“LOCKER ROOM TALK”: THE IMPACT OF MEN DEGRADING WOMEN TO OTHER MEN

by

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Abstract

The present research examines the effects of “locker room talk” by exploring whether conversations among men about sexual activity with women give rise to sexist and rape-promoting attitudes. Male participants listened to an audio recording of either degrading or respectful “locker room talk”. Those exposed to the degrading conversation were expected to exhibit more negative attitudes toward women and stronger rape condoning attitudes. In addition, sexist males were expected to delegate masculine status to men who degraded women. Hypothesis one was not supported, but hypothesis two received partial support: Relative to men lower in sexism, males with higher sexism scores allocated masculine status to men who talked about their sexual encounters regardless of the conversation’s degrading or respectful nature. Men scoring higher in sexism were more likely to endorse rape-supportive attitudes, to hold negative attitudes towards women, and to objectify the woman being discussed in the conversation.
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“Locker room talk”: The impact of men degrading women to other men

At the University of Ottawa on February 10th 2014, Anne-Marie Roy (age 24), who was president of the student union, was informed about a Facebook exchange about her held among five male students in the student union (CBC News, 2014). The messages outlined various degrading and violent sexual activities the male students would like to inflict on her. Phrases included “someone should punish her with their shaft” and “I do believe with my reputation I would destroy her”. Roy took immediate action to address the issue within the university. Rather than an apology, the male students’ response was to threaten legal action due to infringement of their privacy. When the male students dropped the law suit and provided an apology, one perpetrator stated this form of communication is common among men and is often a type of “locker room talk” they see as harmless (CBC News). “Locker room talk” is the term recently made popular within the Donald Trump campaign; it refers to men discussing their sexual acts against women in a degrading manner (New York Times, 2016) ¹.

Anne Marie’s case, and many others like it, display a darker side of university campus life for women. Although university is imagined to be a time of personal and intellectual growth and exploration, for many women in their 20s university is a time when tragedy strikes. Within Canadian universities, one in four women is sexually assaulted (Dekeserdy & Kelly, 1995; Senn et al, 2015). In fact, women in university are three times more likely to be the victims of sexual assault compared to women in the general population

¹ Within this thesis, I will use the phrase “locker room talk” in quotations in reference to Donald Trump’s use of the phrase. This phrase has been criticized for reinforcing the stereotype of male athletes as sexist (Washington Post, 2016) https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/athletes-take-issue-with-trump-over-locker-room-talk/2016/10/09/68458108-8e93-11e6-bc00-1a9756d4111b_story.html. There is, however, evidence that degrading talk about women is common among male sports teams and fraternities (Murnen, S. K., & Kohlman, M. H. (2007))
(White & Smith, 2004). These high rates are surprising given that men with higher education are less likely than those without a higher education to endorse rape myths, gender stereotypes, and pro-violence attitudes (Burt, 1980). The apparent contradiction suggests a situational factor within the university setting may inadvertently promote sexual violence towards women and increase men’s proclivity to perpetrate violence against women during this time of their life.

University is a time when individuals often find themselves in gendered (i.e., all male or all female) groups. Gendered groups occur in campus residences, sports teams, and in certain disciplines such as engineering (UNBC Housing & Residence, 2016; Murnen, & Kohlman, 2007). Within all-male groups, communication about sexual activity has increased (Sprecher, Hariss, & Meyers, 2008) and in some cases, is extremely degrading toward women (CBC News, 2011; Flood, 2008; Murnen, & Kohlman; Murnen, 2000; UNBC Housing & Residence). For my master’s thesis research, I explored the impact of men’s degrading conversations on their attitudes towards women and rape, and perceptions of masculine status.

**What is Sexual Assault?**

Although sexual assailants are often viewed as the unknown creep, women are most likely to be sexually assaulted by someone they know such as classmates, friends, and dating partners (Kanin 1984; Stats Canada, 2008). Approximately 41% of female undergraduates experienced some form of sexual assault on a date (Schwartz, Dekeeseredy, Tait, & Alvi 2001). Central to the definition of sexual assault is unwantedness. Sexual assault includes unwanted sexual contact such as groping and kissing when a woman has clearly indicated she does not want the contact (Davis, Gilmore, Strappenbeck, Balsan, George, & Norris 2014). Unwantedness, however, also includes situations where a woman has not been able to or felt
safe enough to explicitly fight off an attack. These types of situations take many forms, such as engaging in sex when a woman is too intoxicated to consent, using or threatening physical force to obtain sex, making untruthful statements to obtain sex, or overwhelming women with continuous pressure to engage in sex (Davis, et al.). Therefore, an incident does not need to be physically violent to constitute a sexual assault.

**Impacts of Sexual Assault**

Stranger rape is commonly believed to be much more detrimental to victims, both physically and psychologically, than rape by an acquaintance. This, however, is not the case. According to Frazier and Seals (1997), sexual assault is harmful and the impacts can be long lasting whether an acquaintance or a stranger assault a woman. Sexual assaults perpetrated by both strangers and acquaintances have been associated with negative psychological outcomes in survivors including depression, anxiety, hostility, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Frazier & Seals). In fact, women assaulted by an acquaintance experienced significantly higher disturbances in beliefs about themselves and the world compared to victims of stranger rape (Frazier & Seals). More specifically, these women felt less power and control, felt other people were less valuable and worthy of respect, felt less comfortable being alone, and felt less connected with others than victims of stranger rape (Frazier & Seals). Furthermore, women who know their perpetrator are more likely to blame the assault on their own behavior rather than on the behavior of the attacker (Frazier & Seals). These findings show that young women can experience severe impacts as a result of sexual assault, regardless of whether they are assaulted by a stranger or an acquaintance.

My interest in undertaking this research was to discover ways to reduce male sexual violence against women. Individuals from any demographic group can be vulnerable to sexual assault. Indeed, according to statistics Canada an individual with mental or physical
illness is most likely to become a victim, followed by homosexuals or bisexuals, and then students. (Stats Canada, 2014). The vast majority of sexual assault victims, however, are women. In 2014, 555,000 women reported incidents of sexual assault compared to 80,000 men (Stats Canada, 2014). Members of privileged social groups such as white men can also be the subject of degrading “locker room talk” and therefore might be vulnerable to the negative outcomes of these degrading depictions. There is, however, an important distinction between privileged and marginalized groups in their vulnerability to violence (Horan & Beauard, 2018). Therefore, one may suspect degrading depictions of members of privileged groups such as white men are not likely to influence general attitudes toward men and as a result are not likely to increase the risk of violence toward men in general. With marginalized groups, however, there are more pervasive negative stereotypes and negative attitudes (Horan & Beauard). If these pervasive attitudes are reified and reinforced by degrading conversations, there is a possibility the group members as a whole becomes more at risk of the outcomes of negative attitudes such as violence.

The Young Sexually Aggressive Male

There is a common misconception that sexually aggressive acts are perpetrated primarily by sexual sadists, but this is not the case (Schwartz & Dekeserdy, 1997). While sexual sadists gain pleasure from the pain they are causing their victim, most rapists within university simply disregard the pain they are causing their victims (Schwartz & Dekeserdy). “These are the men who have learned that women’s feelings don’t count - what counts is that they score” (Schmidt & Dekeserdy, p. 51). The typical rapist is described as a man who dismisses women’s wishes and desires in favor of his own desires and goals, feels the need to gain control, is focused on conquest rather than intimacy, and will gain sex by any means necessary (Schwartz & Dekeserdy).
Attitudes toward Rape and Sexual Violence

Relative to men who do not perpetrate sexual violence, men who sexually assault women hold a different set of attitudes towards women and toward rape (Muehlenhard & Falcon, 1990; Sierra, Santos-Iglesias, Gutiérrez-Quintanilla, Bermúdez, & Buela-Casal, 2010). Rape-supporting beliefs include thinking that women who want to have sex often say they do not want to, that men are justified in raping a woman when she has shown an interest in any level of physical intimacy, and that women enjoy forced sex (Fisher, Davis, Yarber, & Davis, 2013). Not surprisingly, attitudes towards rape are very good predictors of sexual violence. Men who hold more rape-supporting attitudes report greater willingness to commit rape, report more past experiences of perpetrating violence against women, and demonstrate more aggression towards women in controlled laboratory experiments (Malamuth & Donnerstein 1982; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Malamuth, 1981; Donnerstein 1980a, b; Donnerstein, 1984). Furthermore, the attitude profile of university men who reported that they would be likely to commit rape if not caught is very similar to convicted sex offenders (Malamuth). When men have such negative attitudes towards women, their behaviour appears to be significantly influenced.

Attitudes towards Women and Sexual Violence

Although one would expect rape-condoning attitudes to give rise to men’s sexual violence, less extreme attitudes towards women such as endorsement of traditional gender roles have also been linked to sexual violence (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1973). These attitudes are measured with items such as, “women should behave differently than men most of the time”, “men should not hold jobs traditionally held by women”, or “swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than of a man” (Golde, Strassburg, Turner, & Lowe, 2000 pg. 227; Spence et al. pg.1). Traditional attitudes towards women are
often deemed negative because they either describe women as inferior to men or they assign women to limited and inflexible gender roles. Relative to men who endorse more progressive ideas of women, men who endorse traditional gender role exhibit more sexual violence (Muehlenhard & Falcon, 1990). Correlational studies demonstrate that traditional and sexist attitudes are associated with verbally arguing, forcing, or placing guilt on a woman to obtain sex and physically forcing or violently assaulting a woman to obtain sex (Golde et al.; Muehlenhard & Falcon). Although correlation does not establish causation, the strength of the relationships between these attitudes and behavior leads many researchers to use sexist attitudes and rape-condoning attitudes as proxies for sexual violence.

**Degrading Women and Rape-Condoning Attitudes**

Exposure to media in which men are degrading women appears to impact men’s attitudes toward women and rape (Golde, Strassberb, Turner, & Lowe, 2000; Zillman & Bryant, 1982). Degrading a person occurs when the person’s worth as an individual is reduced by the behaviour or words of another person (Golde, et al). Degrading content may take the form of treating a woman as an object solely for the purpose of a man’s pleasure (Golde, et al). Analyses of music videos identify three components of sexually-degrading content (Primack, Gold, Schwartz, & Dalton, 2008): when a woman is objectified, meaning she is treated as a man’s sexual object existing for the purpose of his sexual pleasure; when a women’s value is reduced to her physical attributes, such as when she is valued exclusively for her large breasts or other body parts; and when men display an extremely large sexual appetite, meaning they have an overbearing desire for sexual intercourse. Objectification is therefore a central theme of sexually degrading content.

In terms of creating rape-condoning attitudes, studies comparing the impact of erotic and degrading videos suggest that degrading content is more problematic than sexual content.
This important distinction was discovered in an experiment that independently manipulated degrading communication and type of activity (sexual versus not-sexual). Men reported the strongest rape-supportive attitudes after viewing videos of women being degraded regardless of activity (Golde, et al., 2000). Sexual explicitness alone had no effect on rape-condoning attitudes (Golde, et al). This study demonstrates that witnessing a man degrade a woman can affect men’s beliefs around sexual violence. Beyond attitudes, other research on degrading pornography/stimuli has demonstrated that degrading content also changes other interaction behaviors such as increasing men’s use of sexual references and their tendency to interrupt women (Check & Gulieon, 1989; Mulac, Jansma, Linz, 2002).

The Impact of Degrading “Locker Room Talk”

The research described above investigating the impact of disrespectful and degrading treatment of women exposed participants to face-to-face interactions between men and women. In other words, participants watched a man treat a woman disrespectfully. “Locker-room talk” is a less direct from of dehumanizing and disrespectful conduct because the behavior does not happen in face-to-face interactions. In the present study, I explore whether this less direct form of degrading communication can have a similar impact on men’s attitudes and behavior. For the purpose of this study, I will define “locker room talk” or degrading sex talk as the act of using degrading language to discuss sexual activity that occurred with a woman who is absent during the conversation.

University Environment and All-Male Groups

More than many other environments, university creates the opportunity for men to participate in numerous all-male groups (Donelly, Norman, & Kidd, 2013; Mann & Diprete, 2013; UNBC Housing & Residences, 2016). Within university residences, same-gendered housing is the norm for many first-year students. At the University of Northern British
Columbia (UNBC), students have to be 19 and older and have lived on residence for at least one year before they can apply for mixed-gendered dorms (UNBC Housing & Residences). Similar requirements exist at other universities across BC (e.g., UBC Residences & Housing). Certain academic disciplines remain male-dominated as well. Although more women are attending university than men, there are still high rates of gender segregation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Mann & Diprete). Engineering is the most male-dominated field. In fact, women earn fewer degrees in engineering than any other discipline (Mann & Diprete). In addition to residences and classrooms, athletic teams are also highly gender-segregated (Donelly, et al.). Being a varsity athlete on a sports team can be the gold standard of male status. Unique to the university environment same-sex housing, classrooms, and sports teams can result in men frequently spending time in all-male groups.

Men Rely on Their Peers for Information about Sex

More than ever before, young men are talking with their peers about sex (Sprecher, Harris & Meyers, 2008; Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2015). In a survey of 6,000 college students exploring sources of sex information and sexual conversations, respondents reported receiving sex education more from their peers and media than from their parents (Sprecher, et al). Indeed, young men were significantly more likely to receive education and discuss sexual experiences with their same-sex peers compared to their mother, father, dating partner, siblings, and teachers or from reading and media. (Sprecher et al.). Therefore, men appear to derive the majority of information about sexual activity from their peers rather than from information sources that may provide a more mature and nuanced perspectives on sexuality.

Gendered groupings have been shown to influence the degree to which men use
degrading terms when talking about sex and women. When asked to imagine themselves conversing about sex and sexual anatomy with different interaction partners (e.g., romantic partner, a group of close female and male friends, or a group of all-male close friends), university men who imagined conversing in all-male groups used the most degrading language (e.g. female genitals = cunt; male genitals = meat; copulation = fucking, screwing (Murnen, 2000). This effect was particularly strong among men in fraternities (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). The above research demonstrates that degrading sexual content can be a part of men’s conversations about sex, particularly in all-male groups.

Young men’s discussions about their sexual experiences have been described as sexual storytelling (Flood, 2008). Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with Australian university men and men in a military academy, sexual story telling was common and included detailed accounts of sexual episodes, descriptions of sex with a prized or ugly women, and depraved sexual acts (Flood). Below, two young men from Flood’s study, described how discussion of sex was a weekly occurrence,

We all talk about sex, all the time. And, ah, I’ll tell ‘em everything. You know, I had her, on a table, with her head hangin’ over the edge, and she was suckin’ on my nuts while I was pullin’ myself off and playin’ with her. And the boys just can’t believe it, you know? . . . We used to actually, every Sunday night, meet in my room; there were about ten boys. . . And we’d just talk about our fuckings for the weekend. And just talk and talk and talk. “You’ll never believe what I did. I hooked up with this chick and made ‘er do this,” you know? Just, talk about it all the time. (Flood, 2008, p. 353).

Within this sample of young military and college men, it appears that discussions about sex were common and tended toward degrading women.

Does “Locker Room Talk” affect Attitudes and Behaviour toward Women?

Presently, there is little research examining the impact of degrading “locker room talk”, on men’s attitudes toward women generally or more specifically on men’s attitudes and behavior toward women. One experiment investigating “locker room talk” suggests that a
woman who is the target of the degrading talk is viewed negatively by those who hear the conversation about her (Murnen, 2000). The participants in this study listened to audio tapes of two men speaking about the sexual activity of a woman in either a degrading or non-degrading manner. Both male and female participants exposed to the degrading conversation derogated the female sexual partner by rating her as less likable, less moral, and more aggressive than a woman who was not degraded (Murnen). These results suggest that degrading sex talk undermines attitudes toward a specific woman. In addition to replicating the Murnen study, the present research seeks to extend this research by examining whether exposure to degrading “locker-room talk” affects men’s attitudes toward women more generally and their attitudes toward rape. Therefore, the present study will examine whether “locker-room talk” does more than damage a specific woman’s reputation, it will explore whether this type of conversation can, in essence, affect the reputation of all women (i.e., can increase sexist attitudes) and can increase attitudes that condone rape.

The Present Study

The 2005 NBC Universal video of Donald Trump’s infamous statements that he kisses women he meets and grabs their pussy whenever he wants were highly published (New York Times, 2016). The first objective of the present study tests whether exposure to this kind of degrading talk about women influences men’s general attitudes toward women and toward rape. Using a similar design to Murnen (2000), male participants were exposed to either a degrading or non-degrading audio recording of a man talking with friends about a sexual experience. After exposure to this conversation, men’s specific attitudes toward the woman involved in the sexual activity and well as their general attitudes toward women and rape were measured. I hypothesized that when men were exposed to a degrading conversation about a woman, their attitudes toward rape would temporarily become more
permissive and attitudes toward women temporarily become more sexist relative to men who were exposed to a respectful depiction of the sexual encounter.

**Masculine ideology and male status.** The research described above explores the impact of exposure to degrading interactions. The second issue explored in this thesis is men’s motivation for engaging in “locker room talk”. According to masculine ideology (Flood, 2008; Murnen 2000), men who sexually degrade women might do so to increase their status among other men (Gilmore 1995). Masculine ideology is a belief system within our society that emphasizes the importance of men adhering to culturally-appropriate masculine standards. (Thompson, Pleck & Ferrera, 1992). Standards of masculinity include being tough, strong, decisive, impersonal, unsympathetic, unemotional; and most pertinent to our topic, being sexually experienced with women (Flood, 2008; Thompson, et al.). Studies examining the content of male communication and its impact on masculine status yield mixed evidence that degrading women enhances men’s status in other men’s eyes. In an experiment in which participants listened to an audio-taped conversation of unknown men talking about the sexual activity with a woman, Murnen (2000) found that men who degraded women were not judged as more masculine than non-degraders by either men or women. In fact, quite the opposite, degraders were viewed as lower in intelligence and were liked less than non-degraders (Murnen). If evaluations of intelligence confer status and if liking determines whether people will continue to interact with an individual, these results suggest, contrary to masculine ideology, that degraders will receive limited status and influence among their peers. Other research involving groups of male friends, however, suggest that young men do communicate about their sexual experiences in order to gain status among other men (Cohen 2009; Flood, 2008; Gilmore 1995). The experimental study therefore might have missed some important elements of communication in real male-friendship groups.
Some features of the audio recording used by Murnen (2000) might explain why degraders were viewed negatively rather than positively. Murnen used research assistants rather than experienced actors to speak on the audio tapes. The research assistants might have portrayed all characters as lifeless and non-masculine. Consequently, the audio tapes may not have captured the masculine qualities and friendly camaraderie found within a real conversation among young male friends. In addition, due to their investment in the research area, the research assistants might have portrayed the non-degraders as more likable and intelligent than the degraders. It would be quite challenging for non-experienced actors to ensure very similar demeanors across the two situations.

For the present study, special efforts were taken to create audio tapes that ensured the characters in both experimental conditions were portrayed as charismatic and as having very positive friendship relations. To do this, actors and a professional audio technician were hired. This also ensured very good quality recordings with realistic background noise (locker room noise). By providing a more realistic audio recording, I hope to have created a better representation of exposure to “locker room talk” among friends. To assess masculine status, participants rated the male talking about his sexual experience in the audio tape and indicated their willingness to interact with the group of men in a future discussion. According to the masculine ideology, the degrader will be conferred higher masculine status than the respectful guy.

Another possible explanation for the harsh judgments of the degrader in Murnen (2000) is that men lower in sexism are, in fact, appalled by men who degrade women and it is only sexist men who grant status to men who degrade women. To explore this possibility in the present research, participants were pretested on sexist attitudes. I hypothesized that sexist males would support the masculine ideology hypothesis and view men that degrade women,
relative to men who talk respectfully about women, as more masculine. Given that masculine status is a central part of the identity of sexist males (Cohen 2009; Gilmore 1995), these men were also predicted to indicate more liking, more status, and greater desire to meet with men who degrade women than men who are respectful of women. Non-sexist men, in contrast, will not differentiate masculinity on the basis of degrading talk and will prefer interacting with non-degraders than degraders.

Hypothesis 1: Relative to those who listened to a respectful conversation, participants who were exposed to a sexually-objectifying conversation were expected to report slightly more negative attitudes toward women and slightly less negative attitudes toward rape, and show differences in perceptions of the object (the women being talked about), and the subject (the male speaking of his sexual experience) of the conversation.

Hypothesis 2: Sexist men were expected to accord men who degrade women higher masculine status than men who speak respectfully of their sexual experiences.

Method

Participants

A total of 51 male psychology undergraduates were recruited to participate in the study, however technical errors with the online survey resulted in 43 valid participant surveys. I announced the study and instructions in psychology classes and put up posters around campus for recruitment. The men within the sample were between the ages 18-32 years, primarily heterosexual (93%), in first or second year of university (70%), single (76%), and spoke English as a first language (95%). A larger percentage of the sample were Caucasian males (30%), followed by men who identified themselves as Canadian (25%), Asian (20%), European (10%), and First Nations (10%) decent.
Measures

**Audio tape believability.** Participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree) whether the audio was believable, interesting, and realistic.

**Attitudes toward women, toward sexual violence and toward the woman who was the subject of the sexual discussion.**

**Sexism.** Two measures were used to assess sexist attitudes: The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske 1996) and the short form of the updated Attitudes towards Women Scale (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory was used for assessing pretest sexism.

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory is a 22-item scale that assess two forms of sexism (benevolent and hostile) using a 6-point Likert scale (0 = Disagree Strongly to 5 = Agree Strongly). Benevolent sexism is placing women in stereotypically restricted roles, and viewing women as fragile or needing to be saved (Glick & Fiske 1996). Selected items include “a good woman should be set on a pedestal”, or “women should be cherished and protected by men” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 500). Hostile sexism, also known as prejudice toward women, assesses the extent to which men feel women are lesser than men and are attempting to control men through feminism or seduction (Glick & Fiske). Selected items include, “women are too easily offended”, or “most women interpret innocent remarks are sexist” (Glick & Fiske, 1996 p. 500). The Ambivalent Sexism Scale has high test re-test reliability ($r = .87$, Sakalli-Uğurlu, 2002). The Cronbach alpha of .85 for the scale as a whole indicates a high degree of internal consistency. Reliability results for the total Ambivalent Sexism Scale, and the two major subscales (hostile and benevolent sexism) across six different studies demonstrated sufficient internal consistency (Glick & Fiske).

The Attitudes towards Women Scale focuses on women’s roles, rights, appearance,
and capabilities, and includes items such as “Women should behave differently from men most of the time”, “Men should not hold jobs traditionally held by women”, and “Men are more rational than women. These items are endorsed on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = Agree Strongly, 2 = Agree Mildly, 3 = Disagree Mildly, and 4 = Disagree Strongly (high scores indicate pro-women) scale. Test-retest reliability is above $r = .90$, and the measure is reasonably internal consistent: Cronbach alpha of .73, and stable over time: test-retest $r = .86$ (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973).

**Rape supportive attitudes.** The Rape Supportive Attitude Scale is a 20-item scale assessing beliefs that support or promote rape and beliefs hostile to rape victims (Lottes, 1988). Sample items include “being roughed up is sexually stimulating to a woman”, and “a man has some justification to forcing a female to have sex with him when she led him to believe she wanted to go to bed with him” (Lottes). Items are answered on a 5-point Likert scale; from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The measure demonstrates high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .91; factor loadings of .39 or greater), and strong convergent validity with non-egalitarian gender role beliefs ($r = .64$), adverse sexual beliefs ($r = .70$), and traditional attitudes towards female sexuality ($r = .50$) (Lottes).

**Evaluation of the women discussed in the audio tape.** Ten items from Murnen (2000) were used to assess participants’ evaluations of the woman who was the subject of the sexual discussion: her level of intelligence, morality, sexual activity, sexual attraction, aggression, likability, self-esteem, self-confidence, masculinity, and femininity on a 7-point scale (ranging from, for example, -3 = unlikable to +3 = extremely likable).

**Masculine Status.** Craig, Corey and Josh are the names of the three men in the audio conversation. Josh is the man discussing his sexual experience, Craig and Corey are his friends engaging in the conversation.
**Evaluation of Josh.** Ten items from Murnen (2000) assessed participants’ evaluations of Josh’s’ level of intelligence, morality, sexual activity, sexual attractiveness, aggression, likability, self-esteem, self-confidence, masculinity, and femininity on seven point scales (e.g., -3 = unlikable to +3 = extremely likable).

**Masculine Status.** Participants rated the amount of masculine status of each man in a real group of friends on a 5-point scale (1 = high masculine, 2 = somewhat high, 3= medium, 4 = little, 5 = no masculine status). Participants were also asked to rate their “willingness to hang out with this group of men in future interactions?” on a 7-point scale that ranged from -3 =very unlikely to +3= very likely.

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited from the winter semester psychology classes and received a 1% bonus percentage as compensation. Participants signed up for the study using the psychology department’s online research participation system (sona system), at which time they completed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), which served as the measure of pretest sexism.

The experimental sessions took place later in the semester in a computer lab that accommodated up to 20 participants. All components of the experiment were completed on the computer using psychology departments’ survey systems. Participants were informed by the male experimenter that the study was investigating the effects of “locker room talk” on men’s attitudes towards women. To ensure privacy in responding, participants were given individual headsets to listen to the audio recordings and, as recommended by Duran, Megais, and Moya (2016), were spaced two computer desks apart. Participants were informed that there were different audio recordings and that the conversations include sexually-explicit content. To comply with the requirement from the UNBC Human Ethics committee,
deception was not used to hide the purpose of the experiment. Participants completed a consent form that described the full purpose of the study with a trigger warning. Participants were informed that all data collected would be kept completely confidential and that they could leave the study at any time without penalties.

**Audio conversations.** Participants listened to one of two short (i.e., 2 minute) conversations of three men discussing a heterosexual experience from the night before: one conversation was degrading and one was respectful (see Appendix A). The script for these conversations were based on those developed by Murnen (2000). The respectful conversation included a description of consensual causal sex with a female partner after going out and dancing with her. Josh discusses how “I met this girl who was really cool” and “we got together and had sex” (Murnen, 2000, p. 325). The degrading conversation mirrors the respectful conversation, but included degrading descriptor terms and references. For example, Josh discusses how “I met a girl with a really nice ass”, and “I fucked her good” (Murnen, 2000, p. 325). North American men are frequently exposed to conversations similar to those represented in the experimental audio tapes (Gorman, Turner, Fish 2010; Primack et al, 2008; Peter & Valkenberg 2006).

Participants were randomly assigned to either the degrading or the respectful sexual conversation. In addition to the audio recordings, participants were provided with a written script of the conversation so they were able to view the names of the characters in the audio. After listening to the audio recording, participants answered questions about their perceptions of the men in the group (masculinity, status, likability), and the women described in the conversation. Next, participants completed the measures of attitudes toward women and toward sexual coercion.
Debriefing. At the end of the experiment, participants were given more information about the study and the importance of the research. An extremely important aspect of the debriefing was to reverse any negative attitude change toward women and toward rape. To do this, I carefully explained the purpose of the study, the predicted effect, and the importance of understanding that the study may have created attitudes that are harmful to women. This type of education about the study has been shown to reverse the impact of the exposure to sexist and degrading content (Malamuth & Check, 1985). Research assessing the effects of debriefing after increasing rape-condoning attitudes showed that participants who were unknowingly exposed to materials that induced rape-supportive attitudes and then properly debriefed were less inclined to show rape myths than controls (those not exposed or debriefed) (Malamuth & Check). This means participants actually become more educated about the effects of exposure to violence against women on their own sexual behavior and become more aware of socialization factors that are contributing to the high rates of sexual assault on campus. Therefore, the research educates university men on sexual assault, which in itself is a protective outcome. Participants were asked to not discuss the experiment with other students and to sign a commitment to keep the details of the study to themselves. This requirement is extremely important in studies involving deception, but less important in studies that do not involve deception. Once the debriefing was complete participants were asked to complete a few questions regarding their experience, which assessed male perceptions of the effects of the study on their temporary attitudes towards women. Participants reported no shifts in negative attitudes towards women as a result of the experiment.

Workshop. The UNBC Ethics Committee was quite concerned that this study might cause distress or harm to male participants by triggering past experiences of sexual abuse or
by exposing them to callous and disrespectful behavior. Therefore, after completing the
debriefing, participants had the option to stay for a 20-minute discussion workshop run by a
male FAM (Fellas Addressing Masculinity) leader. This workshop was designed to reduce
any harm caused to the male participants or to women generally from exposing the male
participants to degrading sexual conversations. The workshop leader has a wide breath of
experience working with young men; Mr. Riggo runs a men’s group once a month on campus
where they discuss topics such as consent, masculinity, femininity etc.

During this workshop, participants had the opportunity to discuss shame or guilt
around the topic of sexual assault. In addition, they were encouraged to discuss topics of
masculinity and their personal feelings around sexual violence towards women. Research has
shown men respond best to open interactive discussion around the topic where they can
converse with one another about these sensitive issues (Berkowtiz, 2004). Men were
encouraged to share their feelings and ideas, and challenge stereotypes around masculinity
and sexual violence towards women (Berkowitz). In addition, positive attitudes towards
women and anti-violence was encouraged (Berkowitz). A list of different counselling
services within the community was provided. A posttest was also provided after the
workshop for feedback and evaluation.

The Wellness Center was made aware of the research, and was prepared to counsel
any participants who were feeling distressed. If any students felt emotionally distressed, they
had the option to be walked down to the Wellness Center. For times the Wellness Center was
not open. Dr. John Sherry, a member of the thesis committee, Assistant Professor, and
Community Counselling Clinic Director was available on-call for counselling as well. A list
of crisis hotlines and counselling services within Prince George was also provided. Only one
participant stayed for the optional workshop. No participants utilized the immediate services offered and participants did not report any negative emotions post-experiment.

Results

First, I examined whether exposure to degrading sex talk affected men’s attitudes and evaluations of women and then examined whether degrading women elevated the status of men in other men’s eyes. Using hierarchical regression analyses, the influence of participants’ initial pre-existing sexism (step 1) on the criterion variables was examined and controlled before testing the impact of the degrading sex-talk audiotape manipulation (step 2). Recall that pretest sexism was assessed prior to the experiment as part of the Psychology Department’s research participation pretest survey. The sample exhibited quite pro-feminist attitudes; 70% of men within the sample were pro-women ($M = 2.00$ (7.9), with a range of scores from .20 to 3.50, see Figure 1). In step 1 of the regression model, centered pretest sexism scores were entered. In step 2, the experimental manipulation of degrading versus respectful sex talk, dummy coded as 0 (respectful) and 1 (degrading), was entered. With this dummy coding, significantly positive beta weights indicate that the dependent variable was higher with the degrading talk than the respectful talk; significantly negative beta weights indicate that the dependent variable was higher with the respectful talk. For all missing data, pairwise cases were removed.

Testing the Equivalence of the Sex-Talk Audio Tapes

The audio tapes were designed to be as similar to each other as possible and to vary only in terms of the respectfulness of the description. Regression analyses were used to determine whether the tapes in the two experimental conditions were rated by participants as similar in realism and believability and whether the men in the two experimental conditions
found the tapes equally interesting (see Table 1). Importantly, the realism and believability of the audio tapes did not differ significantly across experimental condition, all $Fs < 2.81$. In terms of the degree to which the participants found the tapes interesting, participants higher in pretest sexism rated the audio tapes as more interesting than did men lower in sexism [$F(1,42) = 9.25, p<.05, 95\% CI = 0.32 \leq \beta_0 \leq 0.45$], accounting for 18% of the variability in how interesting participants reported the conversation. In addition, men who listened to the respectful conversation rated it as significantly more interesting than did men who listened to the degrading conversation, [$F(2, 41) = 7.23, p<.05, 95\% CI = 0.37 \leq \beta_0 \leq 0.58$]. The experimental manipulation accounted for 8% of the variability in how interesting participants found the conversation. In sum, the audio tapes were rated as equivalent in realism and believability and the degrading audio tape was rated as less interesting than the respectful audio tape.

**Attitudes Toward Women and Toward Rape**

Next, I examined whether pretest sexism and exposure to degrading conversations predicted more negative attitudes toward women and more rape condoning attitudes. Statistical power was supported through the similar number of male participants used in Malamuth & Check (1981) research on effects of degrading stimuli on attitudes (N = 50). Assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, singularity and linearity were met for rape supportive attitudes, attitudes towards women, and sexism. Not surprisingly, pretest sexist attitudes were associated with a number of negative attitudes including: (1) rape supportive attitudes, $F(1,42) = 54.36, p<.05, 95\% CI = 1.70 \leq \beta_0 \leq 1.91, R^2 = 57\%$, (2) negative attitudes towards women, $F(1,42) = 34.84, p<.05, 95\% CI = 3.29 \leq \beta_0 \leq 3.42, R^2 = 46\%$; and (3) post-test sexist attitudes $F(1,42) = 127.90, p<.05, 95\% CI = 1.87 \leq \beta_0 \leq =2.85, R^2 = 75\%$. 
Contrary to predictions, however, the degrading audio tape did not significantly impact attitudes toward rape or toward women, all $F$s < 27.40 (see table 2).

**Men’s Evaluation of the Female Sexual Partner.**

In the audio tapes, the male speaking about his sexual experience (Josh) did not provide much information about his female sexual partner; instead Josh mostly focused on his own experience. In both audio tapes, Josh described how he and the woman met, danced and engaged in sexual intercourse. Josh never mentioned the woman’s name nor described any personalizing features. To examine whether pretest sexism or exposure to a degrading description of the sexual encounter affected the way in which participants thought about the female sexual partner, participants rated their perceptions of the woman on 10 traits on a scale that ranged from +3 very high level of the characteristic, 0= neutral levels of the characteristic to -3 very low level of the characteristic. Statistical power was supported through the similar number of male participants used in Murnen (2000) research using the same stimulus (N = 47). Assumptions of multicollinearity and singularity, were met for all variables assessing perceptions of the woman, but a normal distribution of scores was not obtained. When the male participants were making evaluations of the woman, there was a strong tendency to select 0, thereby creating a spiked (i.e., high kurtosis) distribution of scores. All variables that were non-normally distributed were transformed using a Log10 transformation (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics on the non-normal variables). The transformation did not change the significance for any forthcoming analyses.

Table 4 presents the regression results. Pretest sexism was associated with rating the female sexual partner as less intelligent, $F$ (1, 42) = 6.48, $p$<.05, 95% CI =-0.49 ≤ $\beta_0$ ≤ -0.04, $R^2 = 13$%; and less moral, $F$ (1,42) = 5.26, $p$<.05, 95% CI =-0.32 ≤ $\beta_0$ ≤ 0.20, $R^2 = 13$%.

Contrary to predictions, exposure to a degrading versus respectful audio tape affected only
ratings of the woman’s femininity, $F(2, 41) = 2.82, p<.05$, 95% CI = -0.25 ≤ $\beta_0$ ≤ 0.59, $R^2 = 11\%$, such that the degrading description resulted in higher femininity ratings ($M = .88, SD = .94$) than the respectful description ($M = -1.29, SD = 1.02$). Consequently, neither pretest sexism nor degrading “locker room talk” strongly affected men’s evaluations of the female sexual partner.

**Masculine Status of Men Who Degrade Women**

Next, I examined whether degrading women accords men status in the eyes of other men. For these sets of outcome variables, I had predicted sexist men would accord higher masculine status to men who degrade their sexual partners than to men who speak respectfully, but that non-sexist men would not. To test sexist attitudes as a moderator of the impact of the degrading sex talk on evaluations of Josh (i.e., the degrader), I added a third step to the regression analyses that included the interaction between pretest sexism and type of sex-talk. The interaction term was created as a new variable by multiplying the centered pre-test sexism scores with the condition dummy codes. Josh was evaluated on 10 different traits. In addition, participants rated Josh’s status within group of real friends, and indicated the extent to which they would like to “hang out” with this group of men in the future. Two variables, sexual attraction and sexual activity, were not normally distributed. Log10 transformations corrected the problem and were used for analyses (see Table 5 descriptive statistics on the non-normal variables). Transforming the variables did not yield any different results.

Pre-existing sexism did marginally affect some evaluations of Josh, independent of whether Josh was speaking respectfully or disrespectfully (regression results reported in Table 6). Relative to men scoring lower in sexism, those with higher scores in sexism rated Josh as higher in self-esteem [$F(1,42) = 5.52, p<.05$, 95% CI = 0.25 ≤ $\beta_0$ ≤ 1.14, $R^2 = 11\%$]
and self-confidence \( [F (1,42) = 8.23, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.80 \leq \beta_0 \leq 1.65, R^2 = 16\%] \). Men with higher scores in sexism were also more interested in hanging out with this group of men than were men scoring lower in sexism, \( [F (1,42) = 9.71, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = 1.72 \leq \beta_0 \leq -0.95, R^2 = 18\%] \). Pretest sexism also predicted the degree of status participants attributed to Josh, such that men with higher sexism scores relative to those lower in sexism rated Josh as having higher status in a real group \( [F (3, 39) = 4.07, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = 2.05 \leq \beta_0 \leq 2.54, R^2 = 11\%] \), see Table 7, note that this scale is reverse scored.

When examining participants’ reactions to Josh the degrader relative to Josh the respectful male, Josh the degrader received more negative evaluations: less likable \( [F (2.41) = 3.75, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = -1.29 \leq \beta_0 \leq -0.16, R^2 = 15\%, M = -.74] \), less sexually attractive \( [F (2.41) = 4.71, p < .05 95\% \text{ CI} = -1.31 \leq \beta_0 \leq 0.05, R^2 = 13\%, M = -.61] \) and, surprisingly, less aggressive \( [F (2.41) = 5.73, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.43 \leq \beta_0 \leq 0.65, R^2 = 12\%, M = .13] \). The prediction that sexist men would specifically view Josh the degrader in a positive light, however, was not supported for any of the outcome measures, all \( F_s < 1.57 \). Thus, sexist men did not specifically evaluate Josh, the degrader, as having higher masculine status than Josh, the respectful guy.

**Discussion**

Donald Trump’s objectifying and degrading language towards women, which he dismisses lightly as “locker room talk”, has brought considerable attention to the issue of sexist language and its role perpetuating sexism in society. Over the past decade research has demonstrated that visual and audio media that degrade women can contribute to sexist and

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2 The item assessing Josh’s status in the group failed the linearity test. Therefore, I examined the scatterplots to look for evidence of a curvilinear relationship. A slight J-shape pattern was detected suggesting that men in the top 1/3 of the distribution of sexism might differ in their evaluations of Josh’s status from the 70% of men in the sample who were relatively feminists. A t-test testing this difference, however, was not significant, \( t = -.52 \).
rape-condoning attitudes in men (Murnen 2000; Golde, et al. 2000). One possible motivation for devaluing women is to maintain men’s privileged status relative to women. And, indeed, qualitative research suggests that degrading women might elevate a man’s status in the eyes of other men (Cohen, 2009; Flood 2008). The main purpose of the present experiment was to explore whether a conversation that is roughly equivalent to common male sex talk, known colloquially as “locker room talk”, has a negative impact on men’s attitudes toward women, but a positive impact on a man’s status in the eyes of other men.

The Impact of Degrading Locker-room Talk on Women

The present study failed to provide evidence that a very subtly-degrading conversation affected either men’s general attitudes toward women, their attitudes toward rape, or their specific attitudes toward the woman involved in the sexual encounter. Indeed, the only significant effect of the degrading audio tape on attitudes toward women was that the woman described in the sexual encounter was rated as more feminine when she was degraded than when she was described respectfully. The null findings are surprising given that earlier research by Murnen (2000) found that men who were exposed to a very similarly degrading conversation perceived the female sexual partner more negatively; that is, as less likable, less moral, and more aggressive than a woman who was not degraded. The present study clearly did not replicate these findings. Indeed, the one significant result in the present study (the femininity rating) appears to conflict with the aggressiveness result in Murnen. Based on the present study alone, it appears that exposure to mildly-degrading conversations among men does not contribute to sexist attitudes. When the present results are considered more closely relative to previous research, however, this conclusion must be tempered.

Below, I consider number of differences between the present study and the Murnen (2000) study to explore possible reasons for the null findings of the present study. The first
difference between the studies is location. Murnen’s participants were American university students, my participants were Canadian. It is possible that Canadian men are more progressive and feminist than American men. Nationality of participants, however, seems to be an unlikely explanation for the differences between studies. Sexual violence against women is common at both Canadian and American universities (Senn, 2014; Krebs et al. 2009). In 2014, 35% of women on Canadian campuses reported they had experienced at least one attempted or completed rape and, in 2009, 19% of US women in their first year reported they had experienced an attempted or completed rape (Krebs et al. 2009; Quinlan, Clarke, & Miller 2016). The rates of sexual assault on campus are quite similar in the US and Canada.

If the discrepant results are not due to cultural differences associated with nationality, the timeframe of the research might explain the difference. Murnen’s research was completed 17 years ago. Young men in 2017 relative to those in 2000 may be more enlightened about sexism and violence against women. Indeed, the pre-test sexism scores within my Canadian sample indicated that 70 percent of the male participants held pro-women or feminist attitudes. These numbers suggest a very progressive sample. Murnen did not measure sexist attitudes, consequently levels of sexism among the samples cannot be compared. Evidence from other sources, however, tends to challenge this “progressive times” explanation. Sexual assault rates in Canada have shown no improvement from 1997 to 2014 (Schwartz & Dekeserdy 1997; Senn, 2014). In 1997, 28% of female undergraduates reported being victims of sexual abuse (Schwartz & Dekeserdy 1997), whereas in 2014, 35% of first year university women experienced at least one completed or attempted rape since age 14 (Senn 2014). It is important to note that these statistics control for levels of reporting. It is a hopeful prospect that men are more enlightened now, but the evidence is, at best, mixed.
The explanation for the conflicting results that appears most likely to me is a methodological difference between the studies. In her study, Murnen used a cover story that hid the purpose of the experiment. Participants were told that they were participating in a study of memory for emotional events and that in some conditions people would be exposed to explicit sexual language. In my research, however, I was not permitted by the research ethics board to use deception and consequently could not develop a cover story to hide the main focus of the study. Consequently, participants were told they were participating in a study where they would be exposed to an audio tape that sexually objectifies women, and thereafter asked questions in regard to sexual assault and general attitudes towards women.

The inability to use a cover story or deception when administering the experiment may have resulted in social-desirability effects. Social desirability is the basic human tendency to portray oneself in the best possible way in self-report measures (Fisher, 1993). If participants are aware of what the expected or proper response is to a question, a social-desirability motive will guide their responses to the questions. When they were told that the study was investigating their reactions to degrading conversations, the correct or socially-desirable response would be to portray a pro-woman response to questions. This appears to correspond to patterns of participants responses to the conversation. When asked to rate the female sexual partner on negative and positive traits, men in the study very frequently selected a response indicating that they did not know. In fact, during the experiment when completing these ratings, a few participants called the experimenter over and said “but I don’t know her?” The use of a cover story is an important difference between my study and Murnen’s and offers the best explanation for the divergent results.
The Impact of Sexist Attitudes on Women

I had expected that degrading conversation about women in all-male groups would be one avenue by which men develop sexist and rape-condoning attitudes. Although I did not find evidence in support of this hypothesis, my research does point to the potential harm of sexist attitudes. Sexist attitudes are attitudes towards women that are prejudicial and discriminatory in nature, and that stereotype women in roles that are usually portrayed in a negative manner (Glick & Fiske, 1996). A number of results in the present research support the well-established body of evidence demonstrating that sexist attitudes are linked to men’s beliefs about rape and men’s evaluations of women (Baker, 2015; Malamuth & Donnerstein 1982).

Rape-supportive attitudes reflect a set of beliefs that tolerate, condone, excuse, normalize, and even promote sexual violence or rape. Examples of rape-supportive attitudes include the beliefs that women deserve to get raped when wearing provocative clothing or that women may say “no” but they really mean “yes” (Colorado State, WGAC 2017; Fisher, Davis, Yarber, & Davis, 2013). Rape supportive attitudes are predictors of sexual violence. Men who endorse rape-supporting attitudes are more likely to commit rape, perpetrate violence against women, and demonstrate more aggression towards women (Malamuth & Donnerstein 1982; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Malamuth, 1981; Donnerstein 1980a,b; Donnerstein 1984). Rape-supportive attitudes and sexism towards women are positively correlated (Baker, 2015; Malamuth & Donnerstein 1982; Ryan & Kanjorski 1998). In the present study, men who scored higher in sexism were more likely to endorse rape-supportive attitudes.

Participants’ sexist attitudes were not only associated with general attitudes toward rape, they were also correlated with the tendency to view a particular woman negatively. In
the present study, the woman who was Josh’s sexual partner was rated as less intelligent and less moral by more sexist versus less sexist men. Intelligence and morality are very important qualities, often described as distinguishing humans from objects and animals. The tendency to view a person as lacking these qualities is a way to dehumanize and objectify the person. Experimental research on dehumanization has demonstrated that women are more frequently victims of this dehumanization than men (Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, Puvia, 2011; Heflick & Goldenberg 2014). Women who are dehumanized are more likely to be viewed as sexual objects (Gervais & Eagan, 2017) and to become vulnerable to sexual violence because, when men dehumanize women, men are less likely to consider a woman’s thoughts and feelings (Gervais & Eagen 2017). Indeed, experimental research testing the impact of sexual objectification of women on perceptions of rape victims found this association. After being exposed to a sexually-objectified woman, men were more likely to report that a female rape victim had received pleasure from the rape and “got what they wanted” (Milburn, Mather, & Conrad 2000). Men exposed to a woman being objectified were 17% more likely to have the potential to act like the acquaintance-rape perpetrator (Milburn et al.). Dehumanizing women can have dangerous implications.

It is fairly obvious how viewing a woman as less than human might allow a man to feel he can violate her. A less obvious outcome of dehumanization is that it also affects women’s ability to fend off unwanted sexual advances (Franz, Dillio, & Gervais, 2016; Gervais & Eagan, 2017). Investigating women’s objectification experiences, sexual-refusal assertiveness, and sexual victimization, Franz et al. found that objectification experiences increased a women’s likelihood of sexual victimization via decreased sexual assertiveness. In situations in which they are dehumanized and objectified, women’s agency is undermined. Women are less likely to protest women’s rights, spend less time introducing themselves, and
even speak less when being ogled and receiving sexual compliments from a man were shown (Calogero 2013; Saguy, Quinn, Dovidio & Pratto, 2010; Heflick & Goldenberg 2015). Men who objectify women perpetuate a belief system that can promote violence against women and can undermine women’s feelings of agency.

**Masculine Status and Sex**

Men are engaging in conversations about sex with their peers more than ever before (Sprecher, Harris & Meyers, 2008; Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2015), and all male groupings tend to encourage degrading and sexist language (Murnen 2000). This “sexual storytelling” has been reported to occur among groups of young adult males, including university groups (Flood 2009, Cohen 2009). According to masculine ideological theory, men who discuss their sexual conquests and degrade women while doing so should gain status in their all-male groups (Rigdeway & Diekemia 1992).

The results of the present study yield some evidence in support of the masculine ideology theory but, as predicted, primarily among sexist men. Sexist men did confer status on the man talking about his sexual encounters. Participants’ sexist attitudes were associated with viewing Josh as having higher self-esteem, higher self-confidence, and higher status among his friends. Participants with more sexist attitudes also reported they would be more interested in hanging out with groups of men who discuss their sexual experiences. The status accorded to Josh was not specifically linked to degrading his sexual partner, it appears it was simply linked to his participation in sexual activity.

Bragging about sexual activity has been linked to male status in groups. Young men reported the value of their sexual accomplishments/conquests was derived from the relevance it has on their male friends (Cohen, 2009). Men who have a lot of sex may do so to inflate their own masculine status in the eyes of other men. A qualitative study explored what young
boys say to one another regarding sex, and what they accomplish through this form of communication. Results showed young men communicate about sex and women with their peers because it’s an important factor of status within the group (Cohen 2009; Flood 2008). For example an 18 year old youth reported “ …. They will have a competition of how many girls they talked to or whatever…….having sex (laughs) that’s the most important thing …. ” (p. 162, Cohen). Cohen’s qualitative research suggests that young men talk about sexual activity to increase their status in the eyes of other men. The present study would qualify this finding with evidence that it is sexist men who give and receive status from discussing sexual activity with women.

**Masculine Status Linked to Degrading Women**

The results of the present study did not support the hypothesis that “locker-room talk” that degrades women elevates masculine status. Men, in general, viewed the degrader more negatively (i.e., less likeable and sexually attractive) and viewed him as less masculine than the respectful male. These results are consistent with results obtained by Murnen, which found the male degrader was perceived in a negative light as well (less intelligent and less moral).

In the introduction of this thesis, I had speculated that the negative attitudes Murnen’s participants exhibited toward the degrader resulted from problems and limitations with the content of the male conversation. To overcome the possible limitations, I hired three actors and an audio technician to record the degrading and respectful conversations. The male actors were directed to speak enthusiastically and voice a comradery over the discussion of the sexual experience. Despite these methodological improvements, the results were very similar. Given that derogating the degrader is a socially-desirable response and, as I argued above, social desirability is a likely factor in the null results for attitudes toward women, it is
possible that Josh was evaluated through the lens of social desirability. The present study and Murnen share a weakness and that is the reliance on self-report outcome variables. Socially-desirable responding in terms of reactions to the degrader is therefore a possible explanation of the results in both studies. Future research should explore masculine status in response to locker-room talk in real friendship groups and should use behavioral measures of status such as level of attention and air time given to the degrader.

**Programs Addressing Sexism and Degrading Language at Universities**

The importance of analyzing the effects of degrading language is critical, however the current interventions/prevention programs to address such effects are limited. Currently, UBC has several initiatives in place to reduce sexual violence on campus including, programs for self-defense, by-stander/ally training, education for student leaders, and responding to sexual assault disclosure (UBC Sexual Assault Intervention and Prevention Education, 2015). Programs listed on UBC’s website lacks programming and education on the effects of sexism has on rape supportive attitudes and general attitudes towards women. There appears to be a significant gap in education about effects of sexism and degrading language on male’s attitude and behavior toward women at universities across Canada.

University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, University of Saskatchewan’s websites that list their current prevention/intervention approaches do not appear address this specific issue (University of Calgary, 2018; University of Manitoba, 2018: University of Saskatchewan 2018). As our research has shown men high in sexism are also high in rape supportive attitudes which has strong implications towards sexual violence against women. Therefore, programs aiming at reducing sexist attitudes in men may be a new and critical approach to university sexual assault intervention programs.
Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

It is important to understand factors that influence male’s negative attitudes towards women. The present study did not provide evidence that mildly-degrading “locker-room talk” contributes to negative attitudes toward women and confers status on men who like to degrade women. Unfortunately, social-desirability pressure might have undermined the experiment. I did, however, find that men scoring higher in sexism tended to dehumanize women and endorsed stronger rape-supportive attitudes. In addition, males scoring higher in sexism delegated more masculine status to a man who likes to talk about his sexual experiences with women. Fortunately, I also found the majority of male participants do not hold these attitudes. Continuing to challenge sexist attitudes remains a valuable component of university education.

A limitation of this study was the reliance on a university student sample. For experimental research, social psychologists often rely on convenience, university samples. For testing generalizations, this is a reasonable practice (Mook, 1983). For social issues that are frequently raised and examined in universities, such as sexual violence and racism, university-student samples are likely to be especially alert to these issues and thus might be more likely to demonstrate social desirability effects than a broader sample of men from the population. Therefore, for studies investigating sensitive social issues, samples drawn from non-university populations may be a better choice. In addition, determining whether “locker room talk” affects general attitudes toward women requires that the participants’ attitudes toward women are still malleable to some degree. If the participants in this study had very well-established, strongly-held, attitudes (either pro- or anti-women), exposure to a mildly sexist conversation is unlikely to influence their general attitudes. Therefore, conducting this
type of study with younger men (e.g. high school men), whose social attitudes are still forming and open to social influence, might be more appropriate.

The restricted sample also raises questions about the generalizability of the results obtained. It is possible the correlations obtained with pretest sexism are true for university men, but will not hold for other men in the population. In other words, in university men sexist attitudes predict attitudes toward rape, predict negative evaluations of the woman in the sexual stories, and predict attribution of status to a male who talks about sex, but these correlations may not be found in a more diverse sample of men in the population.

Future research on “locker room talk” could benefit from a lesson I learned conducting this research. Experimental evidence is the gold standard for identifying causal agents in the complexity of factors that influence human behaviour. Without experimental evidence, questions always emerge as to whether factors such as violence in media, degrading pornography, or objectified depictions of women in magazines cause harm or whether harmed people are more likely to expose themselves to these forms of media. In the case of “locker room talk”, without experimental evidence, correlational research will not be able to determine whether exposure to this type of talk creates sexist’s attitudes or whether sexist people simply engage and seek out these types of conversations. To receive permission to use deception, the Tri-council guidelines state the study must pose minimal threat to participants, and this is consistent across all institutions in Canada (Canadian Institute of Health Research, 2014). Therefore, University ethics committees may need to make a judgment on “likely” harm to participants. In support of this, research has shown exposure to Pornography in research does not result in lasting harm to male subjects, conversely participating in this form of research results in broader awareness on topics of sexual violence and effects of degrading media (Check & Malamuth, 1984). This would suggest
there is likely a low risk to participants, which should permit the use of deception. Given widely-held societal concerns about inequality, sexism and sexual violence, in my view, the use of deception is necessary in this research.
Table 1.
Hierarchal Regression analysis of ratings of the audio tapes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Block 1 Pre-sexism beta (R²)</th>
<th>Block 2 Type of Conversation beta (R²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>-0.00(0.00)</td>
<td>-0.04(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believable</td>
<td>0.06(0.05)</td>
<td>0.04(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>0.15(0.18)**</td>
<td>-0.15(0.08)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Missing data removed pairwise. Ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from -3 Strongly Disagree to +3 Strongly Agree.
* p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01.
Table 2
Hierarchal Regression analysis of the Attitudes Towards Women, Rape, and Sexism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes toward women and rape</th>
<th>Block 1 Pre-sexism beta (R^2)</th>
<th>Block 2 Type of Conversation beta (R^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rape Supportive Attitudes</td>
<td>0.47*** (0.56)</td>
<td>-0.09 (0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes re: Women</td>
<td>-0.29*** (0.44)</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Sexism</td>
<td>0.91*** (0.75)</td>
<td>-0.00 (0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile Sexism</td>
<td>0.95*** (0.65)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent Sexism</td>
<td>0.90*** (0.70)</td>
<td>-0.00 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Missing data removed pairwise. **RSS: 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Agree Strongly. ATWS: 4-point scale ranging from 1(A) = Agree Strongly 2(B) = Agree Mildly 3(C) = Disagree Mildly 4(D) = Disagree Strongly (high score indicates pro-women). ASI: 6-point scale: 0 = Disagree Strongly to 5 = Agree Strongly.
* p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01.
Table 3.
Raw and Transformed Mean and Standard Error for Perceptions of the Female Sex Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of the Female (POF)</th>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Log linear Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality Attraction</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likability</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Activity</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>-.64</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Log10 transformation used for variables that were non-normal. Variables remained non-normal due to trend of responses. * p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01
Table 4.

*Hierarchal Regression analysis of Perceptions of the Female Sexual Partner.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Female (POF)</th>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>Block 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-sexism beta (R²)</td>
<td>Type of Conversation beta (R²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellligence</td>
<td>-0.35(0.11)**</td>
<td>-0.25(0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>-0.44(0.11)**</td>
<td>0.00(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>0.14(-0.01)</td>
<td>0.69(0.08)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Attractive</td>
<td>0.31 (0.03)</td>
<td>0.18 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likability</td>
<td>-0.00(-0.02)</td>
<td>0.03(-0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem</td>
<td>-0.30(0.01)</td>
<td>-0.35(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Confidence</td>
<td>-0.23(0.01)</td>
<td>-0.20(-0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>0.01(-0.02)</td>
<td>-0.08(-0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active</td>
<td>0.05(-0.02)</td>
<td>-0.27(-0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>-0.17(-0.00)</td>
<td>-0.29(-0.01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Missing data removed pairwise. Adjectives rated on 7-point scales ranging from -3 = very low on the quality to +3 = very high on the quality.

* p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01.
Table 5  
*Raw and Transformed Mean and Standard Error for Perceptions of Josh*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of the Male (POM)</th>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Log linear Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Attraction</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Activity</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Log10 transformation used for variables that were non-normal. Variables remained non-normal due to trend of responses. * p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01*
### Table 6

**Hierarchal Regression analysis of Perceptions of Josh.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Josh</th>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>Block 2</th>
<th>Block 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-sexism</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>beta (R2)</td>
<td>beta (R2)</td>
<td>beta (R2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hang out in future</td>
<td>0.76(0.16)**</td>
<td>-0.39(0.16)</td>
<td>0.30(0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem</td>
<td>0.67(0.09)**</td>
<td>-0.47(0.10)</td>
<td>-0.17(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Confidence</td>
<td>0.77(0.14)***</td>
<td>0.04(0.12)</td>
<td>-0.32(0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likability</td>
<td>0.13(-0.01)</td>
<td>-1.06(0.11)***</td>
<td>0.72(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>-0.27(0.00)</td>
<td>-0.94(0.10)**</td>
<td>0.04(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Attractive</td>
<td>-0.50(0.03)</td>
<td>-1.22(0.15)***</td>
<td>1.17(0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>0.44(0.05)*</td>
<td>-0.70(0.12)*</td>
<td>0.36(0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>-0.07(-0.02)</td>
<td>-0.63(0.03)*</td>
<td>-0.15(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals</td>
<td>-0.23(-0.00)</td>
<td>-0.57(0.03)</td>
<td>0.83(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>-0.00(-0.02)</td>
<td>-0.35(-0.03)</td>
<td>-0.36(-0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active</td>
<td>-0.03(-0.24)</td>
<td>-0.73(0.00)</td>
<td>0.26(-0.01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Missing data removed pairwise. Adjectives rated on 7-point scales ranging from -3 = very low on the quality to +3 = very high on the quality.

* p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01.
Table 7
Hierarchal Regression analysis of Masculine Status of Men in the Conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of men</th>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>Block 2</th>
<th>Block 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-sexism beta (R^2)</td>
<td>Type of Conversation beta (R^2)</td>
<td>Interaction beta (R^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of Josh</td>
<td>-0.07(0.14)**</td>
<td>-0.04(0.02)</td>
<td>-0.04(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of Craig</td>
<td>0.01(0.00)</td>
<td>-0.00(0.00)</td>
<td>-0.09(0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of Corey</td>
<td>0.01(0.04)</td>
<td>0.07(0.04)</td>
<td>0.07(0.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Missing data removed pairwise. Masculine Status of Men rated on a 5-point reverse scored scale from 1 = High Masculine Status to 5 = No Masculine Status.

*. p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01
Figure 1.
*Histogram of Levels of Pre-Sexism in Male Sample.*

*Note.* The vertical axis is the frequency of scores; the horizontal axis is the scores of pre-existing sexism prior to the experiment.
References


Colorado States University, Women and Gender Advocacy Centre (Oct 27th, 2017). What is Rape Culture. [http://www.wgac.colostate.edu/what-is-rape-supportive-culture](http://www.wgac.colostate.edu/what-is-rape-supportive-culture).


Donnelly, P., Norman, M., & Kidd, B. (2013). Gender equity in Canadian interuniversity sport: A biennial report (No. 2). *Toronto: Centre for Sport Policy Studies (Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto)*.


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Appendix A.

These sentences are taken directly from Murnen (2000) study on Sexually Degrading Language pg. 325.


Degrading Script:
- Hey …. What’s up? Where have you been? I hear you got some last night?
- Yeah, I didn’t go home last night. Well after I came over to the party with you and Craig, I started dancing. I met this girl with a really nice ass. I was looking for a good time and she was too.
- Oh, I wondered what you were up to. I saw you grinding her on the dance floor. What happened?
- Well, I fucked her good.
- How was it? How did she compare to the last girl?
- Well, her pussy was so tight. That made the sex great.
- Oh yeah?
- Yeah- let’s just say I was satisfied – my needs were met.
- Where did you find this girl? I want one
- Next time we are together, Ill point one out.

Non-degrading Script:
- Hey …. What’s up? Where have you been? I hear you met someone last night last night?
- Yeah, I didn’t go home last night. Well after I came over to the party with you and Craig, I started dancing. I met this girl who was really cool. I was looking for a good time and she was too.
- Oh, I wondered what you were up to. I saw you dancing close with her on the dance floor. What happened?
- Well, we got together and had sex.
- How was it? How did she compare to the last girl?
- Well, we had fun together. That made the sex great.
- Oh yeah?
- Yeah- let’s just say I was satisfied – my needs were met.
- Where did you find this girl? I’d like to meet someone
- Next time we are together, Ill introduce you to someone.

*A third male is being added to the script, showing support for the male speaking about his sexual experience from the night prior.