women associate themselves with sexual assault based on their gender and age. In addition, women are more receptive to thematic messages that hold a personal relevance to them. This study expanded the use of cultural theory in public relations as well as supported a proposed theory of women's health communication. Practical implications include various innovations communicators can use to improve their proficiency in crafting culturally competent messages.

HOW YOUNG WOMEN MAKE MEANING OF SEXUAL ASSAULT CAMPAIGNS:
USING A CULTURAL STUDIES APPROACH TO (RE)DEFINE
PERCEPTIONS OF RISK, HEALTH, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2010

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2010

DEDICATION

To survivors who are still finding the strength to be heard

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank...

...first and foremost, **Dr. Linda Aldoory**, for your unending guidance, advice, support and faith in my work. Even when you have given me challenges, you have always stood by my side and remained my number one advocate. Thank you so much for being an amazing teacher and mentor the past two years.

...**Dr. Elizabeth Toth**, for welcoming me into your Department with open arms and pushing me to always deliver my best work. Your dedication and commitment to scholarship is infectious, and without your guidance I probably would have never fell in love with academia. Thank you for serving as the role model I will forever aspire to be.

...**Dr. Monique Turner**, thank you for all of the opportunities you have given me in terms of exploring health and risk communication. I have enjoyed working with you and have learned so much through your leadership and guidance.

...**Dr. Brooke Fisher Liu**, even before you were an official faculty member here you took me under your wing and did not disappoint in terms of mentorship and advice. Whether it is research, publishing, teaching, or even life lessons, I have learned so much from you and could not thank you enough.

...my parents, **Mom and Dad** – who knew that pushing me to be exceptional would actually pay off? Thank you so much for your faith in me and for allowing me to pursue my love of learning. The thought of making you proud gives me the confidence I need to shoot for the stars and go for my dreams.

...**Mama Lynn**, for always being there for me whenever I needed to vent, seek advice, or share some good news. You are like a second mother to me and I could not feel any

luckier to have you as a part of my life. I look forward to sharing future research with you – you’ll probably be the only one who will read every word!

...my sister, **Maria**, for your constant encouragement and support, even when the odds were against me. You’re probably the only person I could share my nerdy tendencies with, and not be judged. ☺ Thank you for being such a great sister and friend.

...my dearest friends at Maryland, **Jenn Bly**, **Brian Keenan**, **Abbey Levenshus**, **Ryan Merkel**, and **Janna Raudenbush**. Graduate school would seriously have no meaning if it didn’t have the amazing memories we have shared together. Whether it was getting through a nervous breakdown, going to social events, or talking for hours, I could not thank you all enough for making my time here so worthwhile.

...my best friends from home, **Peter Efstradiates**, **Danielle Catona**, and **Brian Keefe**. Though we have all moved on to pursue advanced degrees at all different universities, it is so comforting to know that I can turn to you all if I ever need to take a break from work and just share a laugh over the phone. You have all been so supportive of everything I do from the get-go, and for that I cannot thank you enough.

...and **Michael Lynn**, my One. Every day you give me unconditional love and support and help me maintain my sanity (which can be a hard task sometimes!). You make me want to be the best person I can be and for that I cannot thank you enough. Thank you for being an amazing partner and friend, and for allowing me to be a part of your journey.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

According to the National Violence Against Women Survey conducted by the United States Department of Justice (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), one in six women reported experiencing an attempted rape or a completed rape sometime in their lives. Sexual assault is an issue that affects all women, regardless of race or ethnic background. Even though about 80 percent of victims are white in the United States, minorities are somewhat more likely to be victimized (RAINN, 2008). The National Institute of Justice also found that Asian/Pacific Islander women were the least likely group to report victimization, and that Hispanic women were less likely to report rape compared to non-Hispanic women (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). However, due to small sample sizes, much more research needs to be conducted, as these findings may not be generalizable to the entire population.

The rate of sexual assault increases for young women entering college, as 20 to 25 percent of young women in the United States reported experiencing rape during their college career (Fisher et al., 2000). Contrary to the notion that complete strangers are committing these rapes, 80 to 90 percent of these crimes are committed by someone the victim knew or came in personal contact with (Karjane et al., 2002). However, due to feelings of shame, guilt, fear, or confusion as to whether or not they were really raped, many young women do not come forward to report the rape, as fewer than five percent of completed and attempted rapes are brought to the attention of campus authorities or law enforcement (Fisher et al., 2003). This underreporting not only causes many communities to underestimate the number of resources needed for victims, but also increases the medical risk for those victims who choose to remain silent. Victims who fail to tell

someone about their assault could increase the chance of medical complications with an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection.

In spite of the fact that rape occurs frequently on college campuses, many schools have not taken the proper procedures to train staff and educate students on the severity of sexual assault. Overall, only about four in 10 schools offer any sexual assault training, and of these schools, only about half train faculty and staff on proper response policies and procedures (USDOJ, 2005). In terms of education, less than one-third of the schools that offer general education programs include acquaintance rape prevention; less than half of four-year public universities are included in this finding (USDOJ, 2005). The most widely used resource on campuses for victims is mental health counseling, but much more needs to be done to support victims and educate students.

As sexual assault continues to pervade college campuses and surrounding communities, effective communication campaigns could potentially spread awareness and encourage women to take the right precautions in order to prevent being assaulted, as well as motivate women to report incidents should they be assaulted. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has instituted a public health model where they work on preventing violence such as sexual assault based on four steps: define the problem, identify risk and protective factors, develop and test prevention strategies, and ensure widespread adoption (CDC, 2004). Scholars can help develop theoretical frameworks in accordance with this model that can help governmental agencies and other organizations understand the logic behind campaigns and whether they are effective.

As with any health campaign, it is important for communicators to determine how audiences make meaning of the media and dialogue surrounding the issue at-hand. Sexual

assault is no different; in order for organizations to speak to publics, communicators need to conduct formative research and determine young women's involvement with sexual assault. Though there have been several studies evaluating the effectiveness of sexual assault intervention programs (e.g., Breitenbecher & Gidycz, 1998; Breitenbecher & Scarce, 2001; Konradi & DeBruin, 2003; Morrison, 2005; Orchowski et al., 2008), there has been little research on young women's perceptions of sexual assault media and messaging.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how women make meaning of sexual assault campaigns and communication. There are two types of campaigns associated with this issue: campaigns for victims focused on providing resources for recovery and healing; and campaigns for general audiences focused on increasing awareness about the issue. For this study, the campaigns that were used focused on the latter, with groups of women within general audiences being the focal point in terms of who was interviewed. These women varied according to anti-sexual assault activity, from women who are active volunteers at sexual assault organizations, to undergraduate students at a large public university who have a low perceived risk. Using a cultural studies approach, I examined women's meaning making of sexual assault communication materials to investigate (a) if and how women make meaning of sexual assault in general; (b) how women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (i.e., African American, Hispanic, Asian American¹) may or may not make different meanings about sexual assault; (c) if and how

¹ Being very sensitive to how individuals construct their racial/ethnic identity, I was unsure on how to accurately categorize each group of women. In the literature review I used the term that was used by that particular author of the study. For this thesis study, I will use the terms 'African American,' 'Hispanic,' 'Asian American,' and 'White' as those are the terms that are most readily used in sexual assault literature.

women make meaning of the sexual assault campaign environment; and (d) the reasons why women make meaning of sexual assault messages. For purposes of disclosure I feel it is important to make it known that I identify myself as a feminist researcher and because of this I take a strong political stance towards advocating for women. Thus, this unique perspective could filter through this study, in terms of my findings and conclusions.

Study's Significance

This study contributes to the field of public relations by extending cultural theory and offering an alternative approach to examine diverse women publics in a health and risk communication context. The findings also support a theory of women's health communication (Aldoory, 2001) by confirming its basic propositions through the perspectives and experiences of young women from different backgrounds. My hope is that this thesis will help provide information to non-profit organizations, governmental agencies, and foundations on how they can better reach young women when creating campaigns in an effort to reduce sexual violence. By understanding how women perceive sexual assault, organizations can see this issue from their perspective and create more salient messages. I also hope that my research will empower young women to take the proper actions in order to be safe from any personal harm, and to be open and proud of their bodies and of sex. By creating this dialogue about what we can do to increase awareness and decrease sexual assault, there will be more of an understanding between women and communicators that can ultimately benefit everyone and society as a whole.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis first presents a literature review of (a) the cultural studies approach and past cultural studies using public relations and women audiences; (b) meaning-making studies on sexual assault texts and messages; and (c) sexual assault intervention campaigns. The research questions, along with the methodology, are then discussed along with a description of the sample and data analysis procedures. Finally, the results, theoretical and practical implications, limitations of the study and directions for future research conclude this paper.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The following chapter explicates literature from various disciplines that expound and inform this study. First, I will review literature from the cultural studies approach to conceptualize the process of meaning making, and its importance in shaping various identities and social practices in society. Under this section I will also review past studies that have explored how the field of public relations has used the circuit of culture and the cultural approach, as well as how women make meaning of media messages. Secondly, I will review literature that has examined the meaning making of different sexual assault texts, media, and messages, and what findings were derived from those materials. Lastly, I will review sexual assault communication to understand the effectiveness of various interventions aimed towards educating various audiences.

Cultural Studies Approach

Although the concept of culture has been defined in various ways, culture in the social and human sciences refers to the shared understandings, meanings and values among members of society (du Gay et al., 1997). Therefore, two people who belong to the same culture would interpret and make sense of the world in “broadly similar ways” (Hall, 1997, p. 2), sharing the same cultural codes “which govern the relationships of translation between them” (Hall, 1997, p. 21). However, culture can also be the result of opposing forces, as cultural studies can sometimes be seen as producing “significant social, political, and cultural disruption, dislocation, and struggle” (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992, p. 5).

In terms of cultural studies, there has been some debate as to what is its true definition. According to Grossberg (1988):

Cultural Studies is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways discourses are produced within, inserted into and operate in the relations between people's everyday lives and the structures of the social formation so as to reproduce, resist and transform the existing structures of power (p. 22).

Nonetheless, although the cultural studies approach has never been definitively defined, it "has never been one thing" (Hall, 1990, p. 11) yet it "cannot be just anything" (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992, p. 8). Rejecting the notion of culture as purely high culture, scholars of cultural studies explore the "entire range of a society's arts, beliefs, institutions, and communicative practices" (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992, p. 4).

The process of *representation* operationalizes the concept of culture, as people produce and exchange meaning through the use of various communication tools (Hall, 1997, p. 15). According to Hall, there are two systems of representation: one in which individuals internalize conceptual maps that are compared to the outside world; and the second calling for the construction of relationships between these conceptual maps and various signs. The signs that are used constitute a language, a meaning-producing tool that enables meaningful communication with others. These languages, in turn, are translatable to our conceptual maps through the use of codes, which work to stabilize meaning and create a fixed culture. Hall argues that although the fluid nature of culture could never be truly fixed, there needs to be some level of cultural relativism amongst differing cultures in order to accurately reference the world and allow for cooperation and harmony.

One well-known model in the cultural studies approach is the *circuit of culture* model (du Gay et al., 1997). The model comprises five processes, those of representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. Although the processes are separate and distinct within the circuit, “in the real world they continually overlap and intertwine in complex and contingent ways” (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 4). This results in variations in which the circuit is utilized and completed.

In this particular approach the notion of cultural practices is important as it allows individuals to assign frameworks of interpretation to various people, objects, and events. By giving these cultural artifacts meaning, there is a *representation* of what value we associate with those items and what symbolism it offers us in everyday life. Through these meanings, we then construct an *identity* that identifies how the artifact will be perceived by those in our culture and in other cultures. Meaning is then encoded onto the cultural artifact by way of codes and language in a process known as *production*, then decoded by audiences to be incorporated into social practices by way of *consumption*². The artifact is then finally *regulated* by set rules, norms and conventions that offer the culture a formal structure and shape.

One recurring theme that has been often explored in the cultural studies approach is difference, otherwise known as “the spectacle of the ‘Other’” (Hall, 1997, p. 225). This has become a popular topic in representation because it seeks to understand how to best represent people, places, and objects that are different from the dominant culture’s status quo. Although studies may focus on one aspect of difference, there also exists a accumulation of different dimensions where “one sort of difference seems to attract

² These processes of encoding and decoding are particularly vital components of the circuit. Although they may be “relatively autonomous in relation to the communicative process as a whole, [they] are *determinate* moments” of the process (Hall, 1993, p. 91, italics in original).

others – adding up to a ‘spectacle’ of otherness” (Hall, 1997, p. 231-232). This intertextuality of meanings creates ambivalances and complexities within the culture that many times cannot be contested. In spite of this, cultural studies aims to “interrogate the cultural practices – within both academic and everyday life – that create, sustain, or suppress [these] contestations over inclusion and exclusion” (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992, p. 12).

Often the representation of difference includes mostly “the margins versus the center,” as cultural studies has a “long history of commitment to disempowered populations” (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992, p. 12). By being deeply concerned with relations of power, cultural studies “may be involved in the surveillance of the subjectivities of subordinated groups, or in struggles to represent them more adequately than before” (Johnson, 1986, p. 53). Often those that contribute to the culture of difference “desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy, and individuality” (West, 1993, p. 204). Thus, those that study these marginalized populations usually aim to take action and create social change.

It is necessary to study difference in order to completely understand the constant struggle over identity and meaning that exists within a culture. Being open to otherness allows individuals to truly delve within the nuances of a particular culture and explore that culture’s specific spectrum of meaning making. In this study, I will utilize Hall’s (1997) strategy of coping with difference by being open to varying perspectives within the process of consumption. I plan to work with the “shifting, unstable character of

meaning” (p. 274) within the context of sexual assault in this particular study. By interviewing women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, I will discover the complexities within these varying cultures on the likely influence of how these women communicate and make meaning of the object studied.

The cultural approach and public relations. Critics of public relations research have claimed that scholars focus solely on the functional level, emphasizing the practice of public relations as an instrument and ignoring alternative perspectives (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Taylor & Botan, 2006). These critics called for theories that make aware the dynamic, discursive set of meanings that take place in the practice of public relations on a daily basis.

One theoretical framework that could steer scholars away from this dominant, normative paradigm is the use of the cultural approach and the circuit of culture. In a special issue of the *Journal of Public Relations Research* titled “Identity, Difference, and Power,” Curtin and Gaither (2005) answered this call for a new direction and proposed that the circuit of culture could be used as “a basis for developing public relations theory that informs the wide variety of public relations practices found globally” (p. 91). In their critical essay, Curtin and Gaither stated that the circuit of culture recognizes the critical issues of identity, difference, and power, and calls for public relations practitioners to reject their technical roles and become “cultural intermediaries.” In this role, practitioners serve as cultural agents and work to create meaning within the moments of production and consumption.

Curtin and Gaither conducted two studies following their critical piece using aspects of the circuit of culture as well as their cultural-economic model of international

public relations (Curtin & Gaither, 2007), a critical-cultural approach to international public relations theory. In the first case study, Curtin and Gaither (2006) focused on the formation of identity through the example of the World Health Organization's smallpox eradication campaign. They found that the producers and consumers involved with the campaign created, maintained, and modified a variety of different identities that gave the smallpox campaign a series of fractured meanings. In particular, they found that the United States worked to differentiate itself completely from both developing and developed nations through a reinforcement of identity and authority. In spite of these findings, however, Curtin and Gaither realize that identity formation is a constantly evolving process that is only one moment within the entire circuit, and that its relationship with the other components of the model are what "gives rise to the meaning of a cultural event, process, or artifact" (p. 83).

The second case study explored a crisis involving Arla Foods, a Danish company that damaged its relationship with the Middle East when it refused to take responsibility for a series of cartoons of Muhammad published in a Danish newspaper. Gaither and Curtin (2008) used Hofstede's (2001) cultural indices and their cultural-economic model to examine the crisis through a cultural discourse analysis of Arla communication materials and its subsequent news coverage. They found that the Danish and Muslim communities reacted very differently to the situation, causing many of Arla's communication campaigns to be ineffective. Though Hofstede's factors were helpful in addressing *why* this was happening, they are not helpful in helping determine *how* these cultural differences can be resolved. Thus, Gaither and Curtin posit that their cultural-economic model can be useful in observing and exploring the many identity formations

and complexities that occur within the international practice of public relations. Though multinational organizations such as Arla need to maintain their corporate identity, they must also determine a way to incorporate their identity into the lives of local consumers.

In addition to Curtin and Gaither's work, other studies have been conducted in the public relations field utilizing the circuit of culture and the cultural studies approach. A study by Han and Zhang (2009) analyzed the role online activists played in the shutdown of a Starbucks café inside the Forbidden City of Beijing, China. Using the circuit of culture as a theoretical framework, Han and Zhang explored how this particular case addressed each moment with the circuit: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. They found that publics are not necessarily static agents and that they play a role in co-creating the meaning surrounding a particular artifact or event. They also argued that public relations practitioners should take a more holistic approach to their work to determine all of the agents involved with the various situations they face, especially in times of crisis.

Another study by Terry (2005) utilized the circuit of culture to explore the role of public relations in Kazakhstan, a former Soviet Union republic in Central Asia. She found that the country was behind in terms of progress in the field of public relations and that practitioners essentially were products of the government and the elite. By looking at all of the moments within the circuit, Terry was able to explore how the country made meaning of the public relations profession as well as made evident what changes needed to be made to embrace difference and understanding.

Aside from using the circuit of culture as a theoretical framework, there have been studies in the public relations literature that utilize the cultural studies approach as a

whole. Focusing on the Avon Breast Cancer 3-Day Walk as a specific case, Edwards and Kreshel (2008) used a variety of data collection methods to explore how publics made meaning of Avon's corporate communication as a cause-related marketing event.

Through participant observation, in-depth interviews, journal entries, and follow-up focus groups, they found that audience members construct their realities, form identities, and create a sense of community through usage of Avon's corporate communication messages. Because Avon's goals and values match those of their public, Edwards and Kreshel found that everyone held the same frame of reference and reality, leading to strong relationships and resulting in a successful event that benefits all players involved.

In another study, Moffitt (1994) argues for an alternate conceptualization of corporate image using a cultural studies approach. Through an ethnographic method, she explores in her observations and interviews how publics make meaning of corporations using State Farm Insurance as a case example. Moffitt found that corporate image is not produced by the organization or audience members alone; instead the formation of image constitutes a complex process in which multiple meanings are discovered. Finally, Pal and Dutta (2007) offer a culture-centered approach to public relations that "critically theorizes issues of power, ideology and economy by engaging voices at the margins" (p. 4). Based on subaltern studies, this particular approach focuses on disenfranchised populations in an attempt to reverse the status quo and share the stories of the marginalized, a group that has typically been ignored in the public relations field.

Cultural studies of women. There have been a number of studies that have explored how women make meaning of various communication materials and media, and how their perspectives set them apart from men in society (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003;

Aldoory, 2001; Bobo, 1995; Grodin, 1991; Martin, 1992; McKinley, 1997; Press & Cole, 1999; Radway, 1984; Uy-Tioco, 2007). Radway's (1984) study explored why reading romance novels was not only feasible and enjoyable but also necessary to women's culture, and how the meaning derived from the act of reading was different from the text of the novel itself. Radway conducted both an ethnographic examination of a community along with 60 hours of in-depth interviews and discovered a strict culture with set rules. She found that readers saw opposing forces in the act of reading romance novels, being both combative (in that they reject their caretaker role) and compensatory (in that it allows them to focus on themselves and their personal needs). In a similar study, Grodin (1991) interviewed 33 women to examine how self-help books are enacted in the meaning making of their everyday lives. Her data revealed that these women turn to self-help books as a resource "when rules of conduct are unclear and when opportunities to learn about solving personal problems are not easily accessible through everyday interpersonal interactions" (p. 409). Selecting self-help books also gave these women a sense of confidence and autonomy in their lives that allowed them to make their own choices, yet offered them an optional outlet with which they can share in a community of other readers.

Using feminist media studies and the circuit of culture (du Gay et al., 1997) as her conceptual framework, Acosta-Alzuru (2003) conducted a textual analysis of a popular Venezuelan soap opera along with several in-depth interviews to determine how feminism was represented and perceived. Although the show denies a patriarchal culture that condones the objectification of women, the writer of the show, along with Venezuelan society, rejects the term feminism because it is perceived as a "man hating,

aggressive, emotional, out-of-place discourse” (p. 288). Arguing that the communication process is never neutral, Acosta-Alzuru contends that all producers and consumers are “caught in a ritual process of establishing shared meanings, which is embedded in culture and power differentials” (p. 288). Thus Acosta-Alzuru’s study attempts to merge feminism and cultural studies by investigating the “role of culture in the reproduction of gender inequality” and patriarchal power (Franklin, Lury, & Stacey, 1991, p. 185)

McKinley (1997) conducted another study on media consumption by exploring how the hit television series *Beverly Hills, 90210* accomplishes identity work for female viewers. Through a snowball sampling method of acquaintances and classmates, McKinley discovered that female audiences construct two types of identity based on the show: a dominant identity of beauty defined by relationships with men; and a different, alternate identity consisting of rebelliousness, independence and control. However, no matter which female identity these young women chose, “all viewers enjoyed reifying notions of identity with which they already were comfortable” (p. 234), allowing the values that were portrayed by the show to gain “additional meaning” (p. 237).

Exploring women’s involvement in their meaning making of health messages, Aldoory (2001) used Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory to analyze data from five focus groups and 10 in-depth interviews with women from various ethnic, class, educational and sexual backgrounds. She found that several mitigating factors influenced involvement, including a consciousness of everyday life and personal health, self-identity, and source preference. One interesting finding from Aldoory’s study was the need for messages to have personal relevance in order for women to feel any sort of connection to those messages and to consider them effective. By viewing the messages as

part of their everyday lives, women can have control over their social identities, social relations, and their overall social existence (Fiske, 1992).

Press and Cole (1999) also utilized the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine how women perceive media representations of abortion. It is through the use of this approach that Press and Cole found the importance of social class and how “women’s classed identities – both implicitly and explicitly articulated – are engaged by the abortion issue and its treatment in entertainment television” (p. 9). Press and Cole also found that ideology (pro-life vs. pro-choice) played a role in perceptions of the media’s portrayal of abortion, though both sides felt that the issue was “primarily concerned with an individualistically based and economically driven version of choice” (p. 131).

Martin (1992) conducted a cultural study comparing medical science with women’s perceptions of their bodies and health. She interviewed women at various stages of life and asked them about their major physical events (such as menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause) to “convey a sense of underlying cultural assumptions about these events...a sense of their implicit meaning” (p. 12). Martin assumes that although women’s physical and hormonal makeup as portrayed in medical culture is unyielding, there are in fact underlying cultural differences in individual women’s bodies that are essential to understanding women’s everyday experiences. Through these interviews and textual analysis of various medical texts, Martin discovered that the “consequences of the medical lexicon about women’s bodies” influence how women perceive medicine’s view of their bodies, along with how they perceive their own bodies.

There are few cultural studies that focus primarily on minority populations in terms of their identification and consumption. In a study exploring how Black women respond to and use different popular cultural forms, Bobo (1995) used a triangulated data approach by conducting a textual analysis of three popular Black texts and then conducting interviews with a group of Black women. Through these methods, Bobo discovered that Black women readers oppose interacting with mainstream media that has historically degraded them. By counteracting the negative effects of these media, these women have become more actively involved in the creation of meaning around these cultural forms. These findings go along with the Black feminist epistemology in that there is a “resistance to, or transformation of, relatively fixed structures of communication and meaning” (Mumby, 2001, p. 587)

A more recent study by Uy-Tioco (2007) focused on how Filipina mothers in transnational families use text messaging to communicate with their loved ones. Interviews with migrant workers found that although these text messages are usually mundane and about everyday things, the connection helps these women “escape from the reality of the separation, allowing [them] to enjoy an ‘absent presence’” (p. 260). For migrant Filipino mothers, text messaging technology is “empowering and humanizing” and “helps with the dislocation brought about by moving to a foreign land” (p. 261).

Meaning-Making Studies on Sexual Assault

There have been a few studies on how women make meaning of sexual assault, both as an issue and how it is represented in the media. A study by Young and Maguire (2003) explored how women use language to label themselves and describe their sexual assault experiences. The authors extend Wood and Rennie’s (1994, as cited in Young &

Maguire) model by looking at the connections among naming the sexual assault experience, labeling oneself, and coping with the aftermath of the experience (p. 40-41). Through 11 ethnographic interviews with survivors, the authors discovered that women who were assaulted label the act of violence and themselves in various ways: “rape” vs. “sexual assault,” “survivor” vs. “victim,” etc. These differing labels are a result of “competing viewpoints [that] may serve to confuse women who are trying to make sense out of their experiences by comparing their constructions of the trauma to those provided by other individuals or entities” (p. 50). Some of the women interviewed rejected every label altogether; this avoidance of specific terms “may be connected to their feelings of culpability about the sexual violence they encountered” (p. 50) or they may feel like the available terms do not fully describe what has happened to them.

Another study conducted by Connop and Petrak (2004) used qualitative data from in-depth interviews to determine the impact of sexual assault on heterosexual couples. Eight men whose partners were recently assaulted, along with three women who have just disclosed their assault to their significant others participated in the study. Transcripts were analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA, Smith, 1995, as cited in Connop & Petrak, 2004), as it:

...attempts to get as close as possible to the phenomenological world of the participant and to explore beliefs of constructs manifest in what the respondent says, whilst also acknowledging that the process of deriving meaning from data is inevitably influenced by the researcher’s own ideas, interpretations and values (p. 31).

Results revealed that there was evident support and communication within these relationships, yet there may be increased levels of aggression and difficulties with the sexual aspect of the relationship due to the assault. The study suggests that sexual assault can “extend into other domains” and that there are “very real difficulties individuals experience in making sense of what happened and negotiating sexual relationships subsequently” (p. 36).

Weaver (2004) conducted a study that explored the relationship between a media text (the film *The Accused*), its reception by audiences, and its discursive culture through a triangulation of methods. She first conducted a textual analysis of the film and discovered that there were two cultural discourses being highlighted: that rape is the result of women’s lack of caution in dealing with men; and the other as the prevalence of a patriarchal culture that protects rapists above rape victims (p. 55). She then recruited 74 women and formed 10 focus groups that watched the film together and engaged in a discussion about their thoughts and perceptions of the film. Focus groups varied in whether they included participants with personal experiences of sexual assault, which in turn influenced the discussion. For example, women who had no prior experiences with sexual assault blamed the victim for the rape due to her appearance and actions; those who have had personal experience were angry at the depiction for promoting a stereotyped perception of rape victims. Respondents also discussed how the film promotes a male culture, in which rape is not a crime but some sort of competition or game. Lastly, the film’s graphic scene allowed viewers to truly see how horrific rape actually is, perceiving that the film had some educational value as well.

Krafka, Linz, Donnerstein and Penrod (1997) also used films to investigate whether the media contribute to a cultural climate that supports violence against women, causing women to be desensitized to such images and having more negative perceptions of themselves. Female college students watched three types of films over a five-day span that varied in terms of their sexually explicit stimuli, and were then asked to report on their perceptions and mood following the film. After viewing the final film, participants finally served as jurors in a simulated rape trial. Results showed that women exposed to the sexually violent material exhibited emotional desensitization, and women exposed to mildly graphically violent stimuli showed lower levels of concern for sexual assault victims. However, though watching the films was a stressful experience for all participants, there were no significant reductions in self-esteem and fear of victimization.

Kahlor and Morrison (2007) proposed several hypotheses regarding television viewing and rape myth acceptance: (1) that television use will correlate positively with the acceptance of rape myths; (2) that television use will correlate positively with perceptions that rape accusations are false; (3) that television use will correlate positively with a general overestimation of rape in society; and (4) that television use will correlate negatively with the perceived personal relevance of sexual assault (p. 732). Ninety-six undergraduate women from a large midwestern university were given a survey testing these hypotheses. Results revealed that women with a higher television use generally accepted rape myths, i.e., only promiscuous women are raped. This finding leads women to believe that they can engage in more risky behaviors, since “bad things only happen to bad people” (p. 735). Though the link between television viewing and personal relevance

was not significant, the results were in the predicted direction that TV viewers find sexual assault to be less personally relevant to them.

Finally, Worthington (2008) conducted a case study using news coverage of a sexual assault scandal at a college located in the Western United States. Worthington traced the “natural history” of the media text from its encoding and representation by the news producers to its decoding and consumption by news audiences (Deacon et al., 1999, as cited in Worthington, 2008). She first conducted hour-long, semi-structured interviews with the story’s producer and her main informant, the former director of the college’s women resource center. Worthington found that the producer of the story wanted the participation of credible sources (i.e., the resource center director and survivors). However, she also needed to adhere to the news narrative, resulting in a story that highlighted “the dramatic encounter between victim and villain” (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, p. 118, as cited in Worthington, 2008) which in this case was the survivors and campus authorities. The producer was also aware of institutional policies she needed to adhere to, in order to avoid litigation.

Worthington then textually analyzed the news story in an attempt to uncover the dominant themes that surfaced. In the central narrative she found that there was (1) a contrast between violent crime and inadequate punishment; (2) an institutional scandal; and (3) the cover-up of campus security (p. 354). The story also showed that it adhered to the producer’s vision and preferences by adding major source contributions to the entire piece, greatly emphasizing the perspective of the survivors and leaving the perpetrator’s point of view in the background.

Lastly, Worthington explored how individuals decoded the message by analyzing the comments on the story that were posted on the TV station's Website. Feedback revealed, "progressive rape discourse in news can empower assault survivors to challenge patriarchal rape discourse, provided they have a forum in which to do so" (p. 359). Many of the women who responded to the news story offered suggestions on different preventative measures women could take to avoid being assaulted. Responses also portrayed that women believed that perpetrators are more likely to be male strangers, illuminating the fact that they are drawing from "misleading cultural discourse about rape" and diverting "attention from female vulnerability to male acquaintances, [perpetuating] the suggestion that gender violence occurs on the margins of society, rather than at its core" (p. 362).

Sexual Assault Interventions

As sexual violence quickly grew to be a nationwide problem across the United States, it was soon evident that there needed to be more of a response from the Federal Government. Thus, in 1994, President Clinton established the Office on Violence Against Women in the U.S. Department of Justice, and Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. This mandate in turn led to the creation of the Panel on Research on Violence Against Women in 1995, calling for a "research agenda to increase the understanding and control of violence against women" (Crowell & Burgess, 1996, p. 18, as cited in Bachar & Koss, 2001). Before and soon after the Panel's inception, there have been a variety of studies that have focused on the context, scope, prevalence, incidence, and evaluation of sexual assault as an issue and different sexual assault intervention programs.

Methodological patterns in research. There are several demographic and methodological trends that were reflected in the literature on sexual assault intervention programs. First, the majority of interventions were administered to mixed audiences consisting of both males and females (Anderson et al., 1998; Black et al., 2000; Dallager & Rosen, 1993; Forst et al., 1996; Foshee et al., 2004; Frazier et al., 1994; Gidycz et al., 2001; Heppner et al., 1995; Hilton et al., 1998; Lanier et al., 1998; Lovoie et al., 1995; Lenihan et al., 1994; Lonsway & Kothari, 2000; Macgowan, 1997; Pacifici et al., 2001; Pinzone-Glover et al., 1998; Rosenthal et al., 1995; Schultz et al., 2000; Smith & Welchans, 2000; Weisz & Black, 2001; Wolfe et al., 2003; Wright et al., 2000), focusing mainly on rape-myths, raising awareness and knowledge, and decreasing the acceptance of rape and sexual violence.

In terms of the racial identity of the participants, the majority of the interventions were administered to white participants, who in many cases made up over 80 percent of the respondents in the study (Anderson et al., 1998; Breitenbecher & Gidycz, 1998; Breitenbecher & Scarce, 2001; Dallager & Rosen, 1993; Forst et al., 1996; Gidycz et al., 2001; Wolfe et al., 2003). However, there were studies that had predominantly Black participants (Macgowan, 1997), with one study that focused on a school entirely populated by Black students (Weisz & Black, 2001).

There were various methods that were utilized to educate participants and/or test their knowledge, awareness, and retention of sexual assault information. The majority of studies placed participants into control and treatment groups and tested whether the intervention caused attitude or behavior change (Black et al., 2000; Earle, 1996; Wolfe et al., 2003; Lenihan & Rawlins, 1994). Other studies conducted experimental conditions

with control and treatment groups (Breitenecher & Scarce, 1999; Gidycz et al., 2001; Macgowan, 1997; Pacifici et al., 2001) while others randomly assigned participants into two to three different groups and gave each group different interventions, with no non-treated control group (Lanier et al., 1998; Anderson et al., 1998; Fonow et al., 1992). Finally, other studies have been conducted using a quantitative pre-test and post-test method to gauge attitude change, with one study analyzing qualitative data gathered from phone calls by having participants systematically write down what came to mind through thought listing (Heppner et al., 1995a).

Modes of presentation. Studies have explored the best mode of presentation to increase awareness and knowledge among participants and have used a variety of methods to disseminate information. The majority of studies used a didactic, lecture style format in which educators would present participants with the relevant information. Foubert (2000) created an intervention specifically for men titled, “How to help a sexual assault survivor: What men can do” in an attempt to induce empathy towards victims. Smith and Welchans’ (2000) study focused on high school students in a program called the Peer Education Project who presented sexual assault information to their peers. Educators received 15 hours of training from a local sexual assault prevention and treatment agency in order to provide 45-minute presentations to classrooms. Other methods presented in studies include lectures with video and discussion (Boulter, 1997; Jensen, 1993; Lenihan & Rawlins, 1994; Pinzone-Glover et al., 1998, Prince, 1994) while others used more creative means by workshops and role-playing (Duggan, 1998; Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Foubert & McEwen, 1998; Gibson, 1991; Heppner et al., 1995b; Nagler, 1993).

Successful intervention programs. Studies that have demonstrated positive intervention effects have used mostly knowledge/attitude outcome measures and have focused on college and community populations. Sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs) created the Community Awareness Rape Education (CARE) Program to educate adolescents about sexual assault and the resources available to them in the community. Three groups of 10th graders were asked to write down what actions they would take to reduce rape and were then asked to participate in a discussion regarding rape myths. Results comparing the pretests and posttests revealed that scores evaluating knowledge increased 10-20 percent (Wright, Akers, & Rita, 2000).

Breitenbecher and Scarce (1999) evaluated a sexual assault prevention program designed by a large Midwestern university for female undergraduate students. Women were broken up into groups of 30 and were presented with a one-hour program focusing on the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses, rape myths, sex role socialization practices that support a rape-filled environment, and a redefinition of rape as an issue that affects all men and women (p. 463). At the end of the academic year, participants returned for a follow-up session and were assessed for their knowledge and whether they had personally experienced sexual assault in the seven-month span that elapsed. Results revealed that the program was successful in increasing knowledge, yet there was no definitive change in the incidence of sexual assault.

Fraizer, Valtinson, & Candell (1994) evaluated a coeducational rape prevention program for students involved in Greek life. The two-hour intervention was based on a program developed at Cornell University that uses interactive improvisational theater (Parrot, 1988, as cited in Fraizer et al., 1994). Students from the theater department acted

out scenarios depicting an acquaintance rape and trained counselors facilitated discussion on how the actors could have avoided the rape. Based on the participants' discussion and suggestions, the scene is reenacted and the rape does not occur. Participants were then asked to evaluate the program and test their rape-supportive attitudes. Results revealed that immediately following the intervention these attitudes were lowered; however, one month later there was no longer any significant change.

Eight weeks after completing a pretest assessing rape beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, participants in a study conducted by Rosenthal, Heeksacker, and Neimeyer (1995) attended a one-hour intervention consisting of arguments that favored rejecting interpersonal dating violence, rape myths, adversarial sexual beliefs, and male dominance (p. 173). Modes of presentation included a didactic lecture style interspersed with role-played vignettes. Participants were then handed post-test materials immediately following the intervention and were asked to complete questionnaires measuring their rape myth acceptance and rape-supportive attitudes. Results of the program revealed that participants adhered less to rape myths and expressed less rape-supportive attitudes compared to students who did not attend the intervention.

Theoretical frameworks. The most widely used theory to shape sexual assault interventions was the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which conceptualizes motivation and ability to accept attitude change on a continuum, from peripheral route processing to central route processing. Other theoretical frameworks that have been used include the social learning model (Bandura, 1977), the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; 1980) and attribution theory (Heider, 1958). Due to the fact that this thesis is a qualitative, cultural meaning-making study of sexual assault

campaign materials and not a construction of a sexual assault intervention, I will not be using these particular theoretical frameworks as the foundation of this study. The goal of this research is to explore what factors determine how women receive and consume sexual assault media and materials, and not if a certain educational program or intervention would cause attitudinal or behavioral change.

Research Questions

Given the literature and theory on cultural studies and sexual assault communication, the following Research Questions were developed to guide the data collection and data analysis of this thesis study:

RQ1: How do women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds make meaning of sexual assault?

RQ2: What factors contribute to the ways women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds make meaning of the sexual assault campaign environment?

RQ3: What factors contribute to the ways women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds make meaning of the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network's (RAINN) media campaign in particular?

RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization with a variety of different partners in the entertainment, sports, corporate, and media industries that help fund educational campaigns across the United States. RAINN also receives a great deal of funding from the United States Department of Justice for its programming and to offer support to its local affiliates. Because of their extensive reach and support from many sponsors and governmental agencies, I felt that was necessary to explore RAINN's

campaigns exclusively in its own research question and compare how their campaign materials differed from others in terms of how they are received by audiences.

Chapter 3 – Method

I conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with my participants in order to explore their thoughts and perceptions of sexual assault and sexual assault campaign materials (which will include print and broadcast media) that specifically focus on women. Through this exploratory study I investigated the *consumption* process within the circuit of culture (du Gay et al., 1992) by using a data analysis approach borrowed from grounded theory to identify themes that emerged through the data. I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study and adhered to its policies and procedures in terms of using human subjects for research purposes.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology is an approach that operates in a complex historical environment, constituting its own field of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 3). Potter (1996) argues that there is some ambivalence on the true definition of the qualitative approach because of its wide range of meanings, conceptualizations and political undertones. In terms of its purpose, Berg (2009) states that qualitative research “properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings” (p. 8). Thus, qualitative researchers are interested in “human understanding” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 19) and they strive to discover how people make sense of their surroundings through the use of various communication practices, social roles, rituals, symbols and signs (Berg, 2009). Used in many humanistic disciplines, the qualitative approach utilizes a variety of methods, including participant observation, historical analysis, document and textual analysis, phenomenology, ethnography, and cultural studies (Berg, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Qualitative scholars “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). This interpretive and naturalistic approach goes along with the belief that qualitative research should produce idiographic knowledge, in that the specifics about how individuals in special settings make meaning should be explored (Potter, 1996). This openness and use of a diverse set of representations and meanings cause qualitative researchers to be what Denzin and Lincoln (2008) call a *bricoleur* – someone who uses a variety of tools and methods to piece together conclusions and create a meaningful whole.

Qualitative research is also very dynamic in the sense that it relies on the subjectivity of participants to investigate meanings within a particular context, culture, and perspective. These meanings allow people to produce their own, personal realities; but because these realities are based on how people create those meanings, “reality becomes an interpretation of various definitional options” (Berg, 2009, p. 10). In order to explore and observe the fluidity of representations that constitute reality, qualitative researchers use various methods to uncover participants’ meanings and gather thick, rich data that will accurately represent their different points of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

I feel it is important to describe my epistemology, or how I understand reality, in terms of my research and especially with this particular project. My epistemology answers why I choose to research women and what I hope to contribute to society by undertaking this study.

I identify myself as a just recently self-proclaimed feminist qualitative researcher whose “way of knowing” is feminist standpoint theory. Standpoint theory suggests that women have a bifurcated perspective consisting of the dominant culture’s hegemonic expectations of females, along with their own situated meanings that they intrinsically know inside (Hallstein, 1999). This particular epistemology represents the notion that truth and reality is rooted in one’s subjective standpoint that is distinct and unique to that individual (Buzzanell, 1994). Focusing on gender differences, standpoint theorists recognize the devaluation and subordination of women and specifically choose to utilize their point of view in various ways: by using women researchers, by using women for participants, and by studying women as topics for research purposes (Harding, 1991).

Feminist standpoint theory is an appropriate epistemology to drive this research because it is conducive to accomplishing the goals of the cultural studies approach. Both feminist standpoint and cultural studies seek to understand the “politics of the everyday and the personal” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 251) – through exploring how different individuals socially construct their particular ways of knowing. Both approaches also focus on marginality as grounds for research, seeking to empower and promote a social network of oppressed populations to “join together in opposition, resistance, and transformation” (Pompper, 2007, p. 293).

Objectivity is a question that is raised in the feminist standpoint epistemology. Haraway (1988) contends that feminists do not strive for immortality or omnipotence and rejects the objective researcher that neutrally observes reality from nowhere. Harding (1991) argues that feminist standpoint moves away from a value-neutral objectivity and towards a “strong objectivity” that requires a “scientific account of the relationships

between historically located belief and maximally objective belief” (p. 142). To obtain this scientific account, researchers aim to achieve a reciprocal relationship with the participant or object being studied, which can only be achieved through strong reflexivity on the part of the researcher and the openness to listen intently to others’ thoughts and visions (Harding, 1991). While this philosophy seems easier to accomplish with one type of methodology, feminist researchers use all types of methodology. However, here, I used qualitative method to reflect Reinharz’ argument that the research will be a sort of “antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for women” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19).

Cultural Studies Method

The cultural studies approach uses qualitative methodology that examines how culture influences the way people conduct their day-to-day activities through the creation and use of signs and symbols (Potter, 1996). Scholars using the cultural studies approach can use a variety of different methods to procure insight and knowledge, including “textual analysis, semiotics, deconstruction, ethnography, interviews, phonemic analysis, psychoanalysis, rhizomatics, content analysis, [and] survey research” (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992, p. 2).

One misconception about the cultural studies approach is that it primarily observes people, places and objects within popular culture. To argue this sentiment, Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler (1992) state several characteristics that are common in all cultural studies research: the researcher examines all possible determinations that make up the relationships between differing cultural domains; the approach is mainly focused on the everyday roles and practices of the people studied; and it follows a

tradition that is “deeply implicated in existing relations of power,” especially among the oppressed and disenfranchised (p. 13).

Examples of cultural studies’ procedures. There are a variety of distinct methods one undertakes when utilizing a cultural studies approach, as shown by a number of studies. Acosta-Alzuru (2003) used the entire circuit of culture (representation, identity, production, consumption, regulation) as a tool to analyze the chosen Venezuelan soap opera. She first discovered how feminism was *represented* in the texts and how a feminist *identity* was created through the show. She then conducted interviews with the head writer and the actors to understand the *production* and *regulation* of the soap opera and also interviewed audience members to explore *consumption*. Bobo (1995) also used data triangulation to obtain a variety of perspectives on the production and consumption of different Black cultural texts. Bobo first conducted a textual analysis of the film adaptation of *The Color Purple*, and then conducted two focus groups with Black women who have both seen the film and read the book in order to discuss how these texts “related to the status of black women in society” (p. 101). She then conducted another textual analysis on the independent film *Daughters of the Dust*, showed the film to three focus groups and then discussed their thoughts on the film. These focus groups varied on how well the participants knew each other, from complete strangers to close family members and friends.

McKinley (1997) collected data using ethnographic and cultural studies techniques for conducting qualitative interviews (p. 243). Because *Beverly Hills, 90210* was a popular show that was frequently discussed among groups of friends, McKinley sought out her participants through pre-existing groups in her work and leisure activities.

Once she obtained access to these groups, she then employed a snowball sampling method to expand each of the groups, resulting in a total of 36 participants. Groups ranged from two to four individuals and were mostly similar in terms of demographic information. They were chosen based on the criteria that they had watched the show for at least one year, with preference given to those who have been watching the show since its first season.

Press and Cole (1999) conducted a qualitative study in which they interviewed groups of women in their own homes, “in order to elicit responses that might approximate women’s reactions when viewing television in their everyday lives, outside the research context” (p. 5). Women who agreed to participate in the study were asked to invite other female friends who shared similar attitudes about abortion, in an attempt to avoid very different-minded, emotionally heated groups. Participants first discussed their thoughts on the abortion issue, watched a 30- to 40-minute prime-time entertainment television segment on abortion decision-making, and then discussed their perceptions further afterwards. Because these groups were composed of friends, Press and Cole called this method an “ethnographic focus group” which rejects group disagreement (acceptable in conventional focus groups), and focuses on the “variations and nuances of opinion within the discourse of particular groups of women” (p. 148).

Compared to the aforementioned studies, my methodological approach will be similar to Press and Cole’s (1999) qualitative method in that I will be conducting focus groups consisting of female friends who work together on ending sexual assault. I will also be following Aldoory’s (2001) method of conducting a series of in-depth interviews in addition to the focus groups with women from different backgrounds to establish some

form of triangulation. Lastly, I will use McKinley's (1997) method of using a convenience sample based on participation in various groups, then continuing with the method by utilizing a snowball sampling approach based on those contacts.

In-Depth Interviewing

This study consisted of qualitative, in-depth individual interviews as well as a series of focus groups. I conducted semi-structured interviews, which allows the researcher to approach the world from the subject's perspective and to come to understand that individuals perceive the world in varying ways (Berg, 2009, p. 107). Though time consuming, the interviewing process allows the researcher to deeply explore different cultural forms, practices, and actions without violating the privacy of the individual (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; McCracken, 1988).

Furthermore, the semi-structured interview offers the freedom to participants to digress from the prepared standardized questions and to lead the conversation to what he/she finds to be important (Berg, 2009; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005). Treating the participants as a "conversational partner" (H. S. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005) and encouraging them to frequently participate, is a reflection of feminist standpoint, as it reduces the interviewer's dialogue and control of the conversation and establishes trust between both parties. The semi-structured interview is also appropriate for the qualitative, cultural studies approach to understanding women's meaning making because it is consistent with "many women's interest in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20). Finally, as my aim is to provide an outlet for women to speak and have a voice with this consciousness-

raising issue, it is important for my participants to speak to a woman researcher when divulging self-revealing details about their lives.

Focus Groups

The focus group allows researchers to learn about “conscious, semiconscious, and unconscious psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes among various groups” (Berg, 2009, p. 158) through the use of dialogue. The primary purpose of this method is to create dynamic interactions between participants that can stimulate discussion made by one another’s comments (Berg, 2009). The focus group can be successful because it “taps into human tendencies” by allowing participants to influence each other and reveal emotions that would normally not occur in isolation (Krueger, 1994, p. 10). In audience reception studies, texts are often provided to participants in order to examine how the ideas of the text are brought to life in their imaginations and into the conversation (Potter, 1996; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Focus groups are ideal from a feminist perspective because they offer participants a greater role in formulating the research, granting them more power and control and creating a more egalitarian research environment (Reinharz, 1992). Other benefits of using focus groups include raising consciousness about a particular topic (in this study’s case, sexual assault prevention); allowing women to participate using their own personal languages and frameworks; and creating a collective self-empowerment among the group (Wilkinson, 1998).

Participants

Recruitment. I used a purposive and convenience sample for this study, recruiting participants through my involvement in various organizations and also through informal

contacts. I identified sexual assault volunteers, peer educators and sorority members through my personal affiliations within the University of Maryland, using informants within the university to create focus groups and to find individuals to interview. For the in-depth interviews I talked to informants in Maryland who introduced me to individuals that could potentially be interviewed. After these interviews, I then used a snowball sampling technique and asked these individuals to recommend someone who might be interested in participating in the study, drawing from their references and expanding the list of interviewees (Potter, 1996).

When I received potential participants' contact information, I invited them to participate in my study either in-person or via e-mail, in which I described to them the purpose of the project and the procedures of the research. If they agreed to an individual interview, we agreed on a place to meet, which the majority of the time was either the conference room for the Center for Risk Communication Research, or in my office. For the focus groups, I reached out to the women in Sigma Psi Zeta sorority, an Asian-interest multicultural organization whose national philanthropy is to combat violence against women, and to college-aged women who volunteer at the Sexual Assault Center at Prince George's Hospital in Cheverly, Maryland. Prior to the interview and focus groups I presented each woman with a consent form that explained the purpose of the study, participants' rights, and my contact information, which they signed.

Summary of participants. A total of 35 women participated in the study. Fourteen women participated in the focus groups – six in the Sigma Psi Zeta focus group and eight in the Prince George's Hospital focus group. Twenty-one women were interviewed: nine white women, four African American women, one Asian American woman, three

Hispanic women, four Indian-American women, and one Arab-American woman. The women's ages ranged from 18 to 36 years old. The Sigma Psi Zeta focus group consisted of six Asian American women between 19-20 years old, and the Prince George's Hospital focus group consisted of eight white women between 19-21 years old. Both focus groups took place in buildings located on the University of Maryland's campus.

The focus groups consisted of the number of participants Lindlof and Taylor (2002) recommended would constitute an optimal focus group, ranging from six to 12 participants. Too few participants might cause response fatigue and would limit the discussion to fewer topics; too many participants might cause some participants to not interact with each and might cause some side conversations and tangential discussions that might linger on for too long.

The qualitative method suggests that researchers strive to reach a "saturation point" while collecting data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This concept refers to the point at which each new interview and conversation does not add anything unique to what has already been mentioned, resulting in gathering the same information (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (2005), the saturation point determines when the researcher will stop gathering data and begin conducting their data analysis. While collecting data for this study, I realized at a certain point that I was hearing similar, consistent answers from the women I was interviewing and was not discovering any new, significant information. Therefore, I decided that at this point I could stop conducting interviews as I had a considerable amount of data that answered the research questions in enough detail.

Procedure

Interview guide. An interview guide (also known as an interview protocol, questionnaire, interview schedule, or conversational guide) helps guide the interviewer on what main questions to ask and of whom. Interview guides generally “allow for open-ended responses and are flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 71). They also enable the researcher “to balance the need for predictability with the freedom to explore unanticipated topics” (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, p. 150).

The first part of my interview guide consisted of several “grand tour” questions that ask women about their general health concerns and where they turn to for health information. The second part of the guide used the cultural studies approach to ask how women make meaning of sexual assault media and campaigns (Hall, 1997), and the final part of the interview guide consisted of questions comparing the RAINN materials from the previous materials they were just exposed to. These final questions are focused on whether there would be a difference in their attitudes and perceptions between the two groups of materials. Because all individuals interview differently in terms of their pace and how in-depth they may go into each question, I also embedded a series of probing questions that will give me a way to draw out more information from my participants (Berg, 2009). I also used very open-ended questions in my guide that can easily be reordered and reworded (to see the interview guide, turn to Appendix A). All participants in the interview sessions and focus groups were asked before the session if they can be audio recorded (to see the consent forms, turn to Appendices B and C).

I conducted a pre-test of my interviewing questions with personal contacts from different races/ethnicities. After conducting mock interviews with them, I asked them for

their feedback in regards of the flow and order of the questions. Questions were then removed or edited based on their suggestions for improvement.

Campaign materials. I used a variety of print materials and public service announcements relating to sexual assault for this study. The order of presentation of these materials was different for each participant and focus group. The print materials included the following: a series of brochures created by the University of Maryland's health center on sexual assault and relationship violence, rape myths, and what to do if someone you know is raped; two fact sheets by the CDC on understanding sexual violence; and a frequently asked questions sheet by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Copies of the print materials can be found in Appendix D). I then used two sets of PSAs for this study. The first set was created by the state of Maryland as part of a media campaign called *Rape No More*. Both of the PSAs used featured the same man and woman as spokespeople; the first discussed rape myths while the second urged victims to speak out. The second set of PSAs shown were those created by RAINN. The first PSA was titled "Speak Out" which featured model and singer Krishnar Lewis singing his song "Sad Girl." The second PSA was titled "I Was" and featured a series of women stating that they were raped to emphasize the prevalence of the issue. All of the PSAs shown displayed contact information at the end of the message. (Transcripts of the PSAs are also found in Appendix D).

Interviews summary. All individual and group interviews were conducted in person, and as previously mentioned, the majority took place in the conference room of the Center for Risk Communication Research. The average length for the focus groups was 90 minutes, and the average length for the individual interviews was 50 minutes. The

consent form asked the women if they would like to have a pseudonym that would help me identify them in the final report; I assigned names to these women to protect their identities, though most women chose to use their own names. The majority of women were given extra credit in their communication course for their participation.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I wrote down my initial feelings, impressions, problems, and ideas – what I learned from the interview and what I think I could improve. These *reflective memos* revealed “a more personal account of the course of the inquiry” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 123) and helped me speculate what the outcome of the study will be. These memos are ideal for feminist research, as it puts aside my personal prejudices and focuses more on the interviewee being understood, rather than getting all of my questions answered (Reinharz, 1992).

I had all of my audio recordings transcribed. I transcribed the focus groups, while the remaining recordings were transcribed with the aid of a speech recognition software provided by the University of Maryland’s Center for Risk Communication Research. I inserted observer’s comments (O.C.s) (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) throughout the transcriptions to reflect on emerging themes, connections to previous interviews, my personal thoughts on the interviews, my reactions to interviewees’ responses, and future interviewing suggestions.

I began the data analysis while gathering data and writing transcriptions. Miles and Huberman (1994) claimed that waiting until all the data are gathered to begin analysis is a “serious mistake” that “rules out the possibility of collecting new data to fill in the gaps, or to test new hypotheses that emerge during analysis” (p. 49). After

completing the transcripts, I analyzed them using Pardun and Krugman's (1994) procedure and the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, I used open-coding procedures to examine the transcripts line-by-line to locate emerging themes and potential categories. I then used axial coding to find how data can fit into the categorical themes that were identified in the first step, along with finding data that explicates the concepts presented in the literature review. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), axial coding is a part of the integration process of the grounded theory approach that narrows down the number of categories by finding similarities across data in order to make the data clearer and more understandable. However, though single statements were combined to create various concepts, stand-alone statements that were unique or exceptional were also coded, in an effort to avoid too much coherency in the data (van Zoonen, 1994).

To organize and categorize data by theme, I used a modification of the process suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). Each transcript had a set number of themes that were transferred into its own cell in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I then looked across the transcripts for similar themes and color-coded the text accordingly. I examined these themes, making sure that there was consistency across participants. The final themes were then placed into another spreadsheet with key quotations from the transcripts placed in the appropriate cells.

One potential issue is analyzing two separate data sets: one from interviews and the other from focus groups. Data from in-depth interviews provide thick, rich descriptions of that individual's deepest thoughts and perceptions of the environment. However, data from focus groups also provide rich data that depict how participants make meaning from a collective perspective, by how they individually influence each

other. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach allows for the integration of both data sets to be coded and analyzed. As an inductive approach, researchers using grounded theory begin with an area of study and use a variety of data collection methods to generate theory. Themes that may have emerged from new observations are then compared and combined with previous sets of observations (Potter, 1996). Therefore, the constant comparison and evaluation of data sets allows for themes to be readily consistent with each other, regardless of source.

Validity and Reliability

The questions of validity and reliability in qualitative research have been widely contested and debated. Reliability is the measure of how dependable a research instrument will be in terms of yielding similar results when applied to different contexts (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000). A study is deemed reliable if it “yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out” (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 19). Therefore, the “strain for *identifying* consistency in findings thus yields to *establishing* consistency through procedures,” causing reliability to be an artifact (Wolcott, 1995, p. 168, italics in original).

Internal validity refers to the degree to which the research instrument accurately measures what it is supposed to measure (Wolcott, 1995), and external validity is concerned with the generalizability of the findings from the research study (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000). Because of relatively small sample sizes, it is difficult for qualitative researchers to achieve a representative sample of participants whose realities could be generalized to the entire population. M.L. Smith (1987) rejects generalizability on the notion that all research is purely subjective; results could never be universal and context

free. Thus, even though qualitative research may reject the “notion of a universal truth,” it can be valid in the sense that it “accepts the possibility of specific, local, personal, and community forms of truth, with a focus on daily life and local narrative” (Kvale, 1995, p. 21).

In order to achieve validity in this sense, researchers must depend on the quality of *craftsmanship* in their study, which includes “continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (Kvale, 1995, p. 27). Kvale argues that this quality control should be executed from the moment of production to the inspection at the end of the project. Kvale (1995) mentions various tactics to validate and check progress, which include:

...checking for representativeness and for research effects, triangulating, weighing the evidence, checking the meaning of outliers, using extreme cases, following up surprises, looking for negative evidence, making if-then tests, ruling out spurious relations, replicating a finding, checking out rival explanations, and getting feedback from informants (p. 27).

One of the aforementioned tactics is triangulation. Each method that is used in research “reveals slightly different facets of the same symbolic reality,” (Berg, 2009, p. 5) creating the need for researchers to strengthen their arguments (Potter, 1996). By combining multiple methods, multiple theories, or multiple researchers, qualitative scholars can “obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements” (Berg, 2009, p. 5). Triangulation, therefore, is one way to reduce researcher bias, as well as a way to prove that the researcher’s interpretation is robust.

I used craftsmanship in this study in the following ways: first, I wrote memos and journal entries as mentioned in the data analysis to keep in check my personal thoughts, feelings and biases towards each participant and towards the research project as a whole; secondly, I triangulated my study by incorporating two methods (focus groups and interviews) as well as interviewing a variety of sources from different races, ethnicities and backgrounds; and finally, I conducted member checks throughout the study by periodically offering participants my analysis in order to ensure their realities are being accurately portrayed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Reflexivity

In qualitative research it is important to be reflexive in that the researcher has an “ongoing conversation with [them]self” (Berg, 2009, p. 198). Reflexivity is one way for a research project to be considered valid as the researcher is noted as credible and trustworthy (Kvale, 1995). For feminist research in particular, reflexivity allows the researcher to “examine critically the kinds of beliefs that shape our own thought and behaviors, not just the thought and behavior of others” (Harding, 1991, p. 150).

It is my hope that my personal story will help readers connect to the purpose of this study. I am a Filipino woman in my early 20s who was raised in a predominantly white, middle class neighborhood. This experience has led me to associate myself more strongly with a white culture, leaving me feeling like an outsider within my true Filipino roots. I am currently pursuing a master’s degree in communication with plans to obtain my Ph.D. in order to teach courses in public relations, social media, gender and diversity, and health and risk communication. I particularly have a passion for women’s issues, especially women’s health.

I became interested in the meaning making of women from different backgrounds for three reasons: (1) being a generally social person, I have always loved qualitative interviewing, as it always gave me the opportunity to talk to others and learn their stories; (2) I have recently taken a gender and diversity course in public relations which has “opened my eyes” to gender and diversity scholarship. In particular, this course has taught me the idiosyncrasies of both diversity and gender, allowing myself to realize my own complex racial identity (as previously mentioned); (3) I recently conducted a study on how women perceive sexual assault using the variables of the situational theory of publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) which has left me wanting to learn more about how women perceive this issue.

Finally, sexual assault is a very important issue in my life that has to this point driven my research. I was raped and molested by a family member when I was very young, which left me feeling confused and powerless. For years I remained silent, and felt ashamed at the fact that I allowed someone (a family member nonetheless) to violate my body and completely destroy my understanding of sexuality and sensuality. It took years to regain trust in others, and it took even longer to speak up about my rape and share my story. Now in academia, I feel strongly about participating in the effort to increase awareness of this issue, and I will work as hard as possible to help survivors and to reduce the number of women who have to go through the physical and emotional pain of sexual assault.

Chapter 4 – Results

Overall, the young women I interviewed made meaning of the problem of sexual assault and received the sexual assault campaign materials in a number of different ways. Most women were familiar with the issue of sexual assault and were aware of its profound physical, emotional, mental, and psychological effects; however for the most part their knowledge of the issue depended on their own personal involvement. These women made meaning of sexual assault and its campaign environment through concepts such as *sexual assault as just rape; consent; blame; resources; increasing awareness; emotional messaging; knowing you're not alone; and self-efficacy.*

The women were similar in where they sought out health information, using mostly Internet search engines such as Web MD, Medline Plus, and Google. Some of these women felt it was important to supplement their Internet searches with face-to-face interactions with their doctor, to determine the accuracy of their Web searching. Additionally, college-aged participants in particular mentioned learning about health in their courses, while others went to family members who worked as doctors or nurses for medical advice. A small number of women also looked to magazines, television specials and their sorority sisters for health information.

RQ1: How Do Women from Different Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds Make Meaning of Sexual Assault?

Knowledge of the Issue

When it came to the topic of sexual assault, the women had a series of preconceived notions about what sexual assault is and what constitutes the act of sexual

assault. These ideas surrounding the issue stem from a number of various factors: the media, their personal experiences, their education, and their overall environment.

Sexual assault is defined as solely rape. Even though under Maryland criminal law sexual assault can include other sexual offenses such as touching an unwilling person's intimate parts, the majority of women immediately thought of rape when they were asked what came to mind when I mentioned sexual assault. As Brenda, a 20-year-old white public health major stated, "The first thing that comes to my mind is rape. That's the main thing that pops in my head." Hawaria, an African American accounting student, also immediately thought of rape because she felt "like that's the biggest issue with sexual assault."

Some women believed that rape was the ultimate extreme of sexual assault, but could not help but associate this particular act with the issue. As Sumrita, a 20-year-old Indian public health major mentioned, "rape is the extreme but that's what comes to my mind." Shauna, a 22-year-old African American student, agreed, stating that rape is probably the first thing that comes to mind for a lot of people, "although I think that's an extreme of sexual assault - I don't think that's the only thing that could happen."

Other women associated sexual assault with rape due to their personal involvement with the issue. Adrienne, an 18-year-old Indian Freshman student, attributed her knowledge of rape as sexual assault to its representation in mass media: "I feel like the media always shows it that way." Michele, a 19-year-old Asian student, believed that sexual assault could be more than rape but is taught to believe otherwise through her experiences at work:

I think of just rape. I guess the reason I think that is because I work at a restaurant and they have really strict sexual harassment policy and I guess when I feel uncomfortable with someone I think that sexual assault should not mean just rape but should be at that extent I guess.

Crystal, a 20-year-old white communication major, immediately thought of rape because she has “known people to be raped,” triggering memories associated with friends and family having to have dealt with the issue.

Only women are victims. The women also saw sexual assault as a predominantly women’s issue in which the majority of victims are women. As Brenda, a white public health student stated, “when I think of sexual violence I just automatically think of women being the main victim.” In addition, when asked about the messages they have seen on sexual assault, most of the women believed that the messages were specifically made for women because they are the most at risk. Juliana, a white communication major, felt that messages focus on women “because maybe it’s over generalizing but I feel like most sexual assaults happen to women.” Julia, a Hispanic public health major, believes that sexual assault campaigns feed “into that generalization that only women are raped.”

One participant in particular felt very strongly about the fact that most people believe only men to be perpetrators and women to be victims: “Like, it’s again there’s a lot of portrayal of women as victims only. Everything. From media portrayals to what they’re supposed to be. It makes women weak sort of. It drives me crazy.” She didn’t agree with the common conceptions surrounding perpetration and victimization and felt that the media play a role in creating gendered stereotypes surrounding the issue.

Unwanted touch that requires consent. When asked to define sexual assault, most of the women strongly emphasized the notion that sexual assault is an unwanted or unwelcomed act, leading a person to feel uncomfortable or abused. Julia, a Hispanic public health student, specifically emphasized sexual assault as unwanted, claiming that it's "unwanted whether it's physical, whether it's mental, like threatening anything that would interfere with your daily thoughts ...whether it's a sexual threat or whether it's a sexual action as long as it unwanted." Juliana, a white senior communication major, had similar thoughts, while additionally thinking sexual assault to be aggressive: "you know pretty much usually violent, associated with violence...mostly just unwanted."

The focus group of white sexual assault center volunteers were unsurprisingly very knowledgeable about what constitutes sexual assault and very easily came up with a definition:

Melinda: Any kind of sexual advances or forceful contact without consent.

Jess: Or intent. Doesn't have to be sexual contact.

Meg: If something is attempted it can still have the emotional but not necessarily the physical repercussions.

A number of women also agreed with the idea that sexual assault includes any activity that occurs without your consent. Crystal, a white 20-year-old junior, believed that sexual assault meant that you are "receiving contact or are receiving any words without your consent. If you're asking for it obviously it's wanted but if it's not wanted then I view that as assault." Hawaria, an African American accounting student, had a similar definition, stating that sexual assault included "doing something to somebody else sexual without their consent, against their will."

Negative connotation/social stigma. For Safrianna, a 20-year-old white student, the idea of sexual assault conjured up personal experiences, causing it to have a very negative connotation:

For me it brings up personal experiences. One of those things that throws up a red flag. It's something that has a buried negative connotation and because of my education I know that it happens extremely frequently. When I think about it it's just depressing that the world has gotten to this point.

Serena, an Indian history major, agreed and also believed that sexual assault is overall very negative because it causes someone to be hurt against their will without any say.

Along the same vein as its negative connotation, several women discussed the social stigma surrounding sexual assault and how the subject to this day is very taboo. As twenty-one-year-old African American student Monique mentioned:

It's kind of a big thing to say but I feel like a society needs to take more responsibility if you think that you know somebody who's been sexually assaulted and they're showing crisis signs...are cries for help that they should not be ignored and that society needs to know. The issue needs to not be taboo...it can't be taboo if it happens so frequently.

The Asian American Sigma Psi Zeta sorority sisters also felt this way, engaging in a discussion about why sexual assault prevention isn't as widely advertised:

Sammy: Advertisements pay more money.

Christine: It's so taboo. Cause not everyone is comfortable talking about things.

Tori: It's like two taboos in one. It's sex and violence.

Sammy: Also the fact because the media – I guess it’s a cyclical thing – the media reflects society and society reflects the media - because it’s not really known in either one, it’s probably not going to happen and have a chance of showing up in the media.

Effects of the Issue

The women also made meaning of sexual assault through the various consequences and effects this traumatic experience can have on a victim.

Physical, emotional, and psychological effects. Overall the women were very aware and knowledgeable about the various profound effects an act of sexual assault can have on a woman. These responses ranged from the seemingly evident physical consequences as stated by white student Kelly: “...you can get pregnant or STD if someone sexually assaults you,” to the additional mental, emotional, and psychological effects that can occur as a result of sexual assault. As Monique, an African American communication major, very succinctly described:

Sexual assault...the obvious thing is that there is a whole physical aspect could potentially be exposed: you could be pregnant, be exposed to an STI and there are other psychological repercussions of sexual assault such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, anger management issues.

Additionally, the focus group of white sexual assault center volunteers was very knowledgeable about what consequences could occur:

Kate: STDs.

Sonia: Mental, emotional

Kathryn: Physical Health

Katelyn: Every aspect of health.

Meg: Sexual assault is the trigger than can affect all aspects of health.

Jess: You withstand so much damage. Physically, emotionally

When asked if sexual assault is a health risk, many of the women agreed that it should be considered so. Elizabeth, a white 18-year-old finance major stated, “Absolutely. Just for the sheer fact that sexual assault can result in real diseases. And of course the mental health aspect of it obviously is very damaging for all victims of sexual assault. Yeah absolutely.” Brenda, a white public health student, brought up the emotional devastation of being assaulted by someone you knew, which occurs frequently on college campuses:

Because of all the recent research on the STI’s that are going around, the prevalence of incidence of rape are reasoning to [see it as a health risk]. I guess pregnancy, your emotional well-being: you could be devastated if something were to happen to you if it's presented by someone that you knew.

Amanda, an African American student, included some examples of mental disturbances that could occur if a woman is sexually assaulted: “As a result of the sexual assault, the different diseases that you can get if someone sexually assaults you. Other than physically it could also be a mental health risk. Anxiety, paranoia...tends to be the result of sexual assault.”

Lastly, a few of the women discussed how sexual assault impacts not only the victim, but her loved ones as well, creating secondary victims. As Julia, a Hispanic public health major, said, “sexual assault impacts across the board...it impacts a person directly affected, it impacts a person physically and emotionally, and it can impact those around

them.” Sumrita, an Indian student, believed that being sexually assaulted can change the lives of those around you:

It doesn't really matter what happened. It affects you physically, it affects you mentally, interpersonal relationships, it affects all areas of your life. If you're a victim...even as a person who's not a victim if a friend were affected it would affect me as well.

Loss of control. Daniela, a Hispanic communication student, brought up a very salient point indicating that sexual assault results in a loss of control over your body and your boundaries:

It's a huge health risk so it's psychologically a health risk as well. Probably because your boundaries have been broken and you have been abused and that way you have your own boundaries, you have control of your own body...there is no control you lose control.

Mindset change. Finally, some of the women interviewed mentioned how being sexually assaulted is so life altering that it can completely change your mindset and perspective on life. As Julia, a 36-year-old Hispanic public health student so eloquently described:

It can impact them in day-to-day activities and takes a balance of things and changes it - it can teach him the way a person thinks or feels about his or her environment. This therapy and all those things I think that's a part of that shift in that what life once was is now different.

Hayley, a 19-year-old white student, agreed, stating that “it would change the way you think about things and then I don't know...it's probably different for everybody but it

would probably change your outlook on things.” Another white student, Linda, was a secondary victim but could not relate because she was never personally assaulted. However, she understood the deep impact of being sexually assaulted: “I can't really say because I've never been assaulted. It's hard to say. It's a whole different mindset. It can change your life.”

RQ2: What Factors Contribute to the Ways Women of Different Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds Make Meaning of the Sexual Assault Campaign Environment?

Content of Messages

The content of the messages within the sexual assault campaign environment played a role in how the women received and made meaning of them. The women discussed what constitutes a successful and effective campaign and what factors cause them to either change their mindset or attitude.

Vulnerability. When exposed to the campaign materials, some of the women applauded how the materials exposed the fact that young women can be particularly vulnerable to sexual assault. Amanda, an African American student, brought up The Clothesline Project, an international grassroots public art demonstration focused on survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault that is displayed bi-annually at her university:

The clothesline project makes me think of the anger, resentment, and hurt, and the violation, and the pain...nothing happy about any of it. I'm excited about how I think it brings awareness...that it does happen. I think many people, especially college students, live in a bubble and don't think anything bad can happen to us

...we're just in the bubble in College Park. I think that the T-shirts and messages that they send give us a wake-up call: it does happen, it can happen.

Amanda also believed that a successful campaign should include survivors of sexual assault to show other women that they are susceptible:

I would include people who have been victims of sexual assault. I think that would definitely appeal to the emotions of the audience so instead of saying, "yes such and such statistic," most people who experience it want to know it happened to me, it can happen to you...this is what you can do, this is what got me through - I think that would be a better way to target the audience.

Michele, an Asian communication and pre-nursing major, believed that sexual assault campaigns are especially important because the issue is so prevalent in society: "it's all over the news...it's all the time happens on our college campuses, in high school, it's just everywhere."

Age of victims. Participants felt that campaign materials should be more directed towards younger, college-aged women because they believed that this particular demographic was more at-risk to be sexually assaulted. After watching one of the PSA videos, Sumrita, a 20-year-old Indian student, said:

They're not trying for a specifically targeted age group but it should be for a little bit younger. It might have made a difference. This is a really big generalization but I think a lot of people that get assaulted are younger people and they're more at risk.

Crystal, a white 20-year-old student agreed, and added that different campaigns should reach different groups, though for the most part materials should be directed towards the college-aged demographic:

I would have it be a middle-aged person to target the middle-aged community as well as younger people maybe a 20-year-old girl or something like that just so it would target more of college students because that's where most rapes occur but that's just my personal preference on it.

Resources. The women felt that a successful campaign should offer a number of different resources for victims and their loved ones to turn to in the event of a traumatic experience. After watching one of the PSA videos, Julia, a Hispanic public health student, was happy and relieved to hear about what resources are available:

I know that there are resources available at the county but having just heard that again stands out to me...that there are resources and that we could talk about it whatever you want. It doesn't matter when the sexual assault occurred, you could do something about it.

White government and politics major Hayley felt a little overwhelmed by the number of resources listed, so she thought it would be a better idea to have a happy balance in order to not scare or confuse women into not knowing what to choose from. On the other hand, Shauna, an African American psychology major, believed that there was not enough information surrounding the resources that would tell her where exactly to go:

I think they're a good start. I don't think they're everything that I would need for information. I think they give out a lot of good facts and they say they started by saying there's a lot of resources, it would be nice to know where to find them.

Lastly, white English education major Safrianna brought up a very true and valid point that the need to offer all these resources shows the true scope of the problem: “It [the campaign] communicated obviously the need for women to have these resources as it’s honestly becoming more frequent or at least it's being reported more.”

Themes within the Messages

The women also felt that the overarching themes or messages within the campaign materials played a role in how they perceive sexual assault. These messages helped the women to better understand victims who have been directly affected.

It's not your fault. An overarching theme or message that many of the women got out of the campaign materials was the fact that the sexual assault is not your fault. A few of the women stated that the blame should be shifted from the victim to the perpetrator. Daniela, a Hispanic communication major, mentioned the fact that “usually people you know would rape you. It's not the fault of the victim, it’s the fault of the rapist.” Kelly, a white criminology major, thought the campaign materials did a great job of speaking to the victims and reaching to them on a more personal level: “They were speaking to actual victims were it would have been like, ‘it's okay don’t blame yourself, don't blame the victim, blame whoever's doing it to you - the offender.’”

Sumrita, an Indian public health major, felt that she has seen the “it’s not your fault” message frequently, but thought that it might be due to her major that gets her more exposed to those types of messages:

I see things at SARPP (Sexual Assault Rape and Prevention Program) but that's it. The one thing that in the workshops I've attended hammered into us is that it's not your fault – that's the overall message that I found, but there's really not too much exposure on campus if you think about it unless your public health major.

However, despite seeing the message often, she still believed that it still was an important one: “Whatever happens to you... a lot of people that assault you they just want to provoke it and it's really important to tell them that it's not your fault whatever happened, happened.”

Speak out. One of the PSA videos had a very strong statement to viewers asking them to speak out against their assault and tell someone about their experience to help them recover. The focus group of white sexual assault center volunteers felt that this was a good message, but at the same time victims shouldn't be forced to speak out:

Bethany: [They] shouldn't force you to speak out.

Kate: If you would speak out it should be more of a choice more than you have to.

Sonia: More like you don't have to be silent, more than telling you to speak out.

Sumrita, an Indian public health major, particularly liked the “speak out” message and felt that it was an important one to relay to survivors: “[The PSA] makes me feel really strong about the need to speak up about it. It's not something you should let sit on the back burner.”

Responsibility. The women also felt that sexual assault campaigns promote the need for everyone to take responsibility for their actions and to help others realize the importance of being safe and cautious. One of the participants mentioned the “Got

Consent?” campaign currently being promoted on her campus, and described its overall message:

They basically say if you're a guy that you have a responsibility to talk about sexual assault and speak up for women if they're sexually assaulted or if you know someone who is talking about the topic...it's a serious topic.

Monique, an African American communication major, took the campaign from a different angle and discussed how it promotes the need for audiences to be responsible for helping their friends and loved ones who have been sexually assaulted:

[The campaign] also promotes responsibility. It's your responsibility to help a person to seek help if they need it...you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. Support that you say, “hey, I'm out there for you” to some extent. But here the resources. It's your responsibility to make sure they're aware of the resources.

Monique also mentioned that men and women should be responsible when obtaining consent with anyone they engage with, which ultimately leads to mutual understanding.

Effects of the Messages

Finally, the women discussed various outcomes the campaign materials had on their overall feelings, attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault.

Empathy/sadness. When talking about The Clothesline Project, Amanda, a junior African American undergraduate student, felt a sort of empathy and sadness for all of the victims the project emulated and represented:

I definitely felt empathy for the women. I could never think of how I would react if I were in that position. And the sadness that it is just not one T-shirt but

hundreds of shirts. I mean it has to include new women every year. It happens every year and if I've been on this campus for a while

Twenty-two-year-old Indian student Serena felt that the issue of sexual assault was a sad issue in and of itself, claiming that it "is sad every time you hear about it."

Increase awareness. An important outcome of receiving the campaign materials was that the women were made more aware of the issue. As Emily, a 19-year-old Arab government major, described: "[The materials] made me feel more aware. More aware of what society defines what these things are. And how we deal with sexual assault victims and especially on the issue of rape." Sumrita, a 20-year-old Indian student, also felt that increasing awareness is very important. She believed that defining sexual assault and offering more information about the issue is an aspect of sexual assault campaigns that particularly needs to be addressed. Amanda, an African American student, felt that her university did a good job in offering that information and keeping her aware of the issue: "I think I've known about it since my freshman year. I think during orientation they provide you with information every year that began the school year to get more information. I've been made aware."

However, Brenda, a 20-year-old white public health major, brought up a good point in that it may prove to be difficult to increase awareness for all populations. She claimed that campaigns need to address both victims and those not personally affected by sexual assault, but should probably do so in different ways:

I think it's important to make the rest of people who haven't been victims aware but I think the only tricky problem is that a lot of the time sexual assault victims don't let their friends know so if you're making these PSAs solely for people who

aren't specifically raped victims you need to let the public know...you could probably act better towards prevention or awareness and not necessarily as a reaction that's a solution to your own experiences.

Makes you think. In addition to increasing their awareness about sexual assault, the women felt that the campaigns also caused them to reflect and think more about their relationships and experiences. As Julia, a Hispanic public health major stated, "After I learned a little more about it [the campaign] I become more engaged. Makes you think about my relationships and my friends relationships. It makes you think." Twenty-year-old African American student Hawaria agreed, stating that the materials specifically focused on debunking rape myths cause people to "really think."

Though a lot of the materials have some sort of call to action, Monique, an African American senior, believed that though the campaigns get people thinking about sexual assault, they do not necessarily cause any sort of behavioral change:

I feel like it does get the motor running because of these issues...because you're a sexual assault case victim it is a highly evolved issue and might make you think about it but I feel like that it's something more internal...you have to want to do it while I feel like this encourages you I don't feel like it completely motivates a person to go and do it.

RQ3: What Factors Contribute to the Ways Women of Different Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds Make Meaning of RAINN's Media Campaign in Particular?

Content of the Messages

As with the other sexual assault campaign materials, the women made meaning of the RAINN materials through the content within the messages. Components affecting the

production and quality of the PSAs played a role in how the women perceived RAINN's stance on sexual assault.

Emotional. The women were especially moved by the RAINN materials because they appealed to their emotions and made them feel empathy towards victims. The white sexual assault center volunteers discussed what feelings emerged after they watched the RAINN PSAs:

Melinda: RAINN pulls at your heartstrings.

Kate: It made you sad, wants you to hug all those women.

Kathryn: I wanted to help them and offer resources if possible.

Sonia: It made you believe them more, because it's people that have been through the situation whereas people who are obviously actors just repeating statistics.

Kate: They may not have been actors but they did a good job of faking emotion.

Jess: It made you sad and it really brings the issue full circle.

A great majority of the women agreed, stating that it truly brought forth a wave of emotions. As Hawaria, an African American student described, "These are really powerful. They brought the emotions especially the last one. It brought me close to tears seeing other people crying ...almost made you feel as if you feel their pain, you see people...it's real emotions." Twenty-year-old white communication major Crystal also believed that the RAINN materials focus on your emotions: "They definitely target that part - the emotional side to it for sure and the first one how you saw men and women together so it's not just women who are victims. It's also shedding and bringing light to men [as victims] as well." Sumrita, an Indian public health major, commended RAINN

for utilizing the emotions in their materials because she feels the “emotional part made the difference.”

As compared to the other sexual assault materials, Safrianna, a 20-year-old white student, made a distinction between the first set of materials she viewed and the RAINN ones:

These are much more serious and much more emotionally based so I think that these in particular are reaching out to people that have been a victim. Whereas the other ones were more informative these are targeted towards people who already had these experiences because the women in the second one you could read their facial expressions...they're victims and they say that you have been through this but there is nothing wrong with you...so these are definitely targeting people who very been through that experience. But these had much more emotional response from me.

19-year-old white student Hayley agreed, and also compared the first set of materials to RAINN's set: “I like them better. They are more links to emotion and actual people instead of the first set was more like you're being preached that.”

Inclusive. Another aspect of the RAINN materials that the women particularly liked was the fact that the PSAs were inclusive, in regards to the actors chosen and also who the materials are made for. Sandra from Sigma Psi Zeta sorority felt that it still felt personable even though it was “universal because there was a variety of people. It had different races, ages, genders...” Amanda, an African American English/Special Education major, also felt that the RAINN PSAs were effective in displaying diversity:

With the first PSA they had a variety of women, of different cultures, different ages, elderly women...they are focusing more so towards women and of various ages. The second PSA they were young but it had women, men, people of different nationalities and cultures

Shauna, a 22-year-old African American undergraduate senior, felt that the diversity was important and effective because it showed viewers their actual vulnerability to the problem in that sexual assault can affect anyone: "The second one showed actual people or how they did a variety of people because everyone can feel like it fits that person that it can happen to them people like me...again the diversity is really important in showing you the different people." Linda, a white American/Germanic Studies student, felt similarly, believing the materials showed that anybody can essentially be raped:

I like how they represented all age groups: we saw older women, younger women, different colored women, so it was all-inclusive. It made the message for everybody. Anybody whoever you are can be raped. That was the overall message I got out of it.

Use of music. Lastly, the women felt that RAINN's use of music within their PSAs was effective in reaching out to their audience. Even though Sumrita, a 20-year-old Indian student, believed that "music can enhance or sometimes take away from a message," the women overall believed that the background music chosen by RAINN helped with its message. Shauna, a 22-year-old African American student, felt that the music helped make the PSA more attractive in that you wanted to listen and look at the message at the same time, making the overall reception of the message more interesting. Comparing the RAINN PSAs to the state of Maryland pieces, Linda, a 21-year-old white

student, felt that the RAINN materials were “more contemporary. It could be argued that people are, they're a lot of sound oriented people, music is more universal, most people like music. It connects to those people. I really like that.”

Themes within the Messages

Like the other campaign materials received, the women also felt that the overall messages and themes of the RAINN materials played a role in how they perceived and made meaning of them.

You're not alone. The women felt comforted by the fact that the RAINN materials made it clear that victims and their loved ones are not alone in their recovery. As Linda, a 21-year-old white student, stated, “It's more encouraging to know that you're not alone. Just being told you are not alone is not enough but seeing it can mean a whole lot.”

Adrienne, an Indian Business major, felt that the emotional aspect of the messages made you feel bad for victims but also offered hope because it stated that you're not alone. Min from Sigma Psi Zeta sorority agreed, stating that “Out of all the ones this [PSA] had the most emotion because you saw the tears in their eyes, the pain that it caused, so if I were a victim I would see that I was not the only one going through that.” Finally Hispanic public health major Julia felt that by tugging at her emotions and making her believe that she is not alone the messages allowed her to think that the RAINN network really cared about her and other women across the nation.

Prevalence. The women also felt that the RAINN PSAs showed the true scope of the problem and made clear that sexual assault happens frequently and often. As Christine from Sigma Psi Zeta sorority mentioned, “By showing more people and more diversity it showed the scope of the problem, how many people are affected by it, and I

guess it was reinforced by real women that every two and a half minutes are sexually assaulted.” Daniela, a 26-year-old Hispanic student, agreed, stating that by showing a diverse group of victims the RAINN messages depicted that this is an issue that affects everybody.

Personable/Relatable. In addition, the women also liked the fact that the RAINN materials were so personable and relatable to their particular age group. Crystal, a white communication major, felt that the people in the RAINN materials were more identifiable as compared to the other sexual assault campaign messages. In addition to just relaying information to audiences, she believed that the RAINN messages had an overall better production value and were “more aesthetically pleasing to the eye.” Additionally, Crystal felt that the state of Maryland PSAs seemed more like a lecture given in a classroom, whereas the RAINN PSAs were “more personable” and made you not feel alone.

Effects of the Messages

Finally, the women experienced a number of emotions and feelings as a result of receiving the RAINN messages.

Empowerment. The women felt that the RAINN messages gave them a sense of empowerment over the problem of sexual assault. Meena, a white PR student, mentioned that even though the messages did not state that many facts and statistics, they still were in fact powerful: “It doesn't really offer information, it doesn't necessarily state what sexual assault is, or what rape is even. They're not as informative, they're just there to empower people.” Hispanic public health major Julia agreed, feeling that the RAINN messages were “more uplifting and empowering” and gave women a “sense of empowerment.” All of the women in the Asian American Sigma Psi Zeta sorority focus

group also felt similarly, stating the RAINN messages made them feel more empowered than the other campaign messages.

Self-efficacy. Finally, the women felt empowered by the message from RAINN's materials that they can do something to recover from sexual assault and heal. Hawaria, an African American business student, felt that this particular message is directed towards everyone: "I feel this is one for everyone: you can do it, you can call someone, you can talk to people about it and you're not alone." Safrianna, a white English education major, felt that this message especially spoke out to victims, allowing them to feel that even though the experience was traumatic and difficult, they can be strong and move on.

Other women felt that the call to action was very strong in the RAINN PSAs. Serena, an Indian history major, felt that there was "a call for action that the people that are victims should do something about it. What happened to them," while Indian student Adrienne believed that the "whole message is if that happens to you go out and say something." White student Kelly was especially moved by the RAINN materials, feeling that it empowers both victims and those who have not been affected by sexual assault:

I could understand more of emotional thing I almost feel bad, empathy for them.

If it also happened to me it would make me feel like a little if they can do it I can do it too. I think could help me to motivate them to play takes a lot of things to get out there. Even those it hasn't happened to you could relate to them better.

Additional Findings

After analyzing the data, a series of additional themes emerged that did not necessarily answer the Research Questions originally set out for this study. These themes surrounded the women's personal involvement with the issue of sexual assault, including

their particular recall of messages and cultural backgrounds. The women also provided a number of practical suggestions on how to better disseminate information about sexual assault and sexual assault prevention.

Personal Involvement

Change in perspective. When exposed to the campaign messages, several women discussed how a personal experience with sexual assault could affect how they perceive and recall the messages. Michele, an Asian student, mentioned how your perspective of the materials varies according to your personal history:

You go into looking at rape from a different perspective with different messages and if you are raped you want a more personable perspective whereas you want information if you're not as affected by the emotional material than you are by numbers and statistics.

Kelly, a white 20-year-old student, felt that “we all understand [messages] the same. We all get the message but I feel like it means more to someone who was actually assaulted.” And even though Juliana, a white communication major, felt angry when going through the messages she believes that if she had a specific rape history she would feel entirely different: “if something had actually happened to me than I think it would probably have spoken more directly to me.”

Recall of messages. The women’s personal involvement with the issue also determined whether or not they would be able to seek out and recall sexual assault messages. As Hawaria, an African American 20-year-old accounting major stated:

I probably have [seen messages]...I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I feel like you're more receptive if you've been through it, you know? But if you

haven't it doesn't really cross your mind or hasn't happened to you we just don't really pay attention to it. Which is how I am.

Hispanic communication major Andrea agreed, believing that your need for information is determined by your personal experience with the issue:

If you know someone were you are beginning to go through the situation then you actively seek for information...that's the difference between being someone who actually had been a victim of sexual assault...they pay heed to that stuff.

Race and Ethnicity

The women were asked how their particular race or ethnicity affects how they perceive sexual assault and whether their culture plays a role in the recovery process. Since the women spanned a variety of different backgrounds, a number of different responses emerged regarding how different groups perceive this issue. However, some of the women believed that race and ethnicity was not a factor, affecting all backgrounds equally and in the same fashion. As Amanda, a 21-year-old African American education student mentioned:

I don't think so. Also I don't know how other racial groups go through this. But I think it's something that goes across all racial lines. I think that what I spend as a black woman mentally and physically by going through sexual assault a white woman, an Asian woman, Hispanic woman will probably go through the same emotional and physical pain.

Twenty-year-old white student Safrianna felt the same way, claiming that "for all women it's the same thing. I think sexual assault is sexual assault." However, based on their particular background, some of the different cultures felt that they had differences.

White women. A few of the white women interviewed believed that white women are prone to be assaulted more. Meena, a 21-year-old white woman, believed that this was the case, “especially among college campuses.” Juliana, a 21-year-old student, believed white women are victimized because they are seen as weaker than their minority counterparts:

I think that in society there's kind of a perception that black women are stronger and kind of don't mess with them whereas white women are little bit more frail and can be attacked easier and don't really know what's going on. It also depends on class at the same time over privileged and not aware of these kinds of stuff. So maybe more of a victim.

Additionally, the white women also believed that their culture calls them to be more individualistic, as Elizabeth, an 18-year-old white student mentioned that “we see ourselves as more respectable - more rights and which have more freedoms against the certain type of things.” Safrianna, a white student, feels that this notion can sometimes be problematic, as it forces white women to fend for themselves in a time of need:

White families especially I guess an American culture tend to be not very family focused its more individual focus so there's not as much you don't immediately know to go to your family for support. It's more get on your own can handle it.

Asian women. The focus group of Sigma Psi Zeta sorority girls had a very poignant discussion about their expectations as Asian women. They talked in length about how their particular culture shape how Asian communities view sexual assault and how they would react should a woman be sexually assaulted:

Sandra: I think Asian American are more seen as submissive in their culture.

Tori: At the same time they're hypersexualized.

Christine: We actually had a workshop about Asian/Pacific Islanders and sexual assault and how they deal with it and culturally yeah, it's a lot more submissive and lower in position than men.

Min: I think because – I'm first generation – so our family values get passed down. So it's kind of passed that way.

Rowena: What would the Asian community's reactions be if someone were sexually assaulted?

Sammy: They would be ashamed to speak up.

Sandra: Especially as the Asian American community is so close – everyone knows each other – it's hard to keep a secret. Also most religions look down on if you get divorced.

Min: It's all about saving face.

Tori: In terms of our age, a lot of families stress virginity and maintaining it so basically once you lose that you're tainted.

Sammy: It's a very American and sometimes white value to sort of speak out. You think of stereotypes of American white women to be loud and they stand up for what they believe in. It's a different cultural standard.

Hispanic women. The Hispanic women all discussed similar ideas within their culture in terms of how it would affect their community's perceptions of sexual assault.

The Hispanic culture played a huge role, as described by 26-year-old Daniela:

In my culture definitely we don't talk about it [sexual assault]...only talk about sex or anything sexual. And also we respect authority so if you're raped by

someone that is your authority or the teacher or a father or a professor something you would never say anything you always respect your guardian...In the Latino community it depends on your level of education...we're a very developing country so we think we're very submissive. We still tell people speaking out about everything to not speak out about these kinds of things...we're having trouble in my culture definitely they would not talk about it.

Julia, a 36-year-old public Hispanic health student, also touched upon the notion of Hispanic women being submissive:

Based on how I've grown-up for a lot of years you obey the man...it's a male-dominated culture you do whatever the man says, you must respect him and I think that to please and to women keeping silent and not seeking help with this culture and also with domestic violence...though it is unacceptable, even cheating its okay because he's the man he's supporting me...it is kind of submissive, kind of ignorant to have the happy household...this is what you must conform to.

Practical Suggestions

Finally, when asked how they would change the way women received information about sexual assault, several of the women came up with some insightful, practical suggestions to improve how information is disseminated and shared among the community.

Education. Some of the women suggested that including a lesson about sexual assault in the school curriculum would be a good way to increase awareness and knowledge of the issue. Linda, a 21-year-old white student, felt that the topic should become more academic:

I would think that if it was a much more focused on topic in sexual health classes and sexual health seminars those sort of things, articles, a lot more people would be more acquainted with it. So there are more acquainted than they would no more, they wouldn't have to go out to find the information. Because sometimes you don't want to find information, it's better to just not. It would be better if there were more academic.

Hayley, a white government and politics major, suggested that schools start a program similar to DARE where children and parents learn about sexual assault together:

I would do it through schools like how the DARE program started people when they're younger. And then get parents organized in too to be some sort of dual child parent class or something like that. Because the details of it are what sexual assault is, just like what to do, I guess address parent acceptance sort of and so that the kids are able to talk about their parents and they can talk to their parents about if anything happened in like where to go things like that to watch out for.

However, Kelly, a white criminology major, mentioned the difficulty of getting school systems to agree to such education, feeling that since it's a "really touchy subject...more touchy than sex especially with younger kids...a lot of people don't want middle school or even high school [students] learning about rape."

Media coverage. The women also felt that there needed to be an increase in media coverage surrounding the issue of sexual assault, including broadcast and print materials. Shauna, a 22-year-old African American psychology major, offered these suggestions in accordance to this regard:

I would do a lot more TV ads...that's probably the best form of communication because a lot of people watch TV. A more magazine ads because people read magazines. And make them factual don't like, not to tell you what to do if you have been but maybe give out a lot of statistics and give out a resource where you can go up this happen to you. It can be a lot more effective.

However, the women also discussed the difficulty of obtaining more media coverage.

Meena, a 21-year-old white PR student, described the issue of sexual assault not receiving equal airtime:

I think it's just not in the media. I think news stations make the murders and robberies more important than sexual assault and I don't think that's the case. It also needs equal airtime and it's not talked about very often, and if it were to start coming up in the news I think people would be more aware.

Additionally, Michele, an Asian student, mentioned the challenge of getting sexual assault through to the media despite all of its preconceived notions:

I feel like there's always a preconceived way of how the society views rape and sexual assault so I think it's going to take a longer period of time to get it through to the media but it's going to take longer for that idea that's already ingrained in our society see it that way. Women are the victims and there's nothing they can do about it is the issue that's ingrained. I want to say to the movies and stuff because you can make a movie about anything. I guess just with time I really think that's the biggest thing.

Content changes. Finally, the women felt that campaign materials should be more explicit in terms of what they need to do or where they need to go in order to get help

should they be sexually assaulted. As Adrienne, an 18-year-old Indian business student explained:

It needs to say what to do. I feel like people won't say that because I think it's stupid that they don't nearly need to or anything. There is more helpful but specific to your area where to find help and how to get the website somewhere to go for each place.

Hispanic student Daniela also felt that materials should offer what's next for victims should they be motivated to take action after seeing the messages:

Just explain how these places you can go talk to and what would it look like if you go talk to these people what can they do for you why would you go. Giving them an image a while when it looked like to go there how there life would change if you went.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

This study used qualitative methods to explore how young women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds made meaning of sexual assault campaign materials and messages. Thirty-five Hispanic, African American, Indian American, Asian American, Arab American and white women ranging from their late teens to mid-30s were interviewed either in groups or individually to determine their perceptions, underlying attitudes, and behaviors surrounding sexual assault awareness and prevention. Using a cultural studies approach, one component of the circuit of culture – consumption – was used as a theoretical framework to understand how women made meaning of the various symbols, concepts, and languages within sexual assault communication. Additionally, women were interviewed to inquire about how they made meaning of their personal experiences and relationships regarding this particular issue.

Results revealed that the women were knowledgeable about certain aspects of sexual assault, especially its profound physical, emotional and psychological effects, but for the most part they do not actively seek out information unless they are touched by a personal experience. This could be largely due to the negative connotations and social stigma surrounding sexual assault, causing most women to remain silent in spite of a need for the issue to be more widely discussed. Furthermore, a number of different elements within campaign materials determine whether the women would favorably receive the messages, including its content, themes, and feelings evoked at the moment of consumption.

Through adopting a cultural studies approach to understand how women made meaning of sexual assault communication, the women interviewed came to understand sexual assault and its campaign environment through cultural concepts such as *sexual assault as just rape; consent; blame; resources; increasing awareness; emotional messaging; knowing you're not alone; and self-efficacy*. Though some slight differences were found in terms of how race and ethnicity played a role in receiving sexual assault media, most of the women identified more with how their age and gender affected their perceptions of the messages and the issue overall. The women felt that being a young student on a college campus greatly increased their risk; these feelings were coupled with their perception that just being a woman made them more vulnerable. However, the women provided a number of suggestions for concepts, messages, ideas, images, and media that would be most effective in reaching their particular demographic in an attempt to increase their compliance for more safe, preventative behaviors.

Theoretical Implications

Cultural theory. In conducting this study I discovered that women make meaning of the culture of sexual assault partly through their gender: most women associate themselves as a weaker, more vulnerable group that is more likely to be assaulted and victimized. In particular, the women's meaning making of the physical consequences of sexual assault portrayed their cultural emphasis on gender as many of the women discussed repercussions specific to females (i.e., rape as penetrative sex, pregnancy, certain STIs). Additionally, the women also made meaning of sexual assault through their age: as students in a large, open university, many of the women felt that sexual assault was more conducive to the environment they were situated in. A lot of the women

discussed circumstances specific to their particular age group that could cause them to be more vulnerable to sexual assault, including parties, activities with fraternities and sororities, and overall tendencies to engage in more risky behaviors.

In examining, receiving, or recalling sexual assault media (e.g., either through the messages they remembered, the brochures they read or the PSAs they watched), the women demonstrated that they made meaning of the materials through gendered and age-related symbols. For example, the Rape No More PSAs by the state of Maryland were highly criticized for the spokespeople that were chosen to deliver the message: two older, middle-aged adults, one an African American man, the other a white woman. The women felt that the messages lost their credibility and impact by not choosing actors that would speak more directly to them and would be more relatable. In addition, the women felt uncomfortable with having a man deliver a message about sexual assault, as men are more likely to be perpetrators; in this case they felt that the man in the PSA was too forceful about the issue. Thus, the women felt more connected to images that were aligned to their particular age and gender that reached out to them on a more personal level.

This study used one moment of the circuit of culture, consumption, to explore how women made meaning of a particular health and risk issue. Other cultural studies have used communication as a conduit in investigating meaning making among individuals including the consumption of campaign materials and texts (Edwards & Kreshel, 2008; Bobo, 1995; Grodin, 1991; Radway, 1984), women's health (Aldoory, 2001; Martin, 2001), and feminist topics (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003; Press & Cole, 1999). Like these studies, the findings of this thesis are grounded in the particular experiences

and memories that the communication messages evoked in the participants involved, demonstrating the realities and meanings these women shared. Women's health and risk communication researchers, along with governmental communicators and policy makers, can use the findings of this study as a baseline measure of how young women consume and make meaning of sexual assault through a cultural perspective. By coming to understand this particular point of view, communicators and researchers alike can create messages and policies that are more relevant and suitable to a population that is for the most part unaware and unknowledgeable in spite of being the most at risk.

Cultural theory and public relations. This study addresses the need for public relations scholars to consider alternative approaches to theory by exploring tenets of cultural studies as a set of dynamic and discursive meanings continually being created and shared. Though the public relations practitioner is important in getting campaign messages across, consumers decode messages in varying ways, allowing meanings to emerge that could differ from what was intended. This variance, therefore, shows that production and consumption within the circuit of culture work in tandem, playing equally important roles in the cultural process that could also cause ongoing tensions and sometimes resistance (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002). Because of this complex process within a particular culture's circulation, the articulation of production is never fully realized until the moment of consumption, as publics continuously change and attach new meanings to messages (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Thus, in creating sexual assault media and messaging, organizations such as RAINN and the CDC need to consider that audiences make meaning of messages within their own frames of reference and particular contexts, causing some messages to resonate and others to be rejected.

In addition, this study also brings attention to the publics side of the organization-public relationship, a group that is often taken for granted as static agents with specific assumptions regarding their attitudes and beliefs. By exploring the issue of sexual assault from a cultural perspective, I was able to see first-hand the discrepancies between the communication materials produced and the unique knowledge and points of view that these women exemplified. Therefore, these findings show the importance of paying heed to audiences and being cognizant to the fact that their ideals are constantly shifting. Public relations practitioners need to continuously play their role as “cultural intermediaries” (Curtin & Gaither, 2005), persistently working to create connections between organizations and publics in order to monitor how producers create meaning and how consumers receive it.

Finally, Curtin and Gaither (2007) posit that the moment of consumption within public relations practice creates the need to recognize and account for relative power in relationships (p. 140). Generally, public relations practitioners work for the producers of messages and campaigns, if they are not the producers themselves. This causes producers to usually have the upper hand in relationships, controlling which meanings are dominant and emphasized. In order to create true, two-way symmetrical communication, publics need to feel empowered and believe that they too can create significant meanings. Thus, this study is just one case example of how young women can feel efficacious in their daily routines and take action in how they perceive and make meaning of sexual assault. The findings show that these women would feel a loss of power or control should they be sexually assaulted; however, the messages they received helped them feel that they were no longer alone and could potentially speak up against the act. According to Curtin and

Gaither (2007), a violation of norms can cause individuals to feel more empowered to act against the organization or institution. Being sexually assaulted causes disruptions not only in the victim's psyche and personal life, but also causes waves within the surrounding community and society as a whole. Therefore, by feeling more empowered and in control of their bodies, thoughts and underlying beliefs, women can work together with public relations professionals and other communicators to ensure that their situated reality surrounding sexual assault is accurately represented.

Developing theory of women's health communication. The findings of this study supported a number of propositions Aldoory (2001) recommended for a theory of women's health communication. The women interviewed were more likely to pay attention to sexual assault messages if they held some sort of personal relevance for them. If the messages failed to include components such as relatable spokespersons, understandable language, and pertinent narratives and examples, then the women were not likely to invest much time and involvement in the message. This personal relevancy was very essential to them, as many women stated factors such as the ones mentioned as vital to an effective message. In fact, when asked what a sexual assault campaign they have created would look like, many of the women expressed the importance of producing materials that kept a young woman's unique perspective constantly in mind. Therefore, organizations should work to monitor women's perceptions of sexual assault in an effort to create more meaningful messages that would speak to their audiences better.

In addition, this study also supported the notion that women paid more attention to messages that directly addressed a health problem already experienced personally. For many of the women interviewed, a personal experience either as a primary or secondary

victim of sexual assault caused them to notice messages more, and even impelled some of them to actively search for information on this particular issue. However, due to the social stigma surrounding victimization, it might prove to be difficult to determine how to reach these specific audiences. Communicators should strive to remain sensitive to victims' personal experiences and aim to create messages that are informative, yet comforting and hopeful. In particular, the women identified with the message of not being alone, and felt that this idea resonated with them the most.

Finally, this study supported Aldoory's proposition that women pay heed to messages found in their preferred media. When asked how they can change the way women received sexual assault information, many of the participants discussed making it more readily available in dominantly used media channels, such as television and magazines. Others mentioned innovative means to disseminate information unique to their particular group, such as creating workshops for Greek life, handing out fliers at local bars and hanging posters in women's restrooms. Another emerging trend mentioned by several of the women was the use of new technology, such as the Internet and social media, to increase awareness of sexual assault policies and prevention. As these technologies allow for a more engaging dialogue between organizations and publics, women in particular can use these emerging channels to become their own producers of content to share and transmit information (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Thus, messages can be continuously circulated in real-time, allowing for deep conversations and creating a community that anyone can be a part of.

Research on Sexual Assault Interventions and Communication

This study extends the sexual assault communication literature by expanding what past research has shown on what women know about sexual assault and the motivating factors behind their response to messages. With the exception of one qualitative study focusing on people's knowledge and attitudes surrounding rape myths and preventative measures (Heppner et al., 1995), the majority of previous studies used quantitative surveys or experimental interventions to test how individuals learn about sexual assault. In contrast, this study delved deeper into the meaning making aspect of sexual assault communication through an exploration of cultural concepts deemed important to women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, while extant research has focused on outcome measures such as increasing knowledge and changing attitudes, this particular study focused on women's perspectives and how their experiences shape their reactions to sexual assault messages. Therefore, instead of evaluating for a shift in cognitive response, this study explored how women made meaning of the themes and content within the media messages.

In particular, this study supported Weaver's (2004) finding that women perceive sexual assault differently based on their personal involvement with the issue. However, I did not find that women who were not personally affected placed the blame on victims and considered them careless; in fact, most of the women applauded the campaign materials for their supportive message. By feeling empowered by the communication (especially by RAINN), all of the women felt strongly about taking action and demolishing the patriarchal culture that Weaver claims protects rapists over victims. As Worthington (2008) also found, when women are given the forum to speak out against sexual assault in a progressive manner, they will be apt to do so. Many of the women I

interviewed felt that by being more open and honest about the issue, women can feel more comfortable about talking about sexual assault and taking the proper preventative actions to be safe.

Practical Implications

Sexual assault communication and messaging. This study provided a number of insights on how organizations can better create and disseminate information regarding sexual assault prevention and support. First, this study shows that women connect and identify more with messages that hold some sort of personal relevance for them, especially when it comes to age. Women should be segmented by their different ages in order to create materials that better associate with their particular lifestyles and daily rituals. Secondly, being that sexual assault is a very sensitive and emotional issue, communicators should understand that women who have been victimized seek social support and want to be believed. Messages should garner a sense of comfort and hope, not placing blame on the victim and offering steps to healing and recovery. Communicating these steps are very important, as the women interviewed felt that they needed to know what to do in the event they are assaulted. Women also feel more connected to messages that offer personal narratives of survivors; their stories allow victims to not feel alone and to find the strength to help each other and move on. Finally, as the women themselves stated, organizations should work to increase the media coverage and reach of sexual assault, in an attempt to remove the social stigma surrounding the issue and to open lines of communication for victims to speak out.

Women's health and risk communication. This study presents the suggestion that health and risk communication should continue its mission of educating the public, but to

do so in a manner that connects personally to audiences and calls them to action. For many of the women, they felt turned off by the print materials that only listed statistics; they felt that it was very impersonal and unnecessary for victims seeking help. Though the information presented aimed to increase knowledge and awareness of the issue, the women felt that with a risky and sensitive issue such as sexual assault, simply stating facts would alienate women even more and decrease their feelings of self-efficacy and hope. Women therefore would feel more involved with messages that evoked a theme or deeper underlying message. For example, the women felt that the RAINN messages were very empowering and strongly identified with the message of “you’re not alone,” as they felt that it helped increase understanding and acceptance. Thus, health communicators, and especially risk communicators dealing with issues relevant to women, should research what thematic messages would resonate most and create materials addressing those particular cultural themes.

Public relations. This study offers insight on how public relations practitioners can work with organizations to engage in more fluid, dynamic conversations with their publics. By learning how to explore the meaning making of a specific group, public relations professionals can use the methodology and findings to better enact their role as “cultural intermediary,” serving as a bridge between an organization and its publics. As this study demonstrates, open communication with audiences is vital to creating and disseminating relevant and effective messages. Practitioners should conduct formative and evaluative research to determine the best channels at which to reach these audiences and create an open dialogue. Practitioners should also strive to establish the goals and values of an organization and make an effort to align its mission with the ideals and

beliefs of their various groups. By trying to learn the other entity's point of view, practitioners can work to facilitate a more active collaboration between the two groups, taking all perspectives into account and increasing mutual respect and understanding.

Limitations of Study

There were some limitations to this particular study that need to be addressed. In terms of recruitment, I was unable to interview a larger number of women within each race and ethnicity group due to time and resource limitations. If I had interviewed more women from a broader range of experiences and backgrounds, I would have been able to increase the validity of the findings in terms of how women make meaning of sexual assault campaign materials. Additionally, my sample was limited in terms of the age range of the participants. If I were able to interview women in their 40s and older, I may have gained some additional perspectives on how women make meaning of this particular issue. However, as college-aged women are the most at risk for sexual assault, I feel that it was important to focus on this particular age group to understand their motivating factors to understanding messages. Finally, as one of the women suggested, it would have been interesting to talk with women from different socioeconomic backgrounds to determine whether they differed in how they receive information. Being that all of my participants were college educated with access to medical care, my findings could have been limited to this particular point of view, hindering other perspectives from women that could be affected by sexual assault differently.

Another limitation may have been the time allowed for the women to view the print materials. At this point of the interview, I asked the women to take a look at all of the print materials I had on hand. Though I did not specify how much time they should

take with each brochure, or whether they had to read each message in full detail, I did require them to look at all of the materials, which could have prevented the women to choose the messages that most resonated with them. Also, since there were a lot of print materials to look through, the large amount of information the women read could have also resulted in fatigue, causing the women to forget which messages were the most effective for them and reducing the validity of the results.

Another limitation involves the lack of discussion on race, ethnicity and culture that could have potentially been brought up with participants. Due to the fact that only one question in the interview protocol asked participants of how particular background plays a role in how they perceive sexual assault, this methodological limitation could have prevented culture to become a focal point in the study. In addition, this question was asked at the very end of the interview, which could have prevented a lengthy discussion on culture from taking place.

Lastly, a final limitation could have been my personal bias towards the organization RAINN. As a volunteer and advocate for the organization, I naturally have very positive associations with RAINN and consider it a strong organization. My personal feelings about RAINN could have affected the manner in which I talked about the organization and presented the materials. Though most of the women spoke favorably about RAINN, any negative feedback about the materials may have caused me to react in a certain way, changing my rapport with the participant and shifting the tone of the interview.

Future Research

Cultural studies. Now that the consumption process of sexual assault was explored, this issue needs to be examined with the other components of the circuit. How the encoding process occurs within the circulation of sexual assault could provide additional insight on why certain cultural symbols are chosen and disseminated. Producers of sexual assault messages such as RAINN, the CDC and the state of Maryland could be interviewed to determine how they conceptualize their messages, what methods they use to choose their specific audiences, and what meanings are ultimately represented and shared. Studying identity could prove to be another opportunity to explore how the identities of sexual assault survivors are created and how this identity formation affects their daily lives; along with how the corporate identity of sexual assault organizations affects their structure and operations. Finally, the moment of regulation could be explored, either through current sexual assault laws and policies or from the perspective of the morality of the issue (i.e., why it is still acceptable to rape). Thus, though each moment of the circuit could be studied individually, researchers can also take a more holistic approach to determine how the risk of sexual assault is culturally situated as a whole, exploring what constitutes its shared reality.

Public relations research. Long-term ethnographic research could be conducted on a single woman or a group of women to help determine how their perceptions of sexual assault changes from their late teens to their early- to mid-adulthood years. Special note could be taken to their particular information seeking processes, their awareness of the issue, and how their personal experiences and relationships affect how they respond to the issue and its messages. This research could prove to be helpful to sexual assault organizations in creating campaign materials reaching out to specific age groups. In

another vein, organizations can test campaign messages by placing them in strategic locations and conducting participant observations. Researchers can determine how the messages are noticed, and whether women stop to consume the messages in full detail. Lastly, surveys of women could also help in determining whether the themes and conceptualizations that are found to be the most effective are applicable to a larger population, and whether these themes can also apply to other health and risk communication contexts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds who varied in terms of their anti-sexual assault activity made meaning of sexual assault communication. Using a feminist standpoint epistemology, I conducted a qualitative, cultural study to learn about how African American, Hispanic, Indian American, Asian American, Arab American and white women make meaning of sexual assault information. Using the moment of consumption within the cultural studies approach as my guiding framework, I sought to understand if and how women make meaning of sexual assault, both in campaigns and in general, and why they did so. I found that women utilize a series of cultural concepts to understand sexual assault, but mostly make meaning of the issue in terms of their age and gender. I also found the various ways in which women believe a sexual assault message to be truly effective. In addition, there are instances where women resist messages; this could be due to the fact that these women felt threatened and uncomfortable with certain message components, such as using a male spokesperson in the Rape No More PSAs. These findings contribute to cultural studies and public relations by extending how the cultural approach can be

utilized to understand women publics better in terms of creating messages that have strong implications for their safety and health. Instead of utilizing the cultural approach to explore the practitioner or organization's point of view, as was done in previous studies, this research shows how consumers make meaning of their relationships and the world around them. Therefore, by understanding how these women situated their reality surrounding sexual assault, communicators can better develop programs and interventions for audiences, reducing the social stigma surrounding the issue and working to finally break the silence.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we begin our conversation, may I have your permission to audiotape the interview so that I can gather details later?

(If no), Okay, I understand. Let's get started with the interview...

(If yes), Great! Thank you! Let's get started with the interview...

As you know, I'm exploring how women make meaning of sexual assault campaigns. Before we get started with the main questions, let's learn a little more about you.

1. What does the word "health" mean to you?
 - a. What health issues do you most frequently think about? Why?
2. What does the word "health risk" mean to you?
3. What media do you use the most often to get health information?
 - a. Did you find these places helpful? Why?
4. Would you consider sexual assault a health risk?
5. How would you define sexual assault?
6. What do you think sexual assault means to your family?
7. What do you think sexual assault means to your friends?
8. What comes to your mind when I mention sexual assault?
9. Where would you turn to for information on sexual assault?
10. Have you seen sexual assault in the media? (Film, TV, etc.)
11. What messages have you seen on sexual assault?
 - a. Can you describe them?
 - b. What did they communicate to you?
 - c. How did you feel receiving them?
 - d. What common themes did you find in these messages?
12. Would you feel that sexual assault information and resources are readily available to you?

- a. Why or why not?

Please look at the following materials (Campaign environment).

13. How well do you feel like the messages in these materials address your needs for information?
14. How do these messages make you feel?
15. To what extent do you think these messages are targeted to you?
a. If they are not, whom do you believe the messages target?
16. How well do you feel you comply with the messages sent to you regarding sexual assault?
17. How does your level of compliance make you feel?
18. How would you change the messages if you could make them “talk” to you better?

Please look at the following materials (RAINN)

19. What are some differences between this message and the other materials you looked at?
20. Did these messages make you feel differently?
21. Do you feel that you can comply with one campaign more than the other?
22. If you could change the way that women receive information about sexual assault how would you change it?
23. If you could design your own sexual assault campaign, what would it look like?
24. How do you feel about sexual assault as a(n) African American/Hispanic/Asian American/Caucasian woman that may be different or unique from other groups affected by sexual assault?

Demographics: Age, Sex, Race, Year, Major

Initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Project Title	<i>Defining Young Women's Involvement with Sexual Assault Messages</i>
Why is this research being done?	<i>This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Linda Aldoory and Ms. Rowena Briones at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a female undergraduate student. The purpose of this research project is to explore how you perceive the issue of sexual assault and sexual assault prevention.</i>
What will I be asked to do?	<i>The procedures involve interviewing female undergraduate students. Interviews will be conducted in person at a date and time determined by you and the researcher. They will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour and will be audiotaped. Questions will focus on how you perceive the problem of sexual assault and prevention, and your reactions to sexual assault PSAs and print materials. Examples include: Do you consider sexual assault a major concern on college campuses? Where would you go to obtain information on sexual assault? Do you feel that you can comply with current sexual assault prevention messages?</i>

Project Title	<i>Defining Young Women's Involvement with Sexual Assault Messages</i>
What about confidentiality?	<p><i>This research project involves audiotaping you for purposes of accuracy in data collection. Those that refuse to be audiotaped may still participate in the study without any penalty. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, your identity will remain confidential unless you give your consent to disclose such information.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, your name will not be identified or linked to the data at any time. The data you provide through your responses will not be shared with others except in aggregate form, grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. Only the principal and student investigators will have access to the names of the participants.</i></p> <p><i>Data will be securely stored on the investigators' computers, several hard disks, and audiotapes. Hard copies and audiotapes of the data will remain in the possession of the student investigator at her locked, home office. Informed consent forms will be stored separately from any and all data. All data including audiotapes will be destroyed (i.e. shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before minimum of five years after data collection. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p> <p>____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study ____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this Study</p>

<p>What are the risks of this research?</p>	<p><i>There may be some risk, in terms of identification, from participating in this research study and being audiotaped. However, all information will be kept confidential as described above. Your name will not be identified or linked to the data you provide at any time unless you give your express consent to reveal these identities. Also, though sexual assault is a sensitive issue, you will not be asked any questions concerning personal experiences that could cause emotional or psychological harm. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, all audiotapes and other records will be destroyed.</i></p> <p>_____ I agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.</p>
<p>What are the benefits of this research?</p>	<p><i>This research may help you personally in that you will become more aware of sexual assault. This research could also benefit non-profit organizations and coalitions by offering recommendations on creating campaigns targeted towards your demographic. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of this issue..</i></p>
<p>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</p>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. You also may feel free to ask questions about the research and/or to decline to answer certain questions. Following your initial interview, the researcher may determine that follow-up questions or even a second interview may help clarify points raised during the interview process. If you agree to be contacted for follow-up, you may indicate your preferred method of contact to ensure confidentiality. In addition, if in-person follow-up is necessary, you and the researcher will determine together a private location in which to meet. Please indicate your consent or decline your consent to follow-up contact by initialing the appropriate statement below:</i></p> <p>_____ I agree to be re-contacted by the researchers to obtain follow-up information on my interview responses.</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to be re-contacted by the researchers to obtain follow-up information on my interview responses.</p>

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Initials _____ Date _____

What if I have questions?	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Dr. Linda Aldoory in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Aldoory at 301-405-6528 or at laldoory@umd.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678</i></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <p><i>you are at least 18 years of age,;</i></p> <p><i>the research has been explained to you;</i></p> <p><i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i></p> <p><i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Project Title	<i>Defining Young Women's Involvement with Sexual Assault Messages</i>
Why is this research being done?	<i>This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Linda Aldoory and Ms. Rowena Briones at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a female undergraduate student. The purpose of this research project is to explore how you perceive the issue of sexual assault and sexual assault prevention.</i>
What will I be asked to do?	<i>The procedures involve interviewing female undergraduate students in a series of focus groups. These groups will be conducted in person at a date and time determined by you and the researcher. They will last approximately one to two hours and will be audiotaped. Questions will focus on how you perceive the problem of sexual assault and prevention, and your reactions to sexual assault PSAs and print materials. Examples include: Do you consider sexual assault a major concern on college campuses? Where would you go to obtain information on sexual assault? How well do you feel like the messages in these materials address your needs for information?</i>

Project Title	<i>Defining Young Women's Involvement with Sexual Assault Messages</i>
What about confidentiality?	<p><i>This research project involves audiotaping you for purposes of accuracy in data collection. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, your identity will remain confidential in the write-up of the report unless you give your consent to disclose such information.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, your name will not be identified or linked to the data at any time. The data you provide through your responses will not be shared with others except in aggregate form, grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. Only the principal and student investigators will have access to the names of the participants.</i></p> <p><i>Data will be securely stored on the investigators' computers, several hard disks, and audiotapes. Hard copies and audiotapes of the data will remain in the possession of the student investigator at her locked, home office. Informed consent forms will be stored separately from any and all data. All data including audiotapes will be destroyed (i.e. shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before minimum of five years after data collection. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p> <p>____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study ____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this Study</p>

<p>What are the risks of this research?</p>	<p><i>There may be some risk, in terms of identification, from participating in this research study and being audiotaped. However, all information will be kept confidential as described above. Your name will not be identified or linked to the data you provide at any time unless you give your express consent to reveal these identities. Also, though sexual assault is a sensitive issue, you will not be asked any questions concerning personal experiences that could cause emotional or psychological harm. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, all audiotapes and other records will be destroyed.</i></p> <p>_____ I agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.</p>
<p>What are the benefits of this research?</p>	<p><i>This research may help you personally in that you will become more aware of sexual assault. This research could also benefit non-profit organizations and coalitions by offering recommendations on creating campaigns targeted towards your demographic. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of this issue..</i></p>
<p>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</p>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. You also may feel free to ask questions about the research and/or to decline to answer certain questions. Following your initial interview, the researcher may determine that follow-up questions or even a second interview may help clarify points raised during the interview process. If you agree to be contacted for follow-up, you may indicate your preferred method of contact to ensure confidentiality. In addition, if in-person follow-up is necessary, you and the researcher will determine together a private location in which to meet. Please indicate your consent or decline your consent to follow-up contact by initialing the appropriate statement below:</i></p> <p>_____ I agree to be re-contacted by the researchers to obtain follow-up information on my interview responses.</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to be re-contacted by the researchers to obtain follow-up information on my interview responses.</p>

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Initials _____ Date _____

What if I have questions?	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Dr. Linda Aldoory in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Aldoory at 301-405-6528 or at laldoory@umd.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678</i></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>you are at least 18 years of age,;</i> <i>the research has been explained to you;</i> <i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i> <i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i> 	
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

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