BYSTANDER INTERVENTION THROUGH THE SURVIVOR’S LENS:
CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT AND THE ROLE OF BYSTANDERS

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Christy Beck

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The dissertation of Christy Beck was reviewed and approved* by the following:

David Guthrie  
Associate Professor of Education  
Professor-in-Charge, Higher Education Program  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Liliana Garces  
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy  
Affiliate Faculty, School of Law, The University of Texas at Austin

Amy Marshall  
Associate Professor of Psychology

Theresa Vescio  
Professor of Psychology/Women’s Studies

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

Sexual assault on college campuses has reached epidemic proportions. One of the ways that higher education institutions have tried to address the issue of sexual assault on college campuses is through Bystander Intervention (BI). BI seeks to prevent sexual assault by training people (potential bystanders) in close proximity to the victim how to intervene effectively without endangering themselves. At the core of my research is developing an understanding of the role of bystanders who could have, but did not intervene, from the perspective of those who have been sexually assaulted. Through this lens I hope to contribute to the existing BI programs with a victim-informed framework. This research takes an interdisciplinary approach, integrating my background in psychology with my disciplines of higher education and women’s studies.

This phenomenological study includes qualitative interviews with 13 participants from the same large, multi-campus university who have been sexually assaulted while in college. Many levels of sexual assault are represented, from unwanted touching, to sexual assault after consent has been revoked, to rape. From these interviews, seven themes emerged which gave unprecedented insight into how these college women experienced sexual assault, and how they would have liked bystanders to intervene.

Keywords: sexual assault, bystander intervention, empathy, college campuses
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Chapter 1.  INTRODUCTION

January 18, 2015, a young woman attends a fraternity party with her younger sister at Stanford University. At the party, drinks are consumed; the woman loses her sister in the crowd. Unfortunately for the young woman, Brock Turner, a freshman at Stanford, finds her. He takes her away from the party, behind a dumpster near the fraternity house, and sexually assaults her. By this time, she is unconscious. Two Swedish graduate school students, Peter Jonsson and Carl Fredrik Arndt, are out riding their bikes at 1a.m. that evening when they notice activity by the dumpster. What motivates them to take action is they notice the woman is not moving. They approach Turner to see what is going on. He runs and Arndt stays with the woman, checking to see if she is still alive. Jonsson runs after Turner, catches him, and restrains him until the police arrive (Kingkade, 2016).

December 6, 2012, a freshman at Florida State University (FSU) meets Jameis Winston at a bar. She takes a cab home with him and his two roommates, Chris Casher and Ronald Darby. While at their apartment, Winston takes the woman into his bedroom and rapes her, with Casher and Darby watching, Casher recording some of the assault. At one point Darby tells Winston that the woman is telling him to stop. Winston responds by carrying her into the bathroom, throwing her on the floor, locking the door, and raping her again (Luther, 2015).
**Topic of Study**

Two horrific scenarios, both true stories, with many common variables except one major difference: bystanders intervened and stopped the assault in progress in the first scenario, and one bystander attempted to intervene, but did not follow through in the second scenario. Both stories garnered a great deal of media attention, not because sexual assault is uncommon on college campuses, but more likely because both perpetrators were student athletes: Turner, a swimmer; Winston, a football player, now quarterback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. While my research does not focus specifically on student athletes, these two well-publicized incidents provide us with clear examples of the important role bystanders can play in preventing sexual assault.

Through my research, I explore the role of bystanders regarding sexual assault on college campuses. There have been many high-profile cases in the media over the last few years where bystanders – people who were around when a sexual assault was taking place or leading up to a sexual assault taking place – either chose to intervene or not intervene. That one action (or inaction) can have monumental effects on all parties involved. My intent is not to take the responsibility of sexual assault off of the perpetrator and onto a bystander, but rather to gain insight into prompting more bystanders to intervene. To this end, I will use the qualitative method of phenomenology to explore the bystander’s role through the lens of survivors who have been sexually assaulted while in college, in order to better understand how victims perceive the role of bystanders after an assault has taken place. This deeper understanding can have positive effects on bystander development and training. The benefit of using phenomenology is that it captures the “lived experiences” of the subjects, thus providing an in-depth perspective of sexual assault (Creswell, 2013). Through my findings, I hope to inform, and potentially re-
conceptualize the definition of a bystander, through the eyes of victims to increase awareness among potential bystanders.

**Use of Terminology – Victim/ Survivor; Her/ Him**

Over the last decade there has been mounting debate over whether to label people who have been sexually assaulted as “victims” or “survivors.” In feminist, psychological, and activist circles, the emphasis has been on moving towards the “survivor” label, as “rape survivor” denotes empowerment and having moved beyond the objectified “victim” label (Hockett & Saucier, 2015). Therapists and advocates commonly use the word survivor when working with those who have been sexually assaulted, also as a reminder that while they were sexually violated, they still survived the assault, in that, they were not killed (J. Jordan, 2013). Throughout this study, I will use these terms interchangeably; not in an attempt to disempower or diminish, but rather because I do not presume to label where any particular person is in their recovery process.

Jordon (2013) points out that the road from being a victim of a sexual assault to a survivor of a sexual assault is not a linear process, and people who have experienced sexual assault weave in and out of these identities as their recovery process unfolds. She suggests moving away from this label dichotomy into a more fluid approach when discussing people who have been sexually assaulted. While feminist theory may favor the survivor model due to the sense of empowerment it signifies, I argue that placing any label is in itself disempowering; who am I, or any researcher, to decide where a person fits on the victim-survivor continuum. To be clear, I give equal respect and validation to those who feel they have been victimized (because they have), as well as honoring that they are indeed survivors (because they are), noting that it is
within in their right to feel either or both of these identities at any time, and this may change day
to day, hour to hour, and that is all a part of the process of recovery.

I will also note here, that throughout this study, I use the pronoun “her” when discussing victims/survivors and “him” when discussing perpetrators, due to the overwhelming statistics that conclude that most victims of sexual assault are women, and most perpetrators are men (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). This is in no way intended to invalidate the trauma experienced by men or to deny the trauma perpetrated by women. It is also not intended to exclude or offend those who do not conform to binary gender identity. I use these pronouns based on statistics and for the sake of convenience, while acknowledging that there are many cases when these particular pronouns are inadequate, or do not apply.

**Context/Background of the Problem**

*Sexual Assault on College Campuses*

Sexual assault on college campuses has reached epidemic proportions. One in five college women are sexually assaulted, the majority in their freshman and sophomore years (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014). The term “red zone” describes a period during the first two months of school where there tends to be a “peak of sexual assaults” on freshman women (Lynch, 2015). However, as staggering as the “one in five” statistic may be, the fact remains that sexual assault is an incredibly underreported crime, which means many more women are impacted than can be seen (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014). Mary Koss' (1985) study, *The Hidden Rape Victim*, sheds some light on why women don’t come forward, reasons that still exist today. Some reasons why college students do not report this crime is because, in most cases, they know their assailant,
coupled with their lack of faith in the processes within their institution and in the criminal court system. They may also face social ramifications leading to a hostile environment (Suran, 2014).

In the Winston case, the victim, later identified as Erica Kinsman, left the FSU campus due to the backlash of football fans who harassed and threatened her repeatedly (Dick & Ziering, 2015).

The lack of reporting sexual assault has further implications to colleges and universities. As a result of the 1990 Clery Act, colleges and universities are required to report their campus crime data each year. These data are organized and categorized to give a clear picture of the nature of crimes happening at each college and university. The Clery Report, while important, is not an accurate depiction of the volume of assaults that are perpetrated against students, as the report only includes incidents that were reported, and all too often, incidents are not reported and perpetrators are not brought to justice. The report also excludes incidents that occur off-campus, such as at fraternity houses and student apartments (Beck & Kehn, 2015).

While most experts agree that sexual assault on college campuses is underreported, there are sometimes suspicions that women falsely report sexual assaults (as in the highly publicized Rolling Stone article). However, the statistics for false claims are very low, between 2-10%, about the same rate of false reports for other crimes (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). It is important to keep in mind that despite the statistics, colleges are not crawling with large numbers of sex offenders; rather, students who sexually assault tend to do so repeatedly. A 2010 study found that “63.3% of men at one university who self-reported acts qualifying as rape or attempted rape admitted to committing repeat rapes” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). According to State College Police Department Lt. Keith Robb, “Very, very few victims lie. In my experience of all the sexual assaults we’ve investigated, a very small percentage makes it up. It is extremely rare for a woman to put herself through the rape exam if
she has not been assaulted” (Lynch, 2015). Indeed, an invasive rape exam and ongoing investigation is likely to deter would-be false accusers.

While this study will focus on female survivors of sexual assault, it is worth noting that college men are not exempt from being victims of sexual assault while in college. One in sixteen men experience sexual assault in college, and more than 90% of all victims do not report the assault (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). Of all students, 81% report sexual harassment at some point in their school career. College students are at great risk of experiencing sexual assault or harassment, but 63% of universities do not adequately address these numbers in regard to their legal obligation, as evidenced by the number of Title IX violations levied against colleges and universities due to their mishandling of sexual assault cases (Suran, 2014).

Being a victim of sexual assault can derail even the most dedicated student. A study conducted by Jordan, Combs, and Smith (2014) concluded that women who had been sexually assaulted in their freshman year of college tended to have lower GPA’s than their counterparts who had not been sexually assaulted. One of the recommendations for further research was to assess the dropout rates of victims of sexual assault, as this factor has not been the focus of attrition rates thus far.

The ways that institutions respond to and handle reports of sexual assault can have important ramifications for the university, families of the victims and perpetrators, the alleged perpetrators, and most importantly, for the alleged victims of the assault, whose lives are forever altered after such a traumatic event. It is important for colleges and universities to promote a culture that addresses the seriousness of sexual assault, which must highlight prevention, as the ultimate goal is for sexual assaults to never take place.
Bystander Intervention Models

One of the ways that higher education institutions have tried to address the issue of sexual assault on college campuses is through Bystander Intervention (BI). BI seeks to prevent sexual assault by training people (potential bystanders) in close proximity to the victim how to intervene effectively without endangering themselves. Because, by definition, a bystander could be anyone (e.g. friend, neighbor, a passerby on the street), the goal is to train as many people in the college community as possible (Katz, 2008). The three most widely used models of Bystander Intervention for colleges and universities are Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), Green Dot, and Know Your Power Marketing Campaign (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2013). I will describe the unique characteristics of each model, and how colleges and universities across the country are utilizing them in order to provide background of how BI programs function. In addition to familiarizing readers with current BI programs, my plan is to show how these programs could be improved based on this study.

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) was developed by Jackson Katz in 1993 at Northeastern University’s Center for the Study of Sport in Society (Katz, 2008). The program “was designed to train college and high school male student-athletes [a female component was later added] and other student leaders to use their status to speak out against rape, battering, sexual harassment, gay-bashing, and all forms of sexist abuse and violence” (Katz, 1995). The program is unique in its approach as it focuses on men and women as “empowered bystanders” instead of men as perpetrators, and women as victims. The program shows how both women and men can intervene when they witness abuse occurring and support victims, without placing
themselves in physical danger (Katz, 2008). In order to exemplify athletes as leaders, “MVP trainers are former professional and college athletes” (Finley, 2011).

MVP uses a training tool called the “Playbook,” which has participants role-play different scenarios of abusive situations and allows them to practice how they would react. Instead of just two options (intervene physically or do nothing), the training offers a variety of options. By providing an array of options, MVP has proven that people will more likely use an option to help as opposed to doing nothing (Katz, 2008). As Jemalle Cornelius, a former football student-athlete at the University of Florida noted:

“The program was very effective because it was clear-cut. Student-athletes need to be hit with more real life situations, and that’s exactly what the program did. They told us what battery is, sexual assault, sexual harassment. They didn’t just read the definition, they gave us scenarios…One thing the program was good at was giving us a plan…” (Mentors in Violence Prevention, 2014).

The following is an example scenario from the Playbook (Northeastern University, 2012):

You are an R.A. and a sophomore. A guy pushes and then slaps his partner at a party, she’s a resident from your residence hall, but not your floor. People are upset but don’t do anything. She’s not a close friend, but the two of you know each other.

After reading the scenario, another participant will read the “Train of Thought,” which is a type of mental checklist that bystanders in these situations go through:

If nobody else is stepping in, why should I? … It could get ugly … He could turn on me ...

Besides, if she didn’t like that sort of treatment, and she stays with him, why should I get involved? … Is it any of my business? … But if I don’t do something, I am saying it’s
okay for a guy to abuse a woman … Do I have a special responsibility because I’m an RA? … What should I do in this situation?

The “Train of Thought” is followed on each page by a list of practical and realistic “Options” for intervention:

“Nothing – it’s none of my business…Get a bunch of people to contain the boyfriend…Talk to the woman and let her know I am willing to help…Report the incident to fellow RA’s or my RD.”

Scenarios such as the one described above not only give students complex, yet realistic situations they could encounter, MVP provides the tools necessary to navigate such situations.

Due to the accessible nature of the program design, MVP is widely used in college and professional athletics, with “numerous Division I, II and III athletic programs” regularly participating in trainings (Katz, 2008). In addition, “the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) uses MVP materials in its Life Skills program” (Katz, 2008). Per Katz (2011), one of the many strengths of the MVP program is its “creative solution to one of the central challenges in gender violence prevention education: how to engage men without approaching them as potential rapists and batterers.” This philosophy aligns well with the growing trend that “we need to engage men as allies in this cause,” where BI programs have been described as “among the most promising prevention strategies” (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014).

MVP is an evidence-based program and has been implemented at many institutions, including: The University of Hawaii-Manoa; the University of Albany; St. Cloud State University; University of Colorado-Denver; Southwest Oklahoma State University; University of Iowa; Stanford; and Virginia Tech Peer institutions (Slaby, Branner, & Martin, 2011a). MVP is
frequently cited as an exemplary program for BI on college campuses, and is endorsed by the NCAA (2014) in its “Addressing Sexual Assault and Interpersonal Violence: Athletics’ Role in Support of Healthy and Safe Campuses” Report. Indeed, MVP is longest running BI program used on college campuses, is well-cited and studied. However, while MVP provides tools to bystanders, what it lacks is giving trainees the perspective of the victim in the scenarios. This perspective is important for several reasons, including having a better-informed approach as well as the development of empathy for potential victims.

**Green Dot**

As noted above, MVP is widely used within athletic departments, while the BI initiative, Green Dot, is utilized more broadly across the student body. Dr. Dorothy Edwards created Green Dot in 2007 with the intention “to increase active bystander responses and reduce sexual, dating, and stalking violence on college campuses” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2013). The foundation of the program is to recognize “red dots” and “green dots.” Red dots are “a moment in time when someone contributes to violence in any way,” whether in action or inaction by allowing these behaviors to perpetuate. A green dot is “any behavior, choice, word, or attitude that promotes safety for all our citizens and communicates utter intolerance for violence” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2013). Participants are trained to identify red dots and, through their words or actions, turn them into green dots. The program consists of three components, “a motivational speech on bystander intervention, an interactive bystander training program, and a social marketing campaign” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2013). It is preferable that student leaders participate in the training component, as this increases likelihood of other student buy-in. Green Dot is designed to be adaptable to the particular institution/organization utilizing it for optimum efficacy.
Although not the longest running BI program (like MVP), Green Dot is increasingly becoming one of the most commonly used across college campuses (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). In Coker et al.’s (2015) study, the authors compare victimization and perpetration rates at a university which utilizes the Green Dot BI training (Intervention Site) with two other universities that do not have BI programs (Comparison Sites). The study found that the overall rates of violence victimization and perpetration were lower on the Intervention campus than on the Comparison campuses, specifically accounting for lower rates in sexual harassment and stalking. However, when looking at the rates of unwanted sex victimization, the authors reported a “modest difference” in findings, which were “not significant at the $p < .01$ level” (Coker et al., 2015, p. 1518).

Coker et al.’s 2015 study suggests, that while helpful across the board, this BI program falls short in reducing rape significantly. The authors’ intent was to conduct the study and present findings but did not make claims as to why the most significant changes applied to sexual harassment and stalking, as opposed to rape. They theorized that the lower rape numbers reported in the survey, as opposed to higher rates of sexual harassment and stalking could have contributed to the lower significance.

In an earlier study, Coker et al. (2011) evaluated Green Dot using a random sample of undergraduate students, some who had had some sort of exposure to Green Dot, and others who had not. The authors were interested in finding an association between Green Dot exposure and likelihood to engage in bystander behaviors and reject “violence acceptance norms” (p. 777). The authors concluded that the students who received Green Dot training, even the minimum 50-minute speech, were more likely to engage in bystander behaviors and reject rape myths than those students who had no Green Dot training (Coker et al., 2011). While Coker et al.’s 2015
study examined victimization and perpetration rates, the Coker et al. 2011 study focused on bystander attitudes and likeliness of intervening having some exposure to Green Dot. So, while Green Dot appears to make an impression on students who undergo the training, as evidenced by attitude and behavior scales, the actual rates of rape on the campuses where Green Dot has been employed remains unchanged. There is clearly a need for improvement in BI programming, and perhaps this study can lend much needed insights.

**Know Your Power Marketing Campaign/Bringing in the Bystander**

The Know Your Power Marketing Campaign and Bringing in the Bystander are Bystander intervention tools developed by *Prevention Interventions: Research and Practices for Ending Violence Against Women* at the University of New Hampshire. Like Green Dot, this BI initiative differs from MVP in that it is intended for a broader student audience, not specifically for athletes. It differs from Green Dot in that it requires less in-person training. Bringing in the Bystander was created first as an in-person workshop, and Know Your Power was later developed as a companion to Bringing in the Bystander, or as a stand-alone campaign. The creation of Know Your Power stemmed from declining attendance at Bringing in the Bystander trainings. Know Your Power and Bringing in the Bystander both use “21 images modeling engaged bystander behavior” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2013).

The images display various scenarios including supporting someone (men and women) who disclose being a victim of sexual assault, how to intervene in a potentially abusive situation, and how to address peers who engage in demeaning or abusive language. The campaign tagline is: “Know Your Power – Step In, Speak Up – You Can Make A Difference” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2013). While this program does look at BI through both the
perspective of the bystander and the victim, it lacks the momentum both MVP and Green Dot have acquired and has not been proven to reduce rape rates at the institutions where it has been implemented. A 2015 study took an experimental approach using this program at two college campuses with experimental and control groups at each campus. The study only measured attitudes and behaviors, not rape data, upon completion of the study (Cares et al.). The program results revealed improvements in the areas that were measured, with the experimental groups showing more positive change than the control groups, though the results of the impact of occurrence of rape on campuses remains unknown.

**Statement of the problem**

These three Bystander Intervention (BI) models are excellent examples of how to engage students in intervening to help prevent sexual violence. Not only does BI address the alarming rate of sexual assaults at colleges and universities across the country, it also fulfills a directive initiated by President Obama in March of 2014, the *Protecting Students from Sexual Assault Initiative* (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014). All American higher education institutions were to initiate a “good faith effort” to uphold this initiative (American Council on Education, 2014). While colleges and universities should of course want to protect their students from sexual assault, President Obama’s directive is connected to the obligation of institutions to be compliant with the educational amendment, Title IX, and BI programs are one way to accomplish that.

Title IX, passed in 1972 to protect against sex discrimination in athletics, was expanded in 1981 to include sexual harassment, and has now been interpreted to impose an obligation on colleges to address sexual assault (AAUP, 2016; Sun, J., Scott, L., Sponsler, B., 2013). Most
higher education institutions believed they were in compliance with Title IX; however, as students have filed Title IX complaints against them, it has come to light that many are not. In an attempt to clarify standards and offer suggestions, and to ensure colleges and universities were doing their best to protect victims of sexual assault, the White House sent out a “Dear Colleague” letter (DCL) in 2011 (Ali, 2011). This letter, sent from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), informed higher education institutions of their responsibilities regarding the handling of sexual assault cases. However, since the introduction of the DCL, many colleges and universities have been under fire from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), victims, families, advocates, and the media, over the failure of these institutions to uphold their Title IX obligations.

Despite the ongoing issues with Title IX compliance, the extended definition of Title IX has given a much-needed voice to victims of sexual assault when they feel that their institutions failed them. While some may argue the Dear Colleague Letter has done little to change “rape culture” at colleges and universities, it has given victims and advocates some leverage in their struggle. In addition, where lawsuits and Title IX complaints do fall short or fail, the media coverage of the shortcomings of college administration have given much momentum to this issue. For example, after what many thought was a light sentence (six months, of which he served three) for Stanford’s Brock Turner, public outrage led to a petition calling for the removal of Judge Aaron Persky. Persky has voluntarily moved from hearing criminal cases to civil cases, but still remains on the bench (Juris, 2016).

The media and public have certainly played an important role in exposing the issue of sexual assault on college campuses and advocating for change. Of course, many colleges and universities want to avoid this exposure, and some go to great lengths to hide the extent of the problem on their campuses. In the documentary movie, The Hunting Ground, the filmmakers
assert that there is a systematic cover-up of sexual assault cases, with some colleges and universities silencing victims in order to keep sexual assault statistics low so they will not appear unsafe (Lipka, 2015). One Title IX advocate in the movie gave this analogy: If colleges were to email all parents of incoming freshman that one in five of their students are victims of drive-by shootings, how many parents would willingly send their child to that school? Clearly, prevention is a much better strategy in eliminating sexual assault than pretending the problem does not exist.

External influence and politics likely come into play, interwoven throughout the campus rape crisis. The Hunting Ground implies that, in addition to wanting to avoid bad press, colleges and universities are not being as proactive as they could be due to pressures from alumni, who may have a personal as well as a financial, investment in the top two collegiate organizations that most often find themselves in the midst of sexual assault cases: fraternities and athletics (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2005). The movie alludes to the high percentage of fraternity alumni that are in government, the very same people who are supposed to be implementing sanctions against organizations like fraternities. Fraternity alumni are also more likely to be major financial contributors to their alma mater, raising questions about where their loyalties, and thus their priorities, may lie.

Just as fraternity members may be shielded on various levels, athletes are very likely to be protected by the athletics department, as evidenced in the Florida State University case involving Jameis Winston (described in the second opening vignette), who did not have to comply with the investigation until after he had helped the team win the championship game. When he was finally questioned and a hearing was held, he was not held accountable for sexual assault due to lack of evidence, despite the multiple victims that came forward (United States District Court, 2015). In cases of gang rape (involving two or more perpetrators), 40% of cases
involve athletes (Wilson, 2015). In the Brock Turner case (described in the first opening vignette), he was found guilty, thanks to literally being caught in the act by two bystanders. Being part of the swim team did not save him from a guilty verdict; however, his athlete status was used in his defense, most notably by Turner’s father, Dan A. Turner, who received substantial criticism for lamenting that his son’s future, which he had worked so hard for, was ruined by “20 minutes of action” (Preza, 2016).

While accused perpetrators and their families may decry unjust or harsh punishments, a student is more likely to be expelled for plagiarizing than for sexual assault (Dick & Ziering, 2015). The Huffington Post reports that only 30% of students found guilty of sexual assault are expelled (Kingkade, 2014). The Washington Post reports numbers as low as 12% of sanctions resulting in expulsion between 2012-13 (Anderson, 2014). According to the Post report, 28% resulted in suspensions, the rest were reprimands, community service, counseling orders and other unspecified sanctions. This is an alarmingly low number considering, as mentioned earlier, many perpetrators are repeat offenders. Rarely do guilty offenders serve jail time – colleges have a history of preferring to follow internal consequences.

Indeed, institutions of higher education continue to struggle with handling the overwhelming issue of sexual assault on an institutional level and can anticipate major revisions in policies and procedures in the months and years to come, such as the implementation or continuation of BI programs. Sexual assault, an issue once kept underground, is being forced into the spotlight by survivors and advocates who will be silenced no more. Perpetrators and universities, once rarely held accountable, are being held to a higher standard than ever before. As prevention is the preferred method to combat campus sexual assault, BI initiatives are being widely implemented. While training bystanders on how to intervene is a key element of BI
programs, understanding the bystander role through the eyes of the survivor is a link this study proposes to connect.

**Researcher’s Statement**

As a staff therapist at a large university counseling center, I had first-hand knowledge of the pervasiveness of sexual assault on campus. On a weekly basis, we would receive calls from victims, friends of victims, residence life, the Center for Women Students, and faculty, among others, seeking support for a recent or past sexual assault, relationship violence, or stalking incident. As a therapist, my job is to support the victim in whatever decision s/he feels is best, and in some cases, leaving the incident(s) unreported and helping the victim work through their trauma is what is best for them. While support after a traumatic event is crucial, the best way to help victims of abuse is to prevent the abuse from ever happening, and studies have shown that Bystander Intervention is the most effective way to reduce Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence (SARV) on college campuses (Katz, 2008).

It is through the support/advocate role that informs my study, and I believe my background and experience in this area will be an asset as I move into research on this topic. I have been a therapist for over 18 years, specializing in trauma and abuse throughout my career. It has been my privilege to support victims on their path to healing and regaining their power. Now in the role of researcher, I plan to use my years of therapeutic and advocate experience toward the development of more effective prevention. This process has made me keenly aware of my own metamorphosis as a therapist with a background in treating victims of sexual assault in a college campus setting. My evolving identity as an academic researcher urges me to pursue new ways to positively impact BI.
**Purpose of the study**

By better understanding the role of BI from the perspective of survivors, we can better inform, and possibly reshape BI programs in higher education, and aid prevention efforts considerably. Survivors of sexual assault, for example, may identify bystanders who were not even aware they were bystanders, thus expanding an understanding of who a bystander is, as well as the actions they can take. A long-term goal is to change behavior and create a shift in culture where bystanders gain a sense of awareness, responsibility and ownership. By talking with survivors about the role bystanders could have or did play in their attempted or completed sexual assaults, we gain more than hypothetical scenarios, but rather, real-life examples that can help inform new models, and/or enhance existing ones.

While the overall issue of sexual assault has been a cornerstone in the development of the BI programs discussed, what is missing from the current models is the victim’s voice in their shaping and implementation. This study intends to bridge that gap, seeking input from survivors in the development and implementation of programs that affect their lives so profoundly. Seeing a sexual assault through the eyes of a survivor provides valuable information on who a bystander is, or can be. It can also bring in an essential element into the equation: empathy. It is not enough to train on how to act; it is equally as important to give students a *reason* to react. Adding the survivors’ perspectives can provide new insights by allowing the bystander to walk in their shoes, an important part of developing empathy.
Research Questions

This study is framed by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Whom do survivors of sexual assault identify as bystanders?

Research Question 2: How do survivors of sexual assault understand the concept of intervention?

Research Question 3: How do survivors of sexual assault describe how bystanders could have intervened?

Research Question 4: What do survivors of sexual assault want bystanders to know?

I interviewed survivors of sexual assault from the Pennsylvania State University to answer these questions. Penn State is an ideal site for my study as it has a large student body, is convenient, and I have established relationships with offices on campus where students are likely to disclose a sexual assault, thus optimizing my potential for participants.

Significance of the study

Not only is this analysis important to potential victims, especially if this research aids in the prevention of sexual assault, but institutions of higher education have a significant stake in decreasing sexual assault on their campuses. First and foremost, all universities should strive to create a safe environment for their students. Families rightfully expect that they are sending their children to be educated and grow as human beings, not to be victimized. When this trust is violated, the repercussions can be pervasive, including the institution’s reputation becoming compromised and incurring Title IX violations if the sexual assault case is mishandled. To this end, a recent study by an insurance and risk management company looked at 305 reports of sexual assaults in 104 institutions over a three-year span. Nine percent of reports lead to Title IX lawsuits against the institutions. Universities spent more than $17 million in defending and
resolving their lawsuits (Wilson, 2015). The cost of sexual assault is significant not only for victims, but for colleges and universities as well. The former carries the emotional trauma for many years, even a lifetime. The latter carries the financial burden, in lawsuits and in indirect costs, such as loss of reputation.

Due to the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses, colleges and universities have been seeking out and implementing prevention programs to address this issue, BI programs being the most predominant (Banyard, 2014). In fact, the 2013 Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (Campus SaVE) includes legislation specifically aimed at increasing BI, requiring “that primary prevention and awareness campaigns for all incoming students and new employees include bystander intervention training” (Coker et al., 2015, p. 1508). Time and resources (through both personnel and money) are being expended to ensure program success. What better way to ensure success than having those closest to the problem help shape the direction of future programs? This study will contribute to the research by recognizing the victim’s voice, perspective, and experiences of sexual assault and bystander behavior. In the wake of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, where survivors’ voices are becoming the forefront of sexual assault dialogues, this study adds 13 stories of survival to the conversation.

**Definition of key terms**

*Bystander:* Any person who is in the vicinity of someone being victimized, or someone who is in danger of being victimized.

*Bystander Intervention:* A program that teaches people how to recognize red flags and react appropriately to reduce the victimization of others.

*Sexual Assault:* According to the United States Department of Justice, sexual assault is defined
as “…any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the recipient.

Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape” (The United States Department of Justice, 2016).

Title IX: An education amendment that protects students from discrimination based on gender. It was originally implemented to eradicate discrimination for female athletes and has been expanded to include victims of sexual assault.

Dear Colleague Letter: A letter from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to colleges and universities, advising them on Title IX compliance regarding the handling of sexual assault cases.

Consent: Mutually agreed upon engagement in sexual activity. Cannot be obtained by threat, coercion or force. Cannot be given when intoxicated or unconscious (Penn State’s Center for Women Students, 2016).

Rape Culture: An environment where rape is commonplace and accepted due to gender inequality and perpetuated by victim blaming and rape myths.
Chapter 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review will first focus on themes relevant to my topic, as well as the broader discourse. The themes include: survivor perspectives, empathy towards rape victims, and rape culture. I will then discuss my theoretical framework, feminist theory, looking at feminist theory through feminist legal scholarship and feminist psychology lenses. This framework of empowerment and agency, common themes in feminist theory, is useful in conceptualizing Bystander Intervention, which hinges on individuals feeling empowered and using their agency to intervene. Not only will feminist theory frame how I conceptualize bystanders, it will guide my analysis of the data from the victims of sexual assault.

A. Literature Review

Survivor Perspectives

As of this writing I am unable to find any research that relates to the perspectives of survivors of sexual assault regarding bystanders. I am therefore examining closely related literature on sexual assault survivors’ perspectives more broadly. Interestingly, there was a scarcity of literature on this topic as well. I found literature on social workers’ perspectives (Du Mont et al., 2008), police perspectives (Kaiser et al., 2017), therapist perspectives (Ullman, 2014), health care worker perspectives (Moylan et al., 2015), perspectives of friends of the victim (Banyard et al., 2010), yet rarely the survivor her/himself. In this section I will discuss what literature I did find, several studies that directly addressed the experiences of survivors of sexual assault, from a variety of standpoints. The main insight I gleaned from the available studies was that survivors have a unique perspective into this issue and provide new and deeper understandings to the researchers. That idea is the very backbone of this study – listening to
survivors, gaining a deeper understanding, and using their voices to perpetuate change on college campuses through better-informed bystander intervention programs.

While the literature is lacking regarding perspectives of survivors of sexual assault, there are copious amounts of books and articles on resources for victims of sexual assault and how to help someone in the aftermath of a sexual assault. The groundbreaking book, *I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape* (Warshaw & Koss, 1988), was based on a nationwide Ms. Magazine survey and brought to light the then hidden epidemic of date and acquaintance rape. Ledray’s (1986 & 1994) *Recovering From Rape*, Adams & Fay’s (1989) *Free From the Shadows: Recovering From Sexual Violence*, Bryant-Davis’ (2011) *Surviving Sexual Violence: A Guide to Recovery and Empowerment*, and Kelly’s (1988) *Surviving Sexual Violence*, are among the self-help books focused on the healing process after sexual assault. Woodward’s (1989) *Recovering From Rape, Practical Advice on Overcoming the Trauma and Coping With Police, Hospitals, and Court: For Survivors of Sexual Assault and for Their Families, Lovers and Friends* guides survivors and those closest to them on how to navigate the systems survivors must go through if they choose to report the assault. Still, among peer-reviewed research articles, there is a dearth of information available on sexual assault from the perspective of those who have been sexually assaulted. This raises the question: why are so few researchers talking to survivors?

One obvious answer is that those with access to survivors of sexual assault are bound by confidentiality, so finding participants who are willing to talk to a researcher could be challenging. Another issue could be that researchers may not feel they are qualified or prepared to talk to people who have had this experience. Researchers likely worry that they may “say the wrong thing” and inadvertently re-traumatize a victim. However, this fear is not supported by
recent research. A study by Nielsen, Hansen, Elklit, & Bramsen (2016), found that not only did participating in a research study not cause harm to the participants, but over one half of the sexual assault victims felt they experienced some benefits as a result of their participation.

Some of the literature I did find on victims’ perspectives comes via the legal system. In one study, “Victim’s Perceptions of Their Interactions With the Police,” Greeson, Campbell, & Fehler-Cabral (2014) looked at adolescent victims’ perceptions of the police officers who handled their cases. The experiences were categorized into negative and positive: negative experiences included police behaviors that were “uncaring, insensitive, and intimidating” (p.640); positive experiences were behaviors described as “caring, compassionate, and personable” (p. 643). The most compelling data from this study were excerpts from the victims describing both negative and positive experiences. However, the results were predictable: it makes sense that victims would feel comfortable with someone who was patient, caring, and took their time, while feeling uncomfortable with someone who was insensitive and made them feel rushed or pressured. I would venture to say that the positive qualities described in this study would be imperative to possess for anyone working with a victim of sexual assault in any capacity, at any age. This study certainly addresses victims’ perceptions after a sexual assault, but only in relation to interactions with the police. What I am seeking is victims’ perceptions about bystanders, which the Greeson et al. study does not address.

Another study centered around the legal system, “Victims’ Perceptions of a New Model of Sexual Assault Investigation Conducted by Victoria Police” by Powell & Cauchi (2011), yielded similar results: when victims were treated with dignity and respect, they held more positive views of their experience with the police. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the success of this police department’s new victim-centered model. The results of the study
confirmed that the new model is successful, with one of the most salient messages from victims was that “being heard” and having the investigation taken seriously was important to them (p. 240). This paper is strengthened with quotations from the participants, but still does not address the particular issue I am examining: BI.

Cleveland, Koss, & Lyons (1999) also looked at the criminal aspect of sexual assault in their study, “Rape Tactics From the Survivors’ Perspective: Contextual and Within-Event Independence.” Instead of focusing on interactions with the police, as the above two studies did, they utilized unstructured narratives and questionnaires with survivors of sexual assault to examine if there was a difference in the tactics being used by a perpetrator depending on the nature of the victim/perpetrator relationship. Cleveland et al. identified two tactic scales: power tactics (threats/force) and drug tactics (employing alcohol and/or drugs to reduce resistance). They found drug tactics were used more among date/acquaintance rape, as found in many cases occurring on college campuses. Interestingly, the authors noted that the tactics were not used together, postulating that if one were not available, a perpetrator would simply use another one. This theory debunks those that blame alcohol on sexual assaults, rather, attributing sexual assault to coercive men who may have “hostility toward women or low empathy” (Cleveland et al., 1999, p. 543).

Although the participants in the Cleveland et al. study were survivors of sexual assault, the focus was on tactics their perpetrators used to rape them. This study did not speak to the experiences of the survivors, other than in the context of this issue the researchers were examining. This study is similar to my study in that both look at a particular issue through the lens of sexual assault survivors, theirs, rape tactics, mine, BI. The studies differ in that my approach is through the lens of feminist theory, galvanizing the idea of empowerment for both
survivors and bystanders. Another difference is my desire to lend survivors’ voices to BI programs. Further research separating drinking as a causal factor to sexual assault (as is often implied) could have significant implications for sexual assault survivors, such as a decrease in victim-blaming, and an increase in perpetrator accountability.

Other studies seeking the perspective of sexual assault survivors include Hoover & Morrow's (2015) “Qualitative Researcher Reflexivity: A Follow-Up Study with Female Sexual Assault Survivors” and sought feedback from sexual assault survivors who participated in Hoover’s 2008 unpublished thesis, “I Want You to Know: Disclosures of Unwanted Sexual Experiences.” The goal was to use reflexivity – being in tune with others and adjusting accordingly – to reflect with participants on their experience in the original study with the intent of improving research practices. Like my study, Hoover & Morrow’s research was grounded in phenomenology and feminist theory. Unlike my study, this research focused on the participants’ experience as a research participant who had spoken about sexual assault in a previous study. Both studies emphasize the importance of the participant’s voice: “The participants’ feedback is invaluable to promote better research” (Hoover & Morrow, 2015, p. 1485)

Similarly, Campbell, Adams, Wasco, Ahrens, & Sefl (2010) conducted a study titled, “‘What Has it Been Like for You to Talk With Me Today?’: The Impact of Participating in Interview Research on Rape Survivors.” As noted in the Nielsen et al. study above, the participants shared that they had an overall positive experience, the interview being a “helpful, supportive, and insightful experience” (Campbell et al., 2010, p. 60). Like my study, this research was qualitative and used feminist interviewing “which emphasized reducing hierarchy between the interview and interviewee, providing information and resources, and creating an emotionally supportive and compassionate setting” (Campbell et al., 2010, p. 60). Like Hoover
& Morrow’s study, the focus was on the experience of participating in a research study about sexual assault, not necessarily about the assault itself. My one critique of the study is that the participants were asked by their interviewer at the conclusion of the interview about their experience as an interviewee. While the responses appeared well thought out and genuine, it is also possible that the participants would be less inclined to criticize an interviewer who had just spent on average two-and-a-half hours with her in a face-to-face discussion. In addition, while the survivor may have felt supported and stable in the moment, the interview may have had a negative impact on her at a later time. Future studies may want to consider anonymous post-surveys several days or weeks after the interview. Being mindful of how an interview on sexual assault may impact a survivor is an important aspect of my research approach and supported through feminist theory.

The focus on the survivor as a person is further addressed in two studies on survivor identity: Muldoon, Taylor, & Norma's (2016), “The Survivor Master Narrative in Sexual Assault,” and Macy, Nurius, & Norris’ (2007), “Latent Profiles Among Sexual Assault Survivors: Understanding Survivors and Their Assault Experiences.” The Muldoon et al. study discussed the concept of “identity shock,” and the impact sexual assault has on a survivor’s sense of self and sense of safety in the world. The study also emphasized that the legal distinctions of a “minor” or “serious” sexual assault are “meaningless” to survivors – assault is assault regardless of the severity the legal system deems it (Muldoon et al., 2016, p. 565). The authors describe a “shared felt experience” amongst survivors, which is the essence I will be exploring through phenomenology (Muldoon et al., 2016, p. 565).

As opposed to the “shared” experience the Muldoon et al. study highlighted, the Macy et al. study looked at differences within a group of 415 undergraduate women who were survivors
of sexual assault. The authors found differences in women depending on their exposure to sexual victimization prior to the sexual assault in college, such as childhood and/or adolescent sexual abuse. The aim of the study was to tailor prevention efforts to different groups of women. In this way, this study is similar to my study, as both look to survivors of sexual assault while in college to better inform future prevention efforts. The studies differ in that Macy et al. plan to use their research to help women better protect themselves from sexual assault, while my study seeks to involve all members of a campus community (bystanders) in the reduction of sexual assault.

The existing literature was informative and each highlighted the importance of talking with survivors about sexual assault. Like these studies, I talked to survivors directly, and the above literature indicates it is not only appropriate, but also helpful to survivors, to do so. The research also suggests that survivors have an important point of view to express; yet not enough of them are being invited to the discussion through academic literature. This study addresses this gap in the literature by inviting survivors to the conversation, listening to them without judgment, and allowing their voices to propose change in an issue that has affected them the most. They are not objects to be talked about and managed; rather, they are subjects of their own story, and within a larger picture of survivors across college campuses.

**Empathy Towards Rape Victims**

Putting a face on sexual assault victims increases empathy – that they are not just statistics, they are people. Other situations to which this could apply is developing more empathy when one meets an LGBTQ person or immigrant. It is more challenging (hopefully) to dismiss a person or group of people when one can attach a face, a story, to an identity. Building empathy for rape victims is the cornerstone to my research, which argues that empathy should be
addressed in all BI programs. However, the focus of much of the BI literature is on evaluating the models for efficacy, not nurturing empathy. Several studies, not necessarily related to BI, do explore and attempt to develop empathy for rape victims. One such study conducted by Foubert & Perry (2007) includes participants from fraternities and student athletes. These two groups were targeted because of their elevated sexual assault perpetrator rates on college campuses, accounting for the vast majority of gang rapes between the two populations (Foubert & Perry, 2007). Foubert & Perry (2007) state, “[l]ow rape proclivity and high empathy toward rape survivors are strongly linked,” therefore, the research goal was to increase empathy in hopes of decreasing likelihood to rape (p. 71). Foubert & Perry (2007) found that the male participants responded most to a video of a description of a male being sexually assaulted.

As in the BI models mentioned earlier, the male participants were recruited as “potential helpers” to women (Foubert & Perry, 2007, p. 74). Unlike BI programs, they were not trained to intervene prior to a sexual assault; rather, they were being primed to support a victim of assault after an assault had taken place. Foubert & Perry conducted a five-month post assessment of the program and found the program had a lasting effect on all of the participants. Hearing about the rape of a heterosexual man (a police officer) by two heterosexual perpetrators, as told by another police officer, not only changed the male participants’ perceptions of male-on-male rape, it also allowed the men to understand rape from a female perspective, namely, the loss of power in that scenario (Foubert & Perry, 2007). This qualitative study incorporated statements from the participants in the post-assessment questions, which added a layer of insight into the impact of the study.

This study differs from my research in that it uses the story of male rape survivors to develop empathy, as well as the focus being on decreasing rape proclivity (guised as post-assault
support) as opposed to bystander intervention. Although the study didn’t seek to address BI, there were some reported BI outcomes, such as participants sharing that they refrained from making “rape jokes” and called out those who did (Foubert & Perry, 2007). The ways in which this research aligns with my study is looking at developing empathy through the lens of a victim of sexual assault. The results in this study are encouraging to my research goals in that it showed the development of empathy was gained through the witnessing of a victim perspective, and this contributed to long-term attitude and behavior changes.

A related study that dealt with college students (again male), conducted in 2003, focused on “modifying rape myths, increasing victim empathy, and identifying negative outcomes that could occur as a result of engaging in sexually coercive behavior” (O’Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, pp. 514-515). The authors noted the deficiency of programs focused on changing men’s behaviors as compared to the plethora of programs available on college campuses geared toward teaching women to avoid being sexually assaulted (O’Donohue et al., 2003). The study employs the use of videos focusing on: (1) debunking rape myths, (2) developing empathy using victim testimonials, and (3) highlighting negative outcomes through the testimonials of sexual assault perpetrators, two of whom were interviewed from prison (O’Donohue et al., 2003).

As in the previous study, O’Donohue et al. (2003) hypothesized that increasing victim empathy, in addition to reducing belief in rape myths, will decrease the participant’s “proclivity to engage in sexually coercive behavior” (p. 528). The results supported their hypothesis, according to the post-training self-report questionnaire. Unlike the previous study, the long-term results of the training were not measured. This study utilized testimonials from female victims, as my study does as well. However, my study focuses on the victim’s perspective of bystanders, thus contributing to the existing literature on empathy and BI.
Rape Culture

Rape culture is relevant to my topic, as it has been identified as one of reasons sexual assault is so common on college campuses. It is this very culture that BI attempts to thwart. Rape culture is broadly defined as a culture in which rape myths (e.g. women who dress provocatively are “asking for it”) and rape acceptance are rampant (Rutherford, 2011). The term was coined by second wave feminists of the 1970’s and is used widely today. Since the 1970’s, “rape culture,” thought to be predicated by patriarchal forms of society, was regarded as, if not the culprit, at least a major contributor to this epidemic on college campuses, with statistics reporting one in five women are sexually assaulted while in college (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014).

Today, however, there exists a backlash against the use of the term, “rape culture.” The organization, Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), released a statement in March of 2014, in response to the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault’s “Not Alone” report, stating, “Rape is caused not by cultural factors but by the conscious decisions, of a small percentage of the community, to commit a violent crime” (Berkowitz & O’Connor, 2014). RAINN’s concern is that individual responsibility for committing violent crimes can get lost in this culture of violence, adding that “[t]his trend has the paradoxical effect of making it harder to stop sexual violence, since it removes the focus from the individual at fault, and seemingly mitigates personal responsibility for his or her own actions” (Berkowitz & O’Connor, 2014). RAINN cites Dr. David Lisak’s study, finding that 90% of rapes on college campuses were committed by three percent of college men (Berkowitz & O’Connor, 2014). This notion of the predatory rapist on college campuses was exemplified in the documentary, The Hunting Ground (Dick & Ziering, 2015), which aimed to shed light on the epidemic of sexual
violence within higher education institutions, compounded by the cover-up attempts by some university officials.

Higher education institutions have been under increased scrutiny since 2011 when the now infamous “Dear Colleague Letter” (Ali, 2011) was issued to colleges and universities across the United States. This letter, from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and its Office for Civil Rights (OCR), explained how all forms of sexual violence, “including rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, and sexual coercion” were considered Title IX violations, and as such, schools have certain responsibilities to address these violations (Ali, 2011, pp. 1-2). The letter concluded with recommendations for all colleges and universities who receive Title IX funding (nearly all higher education institutions), which included moving to the “preponderance of evidence” standard, required that those investigating sexual misconduct have training or experience in this area, and that sexual misconduct investigations be completed within 60 days (Perkins, 2015). The “Dear Colleague Letter” (DCL) was followed up in 2014, when the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault also produced the “Not Alone” report, further clarifying colleges and universities obligation in protecting students from sexual assault under Title IX.

Although much focus has been placed in higher education institutions in the wake of the DCL, the letter may have more bark than bite. According to Davis v. Monroe, unless the school is not acting in a “clearly unreasonable” manner, they are not required to remedy the peer-to-peer harassment. This gives institutions the maximum latitude for defining what is reasonable. Thus, despite the fact that the greatest potential risk for sexual assault lies within the college environment, higher education institutions have the greatest ability to ignore sexual misconduct (Suran, 2014).

While many colleges and universities scrambled to put policies in place to comply with
Title IX requirements, activists criticized the White House initiative, on the grounds that the threat of pulling a college or university’s funding for Title IX violations was extremely unlikely, and therefore carried little weight (Suran, 2014). As of June of 2015, 117 higher education institutions were under Title IX investigation for a total of 130 sexual violence cases (Dateline, 2015). It is clear that efforts are being made on the part of colleges and universities to address sexual violence on their campuses; yet despite these efforts, this issue persists.

Whether or not rape culture is to blame for the persistence of sexual assaults on college campuses remains a point of contention. There is an abundance of literature on rape culture from activists, social media, and the media at large, as illustrated in Rentschler's (2014) study, *Rape Culture and the Feminist Politics of Social Media*, including conflicting views on rape and the use of the term, “rape culture.” I agree with RAINN’s stance that shifting blame from perpetrators to “culture” can muddy the waters in holding perpetrators accountable. That being said, it is difficult to ignore the levels of violence against women that do exist, as exemplified by the following image (see figure 2.1). Many of the levels that violations take place: victimization, degradation, removal of autonomy, or explicit violence; there is the possibility that a bystander is near and could intervene. My study seeks to shift focus from a culture that condones or accepts perpetrator behavior to one that supports human beings before they can become potential victims.
This is Rape Culture.

These are not isolated incidents. The attitudes and actions on the bottom tiers reinforce and excuse those on the upper. This is systematic.

If this is to change, the culture must change.
Start the conversation today.

11th Principle: Consent!
B. Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework, feminist theory, guides my research and informs the research questions I am asking. In this section, I examine rape from both an historical and contemporary perspective, reviewing feminist theoretical, legal, and psychological literature. Through the examination of feminist theory, I discuss the absence of rape from recent theory, and how this study uses the ideals of feminist theory, such as empowerment and listening to women’s voices, to enhance BI programs. Feminist legal scholarship gives a perspective of the patriarchal nature of the legal system, which bleeds into how sexual assault cases are handled by higher education institutions. This study seeks to challenge this patriarchal perspective, as we look through the lens of the survivor, rather than the male-dominated institution, thereby giving bystanders the opportunity to see sexual assault from the victim’s perspective. In feminist psychology, I examine the avoidance of rape within this field up until recently, and this study joins more recent works in considering rape within the feminist psychology context from an interdisciplinary perspective. Feminist theory has informed the development of the study, and it continued to guide me as analyzed my findings.

Feminist Theory

I first choose feminist theory as my theoretical framework because it aligns best with my background in treating survivors of assault through empowerment counseling. As my study unfolded, feminist theory also best fit the research questions through empowering victims of sexual assault by allowing their voices to be heard regarding the prevention of the crime of which they are survivors. BI speaks to me in this same way, in that it empowers bystanders to take action and intervene. While feminist theory supports the ideals of empowerment, what it has
been lacking is the actual discussion of rape. A cursory look through feminist theory texts revealed that only one had a section devoted to rape; in many of the other texts, the word, “rape,” was not even found in the index. This study seeks to contribute to the theoretical literature in linking feminist theory with rape. Feminist theory looks at people as subjects of their own lived experience rather than objects that others place their own narrative upon. My research questions are congruent with this theory, as I seek direct input from survivors on their lived experience, as well as inquiring what types of interventions they would have found helpful, instead of making assumptions about their experiences and their needs.

Carine M. Mardorossian addresses the paucity of the inclusion of rape in feminist theory in her 2002 essay, “Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape.” In this essay, Mardorossian (2002) calls out feminist theorists on this very issue, (I think in the hopes of a call to action), stating:

Contemporary feminist theory…tends to ignore the topic of rape in favor of more ambivalent expressions of male domination such as pornography and sexual harassment.

The kind of theoretical and genealogical scrutiny that other aspects of women’s lives (the body, gender performativity, eating disorders, transgender politics, etc.) have occasioned is remarkably absent from studies of sexual violence (p. 743). Mardorossian’s call to action was a critique that this issue has been largely neglected by contemporary feminist theorists over the past thirty years. Mardorossian (2002) cites the work of many of the well-known names in feminist theory: Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Gayle Salamon, to name a few; but then she pointedly asks why these and so many others are silent on rape and sexual violence, “precisely at a time when the body is so high on feminist scholars’ list of priorities?” (p. 744).

Furthermore, Mardorossian (2002) critiques feminist theorists’ way of seemingly
distancing themselves from the actual societal issue of rape, by instead turning their attention to analyzing rape culture in contemporary forms of art, such as television and movies:

Although postmodernists have written at length about the discourse of victimization, their inquiries stop short of examining the social meanings grouped under the category ‘rape’. In fact, when sexual violence is discussed in academic criticism, it is generally in terms of its cinematic representation. (p. 746).

In this way, feminist theory (ironically?) forges (or perpetuates?) a disconnection between theory and lived experience.

Mardorossian’s (2002) observations align with my own regarding rape literature stemming more from feminist and antifeminist activists than from feminist theorists, warning of the danger of abandoning rape from feminist theory: “Feminist academics need to start theorizing rape lest we are willing to let the writers of the backlash completely reconceptualize the field and continue to set the terms of the debate” (p. 751). In other words, if feminist theory’s voice is not leading the discussion, whose is? And what will that mean for women?

Mardorossian (2002) cites an increase in victim-blaming as a possible consequence of feminist theorists’ abandonment of rape. This may come in the seemingly benign form of “rape prevention” tactics which tend to focus on teaching women how not to get raped, by taking self-defense classes, for instance, or walking with a partner, as opposed to teaching men not to rape. Mardorossian (2002) argues that these practices place no burden whatsoever on perpetrators, who are given no behavior guidelines themselves: “Making women’s behavior and identity the site of rape prevention only mirrors the dominant culture’s proclivity to see rape as women’s problems, both in the sense of a problem women should solve and one that they caused” (pp. 755-6). The idea of women alone shouldering the responsibility of not getting raped continues to
this day. Just a few years ago, some well-meaning students formulated a nail polish that changes color if placed in a drink that has been laced with date rape drugs (Sullivan, 2014). The reactions to this product from the feminist community changed over the course of a few short weeks. Initially the community was appreciative of giving women a useful tool against being drugged – until they realized that once again, if women fail to outwit their would-be rapists, then the rape is their fault. Giving women more responsibility for not being raped is not the solution feminists are looking for. Having men take responsibility where it squarely lies, is.

Sadly, this culture of victim-blaming, solidified by programs teaching only women that they need to thwart attacks, rather than teaching men the responsibility of desisting from attack, is as pervasive today as ever. However, positive models for acknowledging perpetrator responsibility do exist. In response to a series of rapes in Israel in the early 1970’s, it was suggested that a protective curfew be placed on women. Then Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, had an important revision: “But it is the men who are attacking the women. If there is to be a curfew, let the men stay at home” (Michelle, 2012, p. 1). To my knowledge, the curfew on men was never enacted, as the curfew on women would likely have been if Meir had approved it. How refreshing it would be if the focus was placed on stopping men from raping, instead of having women make sure they are not raped. Today’s colleges and universities continue to send this message out to women and men students, as noted in Bedera & Nordmeyer's (2015) essay: “Never Go Out Alone”: An Analysis of College Rape Prevention Tips.

It is in this environment of victim-blaming and placing prevention efforts solely on women where feminist theory can begin reconstructing current views on rape and rape culture as a continuum, not only a single, isolated event. Henderson (2007) states: “Rape prevention requires that rape not be theorized as a foregone conclusion; rather, feminism must learn to view
rape as a sequence or process that can be undermined before it occurs.” (p. 229). In this light we can refer to Foucault’s (1978) agency of the body in order to interject BI, in that everybody has agency, and that a bystander can use their agency, their body, to intercept when a rapist refuses to use his and a victim cannot use hers.

Agency for survivors of sexual assault can sometimes be found in unlikely places, such as deciding whether or not to report the crime to the police. Holland (2015), conducted an anonymous web-survey study of 840 undergraduate women living in on campus at a large, Midwestern university. Of these women, 284 (34%) experienced sexual assault. Her data also found that 98% did not report the assault to the university; 96% did not seek help from the campus sexual assault center, and 97% did not seek help from housing staff (Holland, 2015). Feminist backlashers consistently try to disprove the accuracy of the “one in five” statistic, and they may be right, but not in the direction they anticipated. This data supports earlier findings that crimes of sexual assault are vastly underreported. The decision to report a rape at all to the university and/or the police is a deeply personal decision. There is no “right way” to navigate this process and it very much depends on the individual’s set of circumstances. However, some critics argue that deciding against reporting rape actually helps perpetuate rape culture “since not reporting protects the perpetrators and creates a sense of tolerance towards rape” (Burnett et al., 2009, p. 467). It may be difficult to understand why someone would choose not to report such a crime. Victims of rape often explain that after the powerlessness one can feel after an attack, having the choice in reporting or not can give them some much needed power back.

One unintended consequence of reluctance in reporting sexual assault, is that it can fuel antifeminist agendas, as in the case of Sloan & Fisher’s, The dark side of the ivory tower: Campus crime as a social problem (2010). The authors describe, from their perspective, how
certain social problems involving college campuses have been brought to the forefront of American society. What initially appears to be a hard-hitting piece on vital social issues plaguing college campuses, turned out to reveal their apparent contempt for activists, who they refer to throughout the book as “claimsmakers.” Besides the deceptive title, the authors, whether deliberately or not, painted a picture of activists as nefarious manipulators who use the media to promote their particular agenda. The authors rarely spoke positively of the achievements the advocates accomplish. I found much of the text to be dismissive and demeaning, starting with the term “claimsmakers,” which is itself pejorative in its connotation. Their attack on activists, deliberately or not, also attacks victims and survivors of sexual assault. This may have been a very different book had they sought out the voices of survivors of sexual assault.

_The Dark Side_ seems to have taken its cue from the rhetoric of other feminist backlashers, like Katie Roiphe, author of the controversial, but best-selling book in its day, _The Morning After_ (1993). Roiphe asserts that, “the ‘rape epidemic’ on campuses is a linguistic phenomenon generated by feminist extremists who cry wolf at the sight of one when their protégés are on a harmless tour of the local zoo” (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 751).

I am not suggesting that colleges are terrifying places where all who enter are destined to become victims. However, portraying crime on campus as overblown does a tremendous disservice to the academy and all of its inhabitants, especially those who have been, and continue to be, victimized. Campus crime is a social issue, in that it does not happen in a vacuum; it is a reflection of society at large. Pretending problems do not exist is exactly how they are perpetuated. By illuminating issues and working together to eradicate them, we can make our campuses the safe havens we would like them to be. Feminist theorists, who for the most part presumably reside within academia, have the unique opportunity to give a powerful voice to
those who need it the most. By identifying rape culture as the enemy of BI, in that it creates an environment where violating others is accepted and not questioned; feminist theory has the potential to incite agency and power through BI as a weapon against being silenced. My study aims to better inform BI programs with the victim’s voice in order to disrupt rape culture.

**Feminist Legal Scholarship**

A notable exception to the absence of the discussions of rape in feminist theory books over the last 30 years is Catherine A. MacKinnon’s “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence” (Harding, 2004). MacKinnon provides us with a rich explanation of rape culture through the eyes of the legal system, stating: “The law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women” (Harding, 2004, p. 169). MacKinnon describes a patriarchal legal system, which denies any point of view contrary to the male point of view. It is exactly this point of view that BI seeks to disrupt, and my research contributes to this by adding the woman’s perspective, which in turn can better inform a bystanders’ assessment and intervention into a potential sexual assault. This patriarchal view MacKinnon describes extends to the law’s (read: men’s) original view of rape, the penetration of the vagina by the penis. MacKinnon notes: “This definitive element of rape centers on a male-defined loss…this may explain the male incomprehension that, once a woman has had sex, she loses anything when raped” (Harding, 2004, p. 170). In other words, since a woman’s virginity was viewed as a possession to be taken, once she no longer possesses it, what has she really lost?

To better understand how date rape is conceptualized by men, MacKinnon references the era before the legitimacy of marital and date rape was recognized, where the mindset was (and sometimes still is): “If the accused knows us, consent is inferred” (Harding, 2004, p. 171). This
conviction supported the long-held belief by men that being raped by someone close to you is less traumatic than being raped by a stranger. However, in reality, women often experience the betrayal of trust of someone close to them as another layer in the trauma of rape (Harding, 2004). It is here we can turn back to Foucault’s theories of agency, in that someone known to the victim would have seen them as a subject with her own agency. Part of the humiliation of rape is realizing one is still an object (to the rapist).

MacKinnon criticizes the court’s tendency to determine if a rape occurred by the amount of force exerted against the victim, thereby giving evidence of a crime by the level of injury sustained: “Having defined rape in male sexual terms, the law’s problem, which becomes the victim’s problem, is distinguishing rape from sex in specific cases…rape is a sex crime that is not a crime when it looks like sex.” (Harding, 2004, p. 171). MacKinnon explores the complexities of sexual assault, such as a victim submitting to avoid more harm, which is obviously not the same as consent, but can be used against a victim in court to disprove that she was in fact raped.

Tuerkheimer (2015) joins MacKinnon’s theories on force with her views on agency and consent, asserting, “rape law should protect sexual agency” (p. 40). Tuerkheimer (2015) dismisses the court’s historic and current stance of using level of force to determine the legitimacy of rape cases, preferring to utilize consent as the determinant, as consent is the “pivot point for distinguishing rape from sex” (p. 41). According to Tuerkheimer, (2015), acknowledging agency implies that a woman is being viewed as a subject as opposed to an object: “Regardless of the quantum of force employed, sex without consent is rape because disregarding consent vanquishes agency” (p. 42). And in that process where agency is vanquished, woman is not seen as a subject with agency, but rather an object to be conquered.
The legal system, as a reflection or an extension of a systemically patriarchal ideology, will therefore re-traumatize rape victims, who frequently report they feel they have been raped twice: once by the rapist, then again by the courts (Harding, 2004). The prosecution of rape is even more complicated, especially when the rapist is known to the victim, when the question of intent comes into play. Was it rape, or just a misreading of signals? MacKinnon postulates: “What this means doctrinally is that the man’s perceptions of the woman’s desires often determine whether she is deemed violated” (Harding, 2004, p. 174). The problem with this is that “men are systematically conditioned not even to notice what women want” (Harding, 2004, p. 174). So, intent is defined by men, and in many cases, tried by men.

Perceptions of women’s desires by men also haunt the realm of “false accusations.” These can be so disturbing to men because the accusation distorts their experience of what happened, and “because rape accusations express one thing men cannot seem to control: the meaning to women of sexual encounters” (Harding, 2004, p. 174). Rape continues to be one of the most scrutinized violent crimes, because what many men (and courts) perceive as “grey” areas, are actually quite black and white. The courts and men cannot seem to make sense of rapes, which from their perspective “involve honest men and violated women” (Harding, 2004, p. 175). Not being able to decipher this dichotomy, where in some cases, both of these are true, the conclusion is that it was the woman’s perception of the event, not the man’s, that was mistaken.

MacKinnon’s perspective as both a legal scholar and feminist, allows a glimpse into the legal arena, and attempts to make sense of a system that often seems arbitrary at best, and misogynist at worst. While this certainly does not solve the issues victims of rape encounter in the courts, an understanding of the thought process is a helpful place to start. This contrast
between perceptions of victim and perpetrator raises another important aspect of BI; it interjects objectivity into a situation where a potential perpetrator may be ignoring signals from a potential victim because these signals do not fit into the schema of what he wants in that moment. An outside party trained in victim-informed BI is better equipped to look at the scenario through the potential victim’s eyes, and act accordingly.

**Feminist Psychology**

While feminist psychology in practice propagates empowerment and agency, until recently, in academic literature, much like feminist theory, feminist psychology shied away from addressing the intersection of women and sexual violence. With my research questions coming from an empowerment framework, this study seeks to continue to bridge that gap, using my background in psychology to contribute to literature on sexual violence against women.

The “mother” of feminist psychology, Karen Horney, created this form of psychology in the 1930’s in response to Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis on women (Albin, 1977). Horney’s landmark book, *Feminine Psychology*, addresses her disagreement with Freud’s theories on the biological differences between men and women are what shape personality, arguing that it is in fact societal and cultural beliefs that create these differences. She answers Freud’s “penis envy” with “womb envy,” speculating that men are envious of women’s ability to bear children. Horney shed light on psychoanalysis’ treatment of women at that time, suggesting, “psychoanalytic descriptions of female psychology were merely descriptions of the male analysts’ fantasies about women” (Albin, 1977, p. 424).

The next wave of feminist psychology began in the 1970’s with the American Psychological Association’s (APA) new division, “the psychology of women” (Stewart &
Dottolo, 2006). This era realized the influence of feminism into the field of psychology. Sandra Bem, a pioneer in feminist psychology, not only wed feminism and psychology in her professional life, but chose to live it out in her personal life, with an egalitarian marriage with husband Darryl Bem (Stewart & Dottolo, 2006). Feminism’s contribution to feminist psychology can further be looked at through its attention to rape as an issue: “Feminists have demonstrated the relationship between trivialization of rape and the cultural views of women as inferior and unimportant” (Albin, 1977, p. 434).

1990’s feminist psychologist, Olivia Espin, described her use of feminist psychology in working with Latina women, many of whom were immigrants: “My contribution to that process, alongside the work of many others, has been to distill the significance of gender in the psychological development of women who are twice or sometimes three times ‘othered’ by mainstream psychology” (Stewart & Dottolo, 2006, p. 497).

According to Stewart & Dottolo (2006), the new generation of feminist psychologists appear to be committed to three important ideals:

First, they conduct research that directly builds on some of the work of feminist predecessors in the field. Second, they continue to confront biased and exclusive assumptions of the field that are still relevant in their current form…Finally, all of these scholars’ work reflects full and deep familiarity with both interdisciplinary women’s studies and mainstream psychology – and is framed within the terms of both. It is creating new fusions and integrations that look different from much of the work generated by the previous generation (p. 502).

Critiques surrounding feminist psychology point out that male violence continues to be studied by studying women (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 754). This line of query perpetuates the notion that
women are complicit in their victimization. My study could be critiqued for the same reason, in that I am addressing violence against women by researching female victims. However, my research goals are not focused on why men perpetrate violence against women, but rather by what can encourage bystanders to intervene more often and effectively. Another area for improvement in feminist psychology is its attention to the issue of rape: “It is symptomatic, perhaps, that systemic discussion of rape is omitted from all the recent publications on women and psychology” (Albin, 1977, p. 435). This quote from 1977 is slowly becoming less relevant today, as more feminist psychologists are addressing this issue. My study joins the new generation of feminist psychology theorists described by Stewart & Dottolo, where I am integrating my psychology background with the disciplines of higher education and women’s studies, in order to provide an interdisciplinary perspective to Bystander Intervention.

**Chapter Summary**

This literature review highlights the lack of existing literature addressing the victim perspective in BI, as well as the encouraging literature in utilizing empathy-based training to decrease sexually coercive behavior in men. I completed the literature review section with a full discussion on rape culture, as it is this culture on college campuses that BI seeks to dismantle. My research can bridge the gaps in the existing literature between empathy building through the victim perspective and BI.
Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

This study sought to understand how victims of sexual assault view the people around them (if any) (i.e. bystanders), in the interest of expanding the definition of who a bystander is. Furthermore, informed by my theoretical framework from feminist theory, feminist legal scholarship, and feminist psychology, in this study, I examined the victim’s perspective of their expectations of bystanders, including what they perceive as appropriate intervention. In answering these research questions, I hope to better inform current bystander intervention practices, and perhaps develop new protocols. The research questions guiding this study are:

Research Question 1: Whom do survivors of sexual assault identify as bystanders?
Research Question 2: How do survivors of sexual assault understand the concept of intervention?
Research Question 3: How do survivors of sexual assault describe how bystanders could have intervened?
Research Question 4: What do survivors of sexual assault want bystanders to know?

I have chosen to answer these research questions using a phenomenological lens, which seeks to describe “the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). To this end, I am looking at the “phenomenon” of sexual assault and bystanders from the perspective of several survivors, with the initial goal of at least 10 participants. Per Creswell (2013), the ideal range of participants in a phenomenological study is between three to four, to 10 to 15. My study falls comfortably within that range, with a total of 13 participants. Phenomenology stems from philosophy, and as such, strives to describe the essence of the experiences within the phenomenon, rather than to analyze or explain the experiences (Creswell, 2013). Another facet of phenomenology is “epoche” (or “bracketing”),
defined as the act of suspending “all judgments about what is real” (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). This is a concept I am very familiar with, as I use it in my psychotherapy practice. The connection between psychotherapy practice and phenomenology research is well supported, as Ashworth & Chung (2006) note that the approach of “no judgments” and not imposing one’s view are similar across psychotherapy and phenomenology (p. 82). When a patient enters my office, it is not my job to judge the accuracy of their experiences; rather, I am there to support them through how they perceived their experiences, and how such experiences have affected their current level of functioning. Phenomenology best helps me answer my research questions, which stemmed from my years as a therapist working with survivors of sexual assault. In this study, I plan to use epoche to contain my ideas of what a bystander is in order to allow the participants to define bystanders in their own way, not being clouded by my frame of reference.

As a therapist, I believe the concept of bracketing myself out of the study will help develop my framework as a researcher, while not ignoring my many years as a therapist treating survivors of sexual assault. In this way, I can acknowledge my past experiences, even utilizing them through the interview process (e.g. building rapport, showing empathy, etc.), while being mindful not to allow my experience as a therapist to bias the research. Bracketing can be a useful tool in focusing on the experiences of the survivors, not the experiences of a therapist with a history of working with survivors. My “Researcher’s Statement” in chapter one seeks to do just that.

My theoretical framework of feminist theory aligns well with phenomenology in that phenomenology uses the voices of the people experiencing the phenomenon, and feminist theory aims to give voice to the disempowered, thereby restoring agency (Fisher, 2010). Rape is considered an exertion of power of one person over another, with the absence of consent
equaling the removal of agency. Feminist theory also speaks to hierarchal power differentials, which many victims of sexual assault on college campuses experience on multiple levels; first, their power is removed at the time of the assault, then, they continue to feel powerless through the investigation and judicial process, victimized at both an individual and systemic level. Power and inequity besiege victims of sexual assault from the moment the assault takes place through oftentimes re-victimization at an institutional level.

This methods chapter describes my research design, including the setting and participants of the research, data gathering procedures, data analysis, expected findings, and research study limitations. The forms used in the study, including the informed consent document and interview protocol, are found in the appendices at the end of this study.

**Research Design**

*Setting and Participants*

*Setting:* The setting for my research study is a large, public university with multiple campuses, located in the Eastern region of the United States. I have chosen this particular university for several reasons:

1. Convenience. The site is a convenient location to this researcher.
2. Size. Being a large campus of over 45,000 students, I can expect a wide range of experiences within the phenomenon of sexual assault.
3. Awareness. This campus has yearly activities revolving around sexual assault awareness, generally concentrated in April, Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This campus has online modules about sexual assault all entering freshman must complete. The campus also has a history of institutional support for sexual assault awareness and prevention, as
evidenced by committees such as the Coalition to Address Relationship and Sexual Violence (CARSV), a Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Task Force, a Bystander Intervention training office, and a Title IX office.

(4). Sexual Assault Issue. Despite the systemic efforts of administration to eradicate sexual assault on its campuses, this university, like most others, continues to struggle with incidents of sexual assault. Per the university’s Clery report, 51 rapes were reported in 2015 (Penn State, 2016). As discussed in chapter one, since sexual assault is an underreported crime, the actual number is likely much higher.

Participants: I purposefully selected 13 students from the university to interview based on their past experience as survivors of sexual assault. I sought a range of experiences which gave me a variety of perspectives from the same phenomenon. My study called for female participants of traditional college age (18-22) who are considered residential, meaning they live on or off campus, but are not commuters. In this way, the group shared enough qualities as possible so at to meet the criteria for a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Data Gathering: Interviews

My first step in data gathering was to apply for approval for my study with the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval from the IRB was granted, I began recruiting for sexual assault survivors to interview. I emailed flyers to the university’s women’s center, counseling center, and residence life staff to aid in the recruitment process, which were then posted on their bulletin boards and available to students who would qualify for the study. I also posted flyers at my office and informed all of the therapists there about my study. My
patients were not eligible for the study, as that would lead to a dual relationship, which is prohibited by my profession’s governing policies. I offered a $20 gift card to Starbucks for the interviewee’s participation.

Unfortunately, my initial recruiting efforts did not result in many volunteers. I then modified my IRB protocol to include academic departments I believed would be receptive to circulating my flyer. Those departments included Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS), Psychology, and Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS). After nearly two months and very few participants, I again modified my IRB protocol to include Stand for State staff and participants (the university’s bystander intervention training program), as well as all public university bulletin boards. In addition, I created a Facebook post which provided a link to the flyer on my company’s website. Upon this final revision, I began receiving an influx of emails from potential participants. I had been looking for at least 10 participants and ended up recruiting 13. The majority of the participants stated they saw my flyer on a public bulletin board.

The interviews all took place at my office, conveniently located downtown, close to campus. The office atmosphere is professional, yet comfortable, and ensured privacy. So as to avoid any confusion of my researcher versus therapist role, although the participants may have been/are in therapy, none of them were my current or past patients. In all interactions, I presented myself as a graduate student researcher, and at the time of the interview, I reiterated my role as researcher, not therapist. My interview script concluded with a referral to a therapist, if desired, who would not be me. The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy and subsequently transcribed. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, so I allowed for a two-hour block of time so the interviews did not feel rushed.
I began the interview protocol (Appendix D) by asking participants to sign an “informed consent” form (Appendix C), which allowed them to see the purpose of the study, the promise of confidentiality, as well as any potential risks and benefits associated with the study (Bhatta, 2004). Prior to transcription, I assigned pseudonyms to all of my participants, which only I have access to, as well as removed/concealed any identifying information to maintain anonymity. All recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriber. As a therapist, I am a mandated reporter, so I informed all of the participants that if they were to disclose plans of suicide or homicide or reveal child abuse or elder abuse, I would be required to report to the appropriate authorities or reporting agencies. The participants were aware of the nature of my study before we met, but it was important for them to be aware of how talking about their sexual assault may negatively impact them, as well as the potential future benefits of this research. The participants were also made aware of the voluntary status of the study, and that they could stop the interview at any time and may leave the study at any time.

Following informed consent, I asked the participants general background information (demographics), then asked questions about the sexual assault, focusing on when and where it took place, events leading up to the assault, and asking who was around (in proximity) prior to and/or during the assault (R1). I did not use the term “bystander”, as I did not want to limit their idea of who was around with labels they may or not be familiar with (R1). I then asked questions about intervention (RQ2), such as if anyone tried to or stop the assault (R3), and if not, what would they have wanted an outside person to do or understand about the assault (R4). I offered all of the participants copies of the transcripts for clarification, corrections, and/or elaboration.
**Data Analysis**

Data analysis through the phenomenology lens looks at two elements: “what” the participants have experienced and “how” they have experienced it (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). Once the recordings were transcribed, I began the coding process, looking through the data and noting “significant statements” which were words, sentences, or quotes that gave a more in depth understanding of how the interviewees experienced the phenomenon; this process is called “horizontalization” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). For instance, if at a party, the participant might say, “there was a room full of people” or “his roommates were in the next room.” Statements like this may indicate that others were present prior to or during the assault but they chose not to use their agency to intervene when the victim was unable or too afraid to use hers. As these statements emerged, I used the coding software, Atlas.ti, which was useful in coding qualitative data.

Next, I transformed these “significant statements” into themes in the coding process. Themes I thought may emerge included feeling helpless, feeling hopeless, and feeling isolated, even if there were others around. Finally, I compiled the data in order to show “the essence of the phenomenon,” focusing on the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Some common experiences I anticipated included bystanders being present, but not intervening, and victims being too incapacitated or fearful to ask for help. Ultimately, the data dictated these themes; I am offering these examples based on my experience working with victims/survivors in a therapeutic capacity.

Ideally, the reader will walk away with a better understanding of what it was like to experience that phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This ties back to one of my topics from chapter two, empathy: having an understanding of what a rape survivor experienced can be a factor in developing empathy for people before they become victims, and perhaps motivate more people
to intervene. Before the interviews, I was unsure if survivors would identify empathy (or lack thereof) as a theme, but the connection between empathy and the reduction of rape attitudes and behaviors is indicated in the literature. The development and cultivation of empathy could have a trickle-down effect in that the more bystanders who intervene promote an atmosphere of non-acceptance of rape culture, thereby possibly deterring would-be rapists. The ultimate goal beyond bystanders intervening is for rapists to stop raping.

**Limitations**

Phenomenology does not lend itself to interpretation of data, but rather to the essence of the data. So, while I will not be making interpretations of the meaning of the data, I am able to tell a unique story of a lived experience. Since I did not have control as to the individual experiences of the survivors I interviewed, I did not know ahead of time how much of their experiences were shared with others. For example, some participants may have had friends who were bystanders, whilst others were among strangers. Although I realized that the sets of bystanders would likely be different, the act of a sexual assault having occurred would be the same. I did not have any information prior to the interview if there were bystanders around prior to their assault. This could be a major limitation since the focus of my study is related to bystanders. However, it is also possible that there were others around who the participant did not immediately identify as a potential bystander, and in talking with these participants we may expand our definition of who a bystander is. If alcohol and/or drugs were involved (either voluntarily or without their knowledge or consent), the survivor may not have an accurate memory of the bystanders present prior to the assault. This could impede the collection of accurate data, but it could also provide information about who was in proximity prior to the
intoxication/incapacitation, and how those individuals could have intervened and/or what the participant was able to reconstruct after the assault from others who were present but more coherent at that time.

I am only conducting research with female survivors of sexual assault. Further research could look at bystander intervention from the male survivor perspective.

**Expected Contributions**

Although the purpose of phenomenological research is to capture the essence of a phenomenon, and the researcher utilizes the concept of epoche to bracket out expectations, within epoche, I will bracket out my expectations here. I anticipated developing a deeper understanding of the survivor’s perceptions of how a bystander could have or did intervene prior to their sexual assault, and this understanding could help future bystanders take action prior to or during a sexual assault. These new insights can help expand the definitions of who a bystander is, as well as the behaviors survivors would like bystanders to display.

The promising research on empathy in sexual assault prevention situates this study within the literature, though through an angle that has yet to be explored. Incorporating empathy into existing BI programs or creating new BI programs that are empathy-based, could have a significant impact on the reduction of sexual assault on college campuses. Therefore, this study could have implications not only as a contribution to the research literature, but on an institutional level regarding the practical application of these findings.
Chapter 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS: PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

Chapters four, five, and six contain the data of my study, data analysis, and discussion. Chapter four details the stories of each participant’s sexual assault. Chapter five includes a review of the data analysis, the themes that emerged from the data, and how the themes connect to the research questions. This study reaches its conclusion in chapter six with a discussion of the study’s findings, including an overview of how the research questions were answered, practical implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

This chapter highlights each participant sharing the story of their sexual assault. These vignettes, while not exhaustive, capture a range of sexual assault across a spectrum, from unwanted touching, to assault after consent has been revoked, to rape. While the stories are not easy to read, it is important that these voices are heard. As discussed in chapter two, through the lens of feminist theory, instead of being treated as objects as they were during their assaults, this dissertation creates a space where they are subjects of their lived experience. Sharing each story also incorporates another element in the foundation of my work: empathy. As we read the stories and picture what it must have been like to be in their respective situations, they are no longer statistics, no longer nameless mentions in a news article, no longer text alerts about an assault reported to the campus police; they are real people, and have unique perspectives on a worldwide epidemic that has touched their lives in personal, life-changing ways.

Table 4.1, below, provides a summary of aspects of the participants’ lives and experiences that I found relevant to this study, and to sexual assault research more broadly. Some of the data aligned with national statistics, such as that most campus sexual assaults occur within a victim’s first two years in college, sexual assault remains an underreported crime, and in the
majority of sexual assaults, the perpetrator is known to the victim. Noteworthy data points will be explored further in chapter six, such as that just over one half of the participants had a bystander present prior to or during the assault, and that all of the sexual assaults took place at the perpetrator’s apartment or dorm room, with the exception of one, which occurred at a restaurant/arcade. One myth that this study contradicts is that alcohol plays a significant role in campus sexual assault. In this study, less than one half of the participants reported being significantly intoxicated. These findings help us to better understand the phenomenon of interest and are worthy of further investigation.
Table 4.1

PARTICIPANT SUMMARY DATA

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Data Highlights:
- Most assaults (73%) occurred during participant’s freshman and sophomore years
- 31% (4 out of 13) reported the assault
- Most (81%) knew the perpetrator prior to the assault
- 54% (7 out of 13) had a bystander present
- 85% (11 out of 13) of perpetrators definitely acted alone
- 92% (12 out of 13) of the assaults took place at either the perpetrator’s apartment or dorm
- 62% (8 out of 13) reported having a history of at least one other assault in their lifetime; for many it was more than one
- 46% (6 out of 13) reported being significantly intoxicated at the time of the assault

*all names and identifying information has been changed to ensure anonymity
**Participants** (*all names and identifying information has been changed to ensure anonymity*)

*Participant 1: Olivia*

Olivia is a 19-year-old Asian sophomore. She transferred from a commonwealth campus to the main campus this spring. While at her commonwealth campus last December, a freshman at the time, Olivia, her teammates, and their coach, celebrated a victorious season at a local restaurant, which included an arcade. While dining, her coach, a 40-something-year-old man, insisted she sit on his right side, and her friend, Samantha*, who Olivia noted is also Asian, sit on his left side. During the meal, “he started to put his hands on not only my leg, but also my friend’s.” Olivia described her coach moving his hands “up and down” on both their legs, while whispering to her, “I would really like to just take you out to go dancing or to a movie or something.” Olivia described feeling stunned and betrayed, not knowing how to respond: “I trusted him.”

Olivia’s coach followed her and Samantha around the arcade the rest of the night. At the end of the evening, Olivia went to cash her arcade tickets in for a prize: “I was taking a long time to decide what I wanted, I wanted to get something for my sister.” By this time Samantha had left, but her coach was still right there:

> He just kind of grabbed my arms a little bit and said he wanted to kiss me. And he just held me there, I couldn’t really move. He was just like, “Give me one kiss, just one kiss. I know you like me, and I like you.” And I was just shying my face away and I didn’t know what to say or do, because he was actually pretty strong. And eventually he just gave me a kiss on the cheek because I averted my face away from the lips or else he would have...his face was so close, it was so close to mine.

After that, Olivia “tried to get away as soon as possible.” However, as everyone was
leaving to go home, “he made sure to give me a hug and also whispered…‘I’d like to see you again,’ and then he gave me another kiss on the forehead.” Olivia and her friend discussed the evening afterwards, and both felt that “this is not right.” In a public space, amongst her teammates, friends, employees, and other patrons, no one intervened. Olivia wished someone had: “I was very impressionable. I didn’t even kiss anyone ever before. I had no experience with guys whatsoever. That actually kind of left a bad mark.”

Participant 2: Aurora*

Aurora is a 22-year-old, Caucasian senior. While a freshman at a commonwealth campus, Aurora and her roommates were excited to attend one of their first parties in college, at their downstairs neighbor’s apartment. Aurora recalled she “wasn’t a partier in high school,” and was looking forward to drinking that night, knowing she would not have to drive anywhere since the party was in her building, and that she would be with her newfound friends, her roommates. Aurora described most of the evening as “fun,” drinking and socializing with the other partygoers.

Aurora recalled getting to a point in the evening where she was “super drunk,” and decided it was time for her to go back to her apartment. She looked for her friends, but she could not find them. She walked past the bathroom, about to leave the party, when “I felt somebody pull my arm and like, pull me into the bathroom. And I was like, ‘whoa,’ I was like, ‘what is happening?’ because the bathroom was pitch black.” Aurora thought maybe it was one of her friends. She was wrong. There were two men in the bathroom, one she had met the week before who lived at the apartment, and one she did not recognize. One of the men blocked the door as she tried to get out, while the other one pulled down her shorts and “bent me over,” then the man
blocking the door tried to “put his penis in my mouth.”

Aurora remembered “freaking out,” and quickly dropped all of her weight to the ground. This action disoriented the men, and she was able to push the man blocking the door out of the way, since “his pants were down too,” so he stumbled. She unlocked the door, opened it, and escaped: “I started like, crawling out, but I was like, pulling up my shorts while I was crawling out of the bathroom, and then I didn’t look back, I just ran.” As she was running, she realized someone was chasing her. She made it to her apartment and locked the door: “And then all of the sudden, someone was just banging so hard on my door.” Aurora recalled the man attempting to coax her from the other side of the door: “Come on out, babe.” The banging went on for 20 minutes, while Aurora hid in her bedroom, both her front door and bedroom door locked.

Aurora wondered, in a crowded party, how no one saw her get pulled into the bathroom, feeling like that should have “stood out to anybody as odd.” No one intervened before she was assaulted, nor as she left the apartment, “I pushed someone out of the way to run out the door, and there was somebody chasing me. [T]hat should have screamed, ‘red flag.’ Somebody could have even stopped him from following me upstairs.” Aurora is thankful she made it to safety, but questions linger: “[W]hat if I didn’t lock my door fast enough? What if he was faster than me?”

Participant 3: Kali*

Kali is a 21-year-old, Caucasian senior. She had been “talking to a guy” she was interested in “for a couple of months” during her sophomore year, and a week before her junior year began, he invited her over to his apartment to “hang out.” His (female) roommate wasn’t home, and while alone together, they began kissing. Kali shared that she had “feelings for him at the time,” however, when he “tried to force himself” on her, she “was just not about it.” Kali
recollected: “He was on top of me and he was stronger than me…I just really wanted it to stop.” Fortunately, she was able to escape: “I bit him. Hard.”

Alone with someone she had trusted, in the middle of the day, Kali had no idea the man she had been dating would sexually assault her. Without being asked, Kali made clear, “I wasn’t drinking. I always get asked that question.” Kali expressed that she would have liked there to have been a bystander close by to “help me make it stop.”

Participant 4: Elena*

Elena is a 19-year-old, Caucasian, second semester freshman. Last semester, around 6pm on Halloween weekend, dressed in a lamb onesie, Elena was on her way to a Halloween party, when she decided to stop by the dorm room of someone she had been “talking to for a while” who she had met through the dating app, Tinder. In the interest of safety, before going to the dorm, she told her roommates where she was going, so they knew exactly where she was, “because we all know about the problems on campus.” Upon her arrival, the man she was visiting asked his roommate to leave the dorm, and the roommate complied. Now alone, the two begin talking, “and the talking kind of leads to kissing.” However, when he pushed for more than kissing, Elena became uncomfortable, thinking, “No, no, this is not okay. I haven’t really been out with you a lot.”

Elena gave the man both verbal and non-verbal cues that she was not interested in going any further with him: “I was like, ‘No, no, no, no thanks, no.’” in addition to facing away from him, “because I just didn’t want to interact with him.” Instead of taking the hint, the man:

*Basically took his dick out and was like, shoving it into my face. And I was like, “No, I’m not interested” and “No, no, no.” And he…was really upset and he was angry that I
wasn’t interested in that. And he puts it [his penis] away, and he’s like going off on me and I start crying. Like, I don’t know what to do in this situation. He was like, “No, don’t cry, we can talk about this.” I was like, “There’s nothing really to talk about.” I sat there for like, 30 minutes because he would not let me leave. So, eventually, he’s like, Fine, leave.”

The man’s “going off” included calling Elena names and demanding to know why she wasn’t interested in doing more than kissing.

Although no one was in the dorm room with them, there were plenty of people in the hallway, “in the freshman dorms, you can hear everything and anything.” Elena doesn’t think she was talking loudly, “but you could probably hear me say, like, ‘no, no, don’t, I’m not into that’ and him not yelling at me, but just being like, really upset and angry, and being like, ‘why don’t you?’, and stuff like that.” Elena wishes anyone walking down the hallway, who may have heard the man berating her, and her saying “no” repeatedly, would have simply knocked on the door to check in: “I really would have wanted someone to come in and be like, ‘Hey, are you okay? Do you need help? Is he harming you in any way?’ But nobody did.”

Participant 5: Farrah*

Farrah is an 18-year-old, Biracial, second semester freshman. She was the only participant who is still in a relationship with her perpetrator, describing the relationship as “abusive,” her fear of him being one of the reasons she remains in the relationship. Farrah, a freshman last fall, met John*, a senior, early into the semester. They were friends for a couple months, then they had “gotten involved” in the beginning of November, being intimate, but not public with the nature of their relationship. The night before she left for Thanksgiving break, she
was at a party with mutual friends, when John stopped by. Farrah remembers him “giving me this look like he was disappointed” because he thought she was intoxicated. John left the party shortly thereafter, then began texting her repeatedly, with messages such as: “Why are you there? Clearly, you’re intoxicated. You need to leave. You need to go home.” Farrah ignored the messages for a while, then when a friend at the party asked her to have sex with him, she thought it was funny, and shared it with John, “but he didn’t take it as joke…he was really mad.”

The next day, around noon, John invited Farrah to his dorm room. When she arrived, he locked the door behind her, and began accusing her of spending the night at the man at the party’s apartment who had propositioned her. Farrah denied the allegations, stating she had gone home that night. John responded angrily: “I don’t know why you can’t just tell me the truth!” Farrah continued to deny the allegations, and then John demanded sex. Farrah had just finished her menstrual cycle but lied and said she was still having her period to avoid having sex. Not believing her, John insisted on “checking,” pushing her against his closet and unbuttoning her pants. Farrah recalled how the assault unfolded:

I was like, “What are you doing?” and “Why are you doing that?” You know, I can’t really move, you know what I’m saying? Because he’s a lot stronger than me, and he’s like, “Worst case scenario I can just take a shower,” and he starts laughing. I’m just like, “No.” And at that point I was scared because I lied. Like, I knew I wasn’t on my period, I just didn’t want to have sex with him. I was like, nervous because I knew I had lied and then he was pulling on my pants and pushing me against the bed. I was on my back, and he had his arm pressing more on my back, and I was about to cry. I just kept saying, “No,” “No, please,” and “No, I don’t want to.”

Instead of stopping, John told her to be quiet, and raped her, not telling her he ejaculated inside
of her until afterwards: “He told me I had to go to UHS and get Plan B. He said that I needed to take a five-minute walk up the hill, or I could have a nine-month pregnancy. I get to choose.”

Farrah did not remember any bystanders present before the assault. John lived in a single dorm, so he didn’t have a roommate. However, it was possible there were people in the hallway. Farrah believes anyone walking by would have heard “some ruckus going on” because she was “being pushed into a closet” and repeatedly saying “No.” However, unlike most of the other participants who would have readily accepted an intervention, Farrah was more hesitant due to concerns for her safety: “I would’ve been scared if someone did actually intervene, because I feel like I would’ve been penalized for being like, so loud. Like, I brought the attention, so it’s my fault. Like, I need to be more quiet. So, the fact that somebody was acknowledging it, I would have been like, very grateful, like, ‘thank you, someone heard my cry for help.’ But at the same time, I would’ve been like, ‘you got me in trouble.’”

For Farrah, an ideal intervention would include someone checking in on her, then after they left, John acknowledging what he was about to do was wrong. However, she finds that scenario extremely unlikely, “because it still turns out to be my fault every time.” Farrah believes it is challenging for others to intervene and understand the nature of abuse if they have not been in the situation themselves: “Honestly, I truly feel like people will not understand until it happens to them. And like, you don’t want it to happen to them.” Farrah would like to see greater empathy amongst perpetrators and bystanders for potential victims and survivors.

**Participant 6: Genevieve**

Genevieve is a 20-year-old, Caucasian junior. She and her friend were driving to a party and were asked to pick up other people on their way there, including Kyle*, one of the people
who lived at the apartment where the party was being held. Genevieve described having “a weird feeling” as soon as he got into the car, as he immediately was fixated on her. She and her friend had planned to spend the night at the apartment, since they knew they would be drinking, and didn’t want to drink and drive. However, as the evening progressed, Genevieve became more and more uncomfortable due to Kyle’s continued unwanted advances on her. Throughout the evening, Kyle repeatedly “rubbed against” her, followed her wherever she went, and touched parts of her body. He invited her to play strip poker with him, and when she declined, “He started taking my clothes off for me.”

Genevieve recollected there were about 20 to 30 people at the party, and Kyle tried to isolate her from the other partygoers. Although she feels she made it clear how uncomfortable she was, no one intervened, but she wished they had: “I would’ve liked somebody else to back me up. Like saying, ‘She’s saying, she’s definitely implying, don’t touch me. She doesn’t want you to get her a drink. She doesn’t want to play strip poker. She doesn’t want you to sit next to her.’ Like, to put a body between me and him, I feel like even that would’ve made it better. It probably would have stopped him.”

During the course of the evening, Genevieve knew she did not want to stay the night there: “I was legitimately scared for the first time in my life that something was going to happen. Like, I’ve never been in that position so, it freaked the hell out of me.” She was fearful she would be “assaulted even more” if she stayed the night. Since it was becoming clear no one was going to come to her aid, Genevieve “sobered up,” and she and her friend drove home. Genevieve would have liked more people at the party to have been more aware of what was going on, and acted accordingly: “Everybody thinks, ‘Oh, ok, someone else is going to do it,’ but if everybody thinks that way then nobody’s going to do it.”
Participant 7: Kira*

Kira is a 20-year-old Caucasian junior. As a freshman, she joined a male-dominated organization on campus, and socialized with them outside of the organization. In December of her freshman year, the group had a going away party for a friend who was studying abroad in the spring. Kira recalled: “It was fairly small. It wasn’t like, a wild like, raging college party. I knew almost everyone there.” One of the people she didn’t recognize was Casey*, who she learned later was roommates the year before with someone in her organization. Upon seeing him, Kira immediately had an uneasy feeling, describing Casey as, “this creepy looking dude.”

Kira was enjoying hanging out with her friends, when Casey approached her, saying, “You should like, play beer pong with me.” Out of politeness, Kira agreed, and they played a couple of rounds of beer pong, after which Kira walked away. As the evening progressed, Casey continued to come over to talk to her. At one point, a group of people went outside to get some fresh air, and Kira joined them. After a while, the group went back inside, and Kira was going in as well, when her friend, Rob*, said to her, “What are doing? Like, Casey is outside, you should go talk to him.” Kira responded, “What? Why would I talk to him? He’s kind of gross.” Rob urged her, “I don’t know, because he really likes you and he wants to get to know you.” Kira didn’t think it would be a big deal just talking to someone, so she went back outside, when Casey immediately grabbed her and “starts making out” with her. Kira remembers feeling disgusted, and said to Casey, “How about we don’t?”

Unfortunately, Kira found out quickly that Casey was stronger than her, and he pulled her into the townhouse next door, where some other partygoers were at. Kira remembers the feeling of confusion and helplessness: “He threw me on this couch and started making out with me on this couch. And I was just kind of like, I don’t know what to do right now, I’m just kind of here.”
Instead of having helpful bystanders present, “There were actually two people who came downstairs from a bedroom and threw condoms at us and then left the residence.” Kira gave the analogy, “[If] someone’s getting mugged on the street, you don’t throw baseball bats at the mugger and say, just be like, ‘Oh, good luck.’ That’s kind of the same thing.”

Casey eventually took off Kira’s shirt and bra, when suddenly she felt sick, telling him, “Hey, I’m going to throw up.” She found a cup on a table nearby, and vomited into it, then made her way to the toilet, and continued throwing up there. As Kira was finishing vomiting, one of the people that lived at the townhouse, Jenny*, found her in the bathroom and asked, “Do you want me to like, call an ambulance for you? Are you ok? Do you want to stay here?” But Casey had offered to take her home, as they both lived on campus. And Kira “genuinely thought” he was going to take her home, so she told Jenny, “No, Casey and I both live on campus. Like, we’re going to, I’m going to go home. He’s going to take me home and it’ll be ok.” Jenny didn’t push the issue, saying, “Oh, ok, like, bye guys, see you whenever.”

However, instead of taking her home, Casey took Kira to his dorm, “and he just keeps, you know, touching me and making out with me, and I’m like, I’m not into this, but I really don’t know what to do.” The assault escalated when Casey forced Kira to perform oral sex on him, “and then eventually he was like, ‘Do you want to have sex?’, and I was like, ‘No. I don’t want to be here, let alone…no, I don’t.’” After the assault, Casey’s roommate and his friend walked into the room, and one of them asked, “What are you doing?” Casey answered, “Yo, can you give me a minute?” They obliged, saying, “Sure, we’re going to go to Sheetz. Do you guys want anything?” After they left, Kira “blacked out.”

When Kira woke up the next morning, she immediately noticed a condom wrapper on Casey’s desk next to his bed. She also realized that the tampon she had inserted the night before,
as she was at the end of her menstrual cycle, was missing. Kira still felt drunk, and Casey took her to a local diner for breakfast. She asked him, “So like, what happened last night?” He responded, “Oh, you like, sucked my dick, that was it.” Kira was doubtful, “Really?” Casey maintained his story, “Yeah.”

Kira went back to her dorm and told her roommate and a friend what had happened, “and they seemed very disturbed,” though they didn’t use the label, “rape.” The next day, she was invited to coffee by Jenny, the person who had asked Kira if she wanted to sleep over, and Phoebe*, who had hosted the party. Kira told them about her experience with Casey, “Because I was kind of starting to realize that like, I did not want to do what happened on Friday.” Phoebe was supportive, assuring Kira, “That is not ok, like, that is not cool.” Jenny had a different reaction: “Listen, it happens to everybody, like, you just have to deal with it.” Jenny’s reaction made Kira feel shut down, “From that point on I just kind of shut up about it.”

On Monday, Kira’s organization was having elections, and all members were mandated to attend. One of the men asked her, “Did you go home with that guy Friday?” Kira responded, “Oh, um, yeah, but I mean, I didn’t really want to so like, if we could like, not talk about it.” Suddenly, seven or eight of her male friends turned around, saying, “Oh my gosh, that’s so funny!” Kira couldn’t believe what she was hearing: “What do you mean? Why is that funny?” They informed her that their organization leader, Rex*, “thought it would be really funny, so he really wanted it to happen.” Kira started crying and left the room. Phoebe went to check on her, and eventually she returned to the meeting. This reaction raised Kira’s suspicions about if people at the party, people who were supposed to be her friends, helped facilitate the assault: “I only had like, a couple of drinks, so I don’t know. I’ve thought about the possibility of date rape [drugs], and then I also thought about the possibility of maybe I didn’t taste how strong it [the drink] was.
Like, I really don’t know.” Even her friend, Evan, who was at the party, the only sober person there, as far as Kira remembers, reacted in a way that wasn’t helpful: “He did not laugh at me, but he was like, ‘Kira, like, it’s ok to have sex with someone and regret it later. Like, that’s ok.’ And I was just kind of like, ‘No, you don’t understand what I’m saying.’”

Throughout the night, there were multiple bystanders who either did nothing, did not try hard enough to intervene, or perhaps facilitated the assault. Kira conveyed, “I wish that everyone would’ve intervened, literally at any point.” Even a small gesture in the beginning of the night could have been helpful: “Someone around us should have been like, ‘Hey dude, how about you quit talking to her, obviously she’s not comfortable.’” Or not tried to facilitate the assault during the night, “when he was first, you know, sexually assaulting me and people threw condoms at us.” By the end of the night, Kira felt “it might have been obvious [she couldn’t give consent], especially when I started vomiting. It was probably obvious that I wasn’t in a state where I was capable of completely understanding what was happening.” In retrospect, she would have liked Jenny to have been more forceful when asking Kira if she wanted to spend the night: “[L]ooking back on it, she was very nonchalant about it. She was just kind of like, ‘Oh, do you want to stay here?’ Like, maybe she could have been a little more forceful and been like, ‘No, you’re gonna stay here.’ I wasn’t going to like it at the time, but it would’ve prevented a lot of further harm.”

Kira is still dumbfounded that even at a crowded party, no one intervened, “I just can’t, looking back, I just can’t understand what would possess anyone, you know, the multitude of people that were there that night…to just kind of be like, ‘Oh, okay, this is happening, I’m gonna let it go.’”
Participant 8: Camille*

Camille is a 21-year-old Caucasian senior in a sorority. One night, during her sophomore year, she went to a fraternity party alone, thinking she would know people at the house, and that her friends would be joining her later. Unfortunately, it was her ex-boyfriend’s fraternity, and she hoped he wouldn’t be there. However, she had a contingency plan: her friend lived at the fraternity next door and had told her she could come over “if things go bad,” as he had planned to be home studying all night.

Camille did see her ex-boyfriend, and first texted her friends for support. They came to the fraternity, “but they were really drunk, so instead of taking me home, they just kind of left without me.” They texted Camille later, asking if she wanted them to come back, but Camille told them, “No, it’s ok, I have a backup place to go.” Camille admitted, “I got really drunk and did cocaine,” so she texted her friend, writing, “I don’t want to be here. I’m drunk and I’m not in the right state of mind. Can I come over?” He responded, “Yeah, sure.”

Since there wasn’t a party at her friend’s house that night, she didn’t see anyone else at the fraternity. And even if there was, “[T]hey knew who I was. They knew we were friends, so I don’t think it would have looked strange to anyone if I was going into his room.” Camille did not give details about the assault, noting that when she woke up in the morning, “I kind of vaguely knew that something happened.” She texted her friend in the morning about what transpired the night before, and her friend responded, “Did you want it to happen?” Camille asked, “What do you mean?” Her friend explained, “You said you weren’t in good shape last night. Did you want it to happen?” Camille paused and replied, “Let me think about that.” It was in that moment Camille realized she had been sexually assaulted.

I had no idea until my friend said, “did you want to?” And even then, I was like, I went to
his place. He didn’t take advantage of me. He wasn’t aggressive. He used a condom. So, I figured, he wasn’t aggressive, it wasn’t against my will, but did I want to? No. Was I in the right state of mind to make a decision? No. So that’s sexual assault. And that’s something that I did not realize.

Camille believes more education is necessary so people have a better idea of what sexual assault is: “A lot of people’s definition of assault is like, grabbing someone in a dark alley, or whatever, and a lot of times it’s not that. And people think because they’re not doing that, then they’re not the bad guy.” Camille would have liked intervention at different points throughout the night so her assault could have been prevented, that her friends would have taken her home before she went to her friend’s fraternity house, or that someone would have “just got me out of the room” before the assault. And, of course, that her “friend” would have made the decision not to assault her.

Participant 9: Jessica*

Jessica is a 21-year-old Caucasian senior, who shared she has been sexually assaulted twice while in college. The first time, it was the fall of Jessica’s freshman year. She met Pete* through Tinder, and it turned out they lived in the same dorm, one floor apart. It was around 9pm, and Jessica was hanging out with her friend, when she and Pete discussed her stopping by his dorm “to say hi.” Jessica recalled: “And that was the extent of what I thought it was going to be. Just like, ‘hi…nice to meet you.’” Jessica told her friend where she was going and went to Pete’s dorm. No one else was in the dorm room except Pete when she arrived: “It happened basically as soon as he opened the door because I think he was drunk.” After the assault, Jessica ran back to her friend’s room: “I was like, we’re going to lock myself in your room right now,
Jessica didn’t think Pete went to her floor, but he did call her repeatedly that night. She didn’t think there was a possibility he could have interpreted the encounter differently: “I wasn’t into it at all, and he was very forceful, and I wasn’t even responding with anything.” Jessica would have liked someone even walking down the hallway to intervene: “I guess, even just like, knock on the door. Just to be like, ‘Oh, what’s going on? Something sounds weird.’” Though Jessica finds that scenario unlikely: “I don’t really know if anybody could’ve done anything. I couldn’t have done anything differently, either, without knowing the information that I know now.”

The second assault occurred the fall of Jessica’s junior year. She was on a date with a law student, Blake*, “and things were going great.” When he suggested they go to his apartment to watch a movie, after an evening of dinner and walking around campus, Jessica felt comfortable enough to accept. They ended up falling asleep in his bed, and the next morning, Jessica awoke to Blake assaulting her: “[H]e wasn’t violent or anything. Really, I just didn’t know what to do, so I just kept pretending I was asleep.” Blake had roommates, but they each had their own room, so none of them were present in the room before or during the assault. As in the situation with Pete, if someone would have heard something, or suspected something was wrong, Jessica would have wanted them to say something: “You know, like, ‘What are you doing?’”

Participant 10: Madison*

Madison is a 20-year-old, Caucasian junior. She and Mike* had started dating the beginning of her sophomore year. Madison described their relationship as “a very insanely toxic
relationship, super like, just abusive, mostly emotionally and physically.” Madison described an incident prior to the sexual assault: “He held me hostage. He pulled my hair because I tried to leave, and he grabbed me by the ponytail and yanked me back into his apartment and pulled me by my backpack back down to his room.” Mike then took her phone and refused to let her leave. After some time, he gave Madison the phone back, where she secretly texted her friend to come get her. She then told Mike that her friends were on their way and prepared to call the police if he didn’t let her go, so at that point she was able to leave.

In February of her sophomore year, Madison had been at the library until two or three in the morning, working on an exam. Mike was becoming increasingly angry that it was taking her so long to come over to his apartment. She eventually did go over, where she “smoked a joint” to help her “relax” and fall asleep. Madison shared that she struggles with anxiety and depression, and at that time, she was “super depressed.” She and Mike went to his bed, where his roommate was asleep in his bed in the same room, a few feet away. Madison described the incident:

*He [Mike] kept like pushing on me, and like trying to kiss me. And I was kind of ok kissing him, but I’m like not really trying to have sex right now, because I’m really depressed. It’s a pretty valid reason, I feel. If you’re really sad, you’re not really trying to have sex. Basically, he kept like trying to finger me, and I was just like, “I don’t want to.” So then, he would stop and then he would just start again, and I was like, “nothing changed in five minutes.” But then eventually he was like, masturbating, and I was just like, ok, whatever, you do you. But then he just positioned himself on top of me and like, just put himself inside. He just like, pushed my underwear aside and put himself inside me. And I was just like, “I said no. Like, I don’t want to. Can you please stop?” Or something like that, and he just like, blatantly ignored me and just kept going and I was*
like, it's already happened at this point. And also, because he had been very aggressive with me in the past, I was just like, I don’t really know, am I supposed to stop this? Am I supposed to yell for his roommate to wake up? What if I wake up his roommate, will his roommate even do anything? Because, when in the hostage situation, his roommates heard me screaming from his room and didn’t do anything.

In retrospect, Madison noted there were some “red flags” early into the relationship: “There had been a lot of times in the past [prior to this incident] where he like, violated my consent that I was less aware of at the time.” Madison shared that in the beginning of their relationship, Mike told her he wasn’t capable of empathy: “Yeah, that’s a red flag, if I ever saw one.” Madison ended the relationship after Mike raped her. She realized that not only did Mike lack empathy, his roommates did as well. In her situation, when Mike chose to violate her, bystanders did nothing to intervene.

Participant 11: Lydia*

Lydia is a 21-year-old Asian senior. When she was a freshman, her high school friend, Todd*, who was a sophomore, was very welcoming when she first came to campus, telling her, “If you need any help on campus, feel free to ask.” They had a lot of mutual friends, and Lydia found it comforting to have a familiar face on campus. Todd decided to have a party right before Thanksgiving break and invited Lydia. Lydia went to the party with her roommate and friends. She remembers looking forward to attending the party: “It was my first time drinking. I think I was very excited, just because like, I’m finally in college and I’m going to a college party.”

At the party, Lydia drank alcohol and ended up kissing one of Todd’s friends, after he asked her permission. The friend didn’t stay long, however, as he was returning home that night
for break. Lydia wonders if her kissing Todd’s friend gave him the wrong impression: “I think because [Todd] saw that, he thought that, like oh, I must be easygoing.” When it got late, and people from the party started to leave, Todd suggested Lydia and her roommate spend the night, offering his bed to them. He implied it wouldn’t be safe for them to walk back to the dorms themselves, and this made sense to Lydia. With Todd’s roommate in the same room in another bed, Todd on the couch in the living room, and Lydia and her roommate in Todd’s bed, she thought, “nothing could happen.”

However, five or ten minutes after Lydia and her roommate got settled into Todd’s bed, he climbed in bed next to her. By this time, Lydia’s roommate had “passed out,” and Todd shouted out to his roommate, “Oh look, I have two girls on my bed, aren’t you jealous?” Lydia wasn’t sure if Todd’s roommate was already asleep. Shortly after that, Todd began trying to kiss and touch Lydia. She remembers feeling paralyzed: “I couldn’t even say ‘no.’ I felt like I was just really scared. And even if I say ‘no,’ I don’t know if he’s going to stop or anything.” When Todd tried to take off Lydia’s shorts, she was able to object, “Oh no, don’t take off my pants.” He didn’t but continued to “grind” against her. Eventually, Lydia told him, “I have to go to the bathroom.” She went to the bathroom, then spent the rest of the night sleeping on the couch.

The sexual assault has had a lasting impact on Lydia: “The whole first freshman year, I like, couldn’t stop thinking about it, and I was really scared to go to parties after that.” Part of her fear came as a result of no one – her roommate or his roommate – intervening that night: “Even when I go, like drinking or anything, I’m kind of scared now. Because like, if I don’t have control of myself, no one’s going to stand up for me in that situation.”
Participant 12: Katherine*

Katherine is a 20-year-old Asian junior. She met Harry* on Tinder and went to his apartment “to hookup.” Katherine recalled, “I went in, knowing what I was getting into.” She had planned to have consensual sex with Harry, and the evening progressed in that way: “He had a condom, but that, it like, broke, and he said he couldn’t find another, and I didn’t feel comfortable having unprotected sex.” Katherine expressed her discomfort to Harry: “We just shouldn’t. I should probably just like, go. We shouldn’t do this. I’m not comfortable.” Harry continued to try to talk her into having sex without the condom, “He like, convinced me to just kind of go along with it, even though like, I didn’t want to. I just kind of gave up arguing.”

Katherine is aware that this was a case of sexual assault because she revoked consent, and Harry wouldn’t stop: “We had protected sex, and then the condom broke, and I didn’t want to continue going on.” Katherine shared that she always tells a friend where she is going when she has a Tinder date but realized after this experience that that does not ensure her safety. While being sexually assaulted, she figured out a way to remove herself from the situation. Her phone was under a pillow, and she secretly called her friend, Matt*, and hung up when he answered, hoping he’d call right back. When he did, Katherine pretended he was her little brother, and was calling because he had car trouble, so she had to leave right away. The plan worked, and Katherine left Harry’s apartment without further injury.

Harry didn’t have roommates, and he lived in an apartment, not a dorm, so there wasn’t a parade of people in the hallways. And even if Harry had a roommate, Katherine doubted if that would have helped her situation: “I think his roommate would’ve known, ‘Hey, he has a girl from Tinder that he has in his room, so like, I’m not going to bother them.’” Katherine believes she would have been embarrassed had someone interrupted them: “I’m not that confrontational.”
Her ideal intervention was the one she staged, or if an outsider, a roommate, for example, could have interrupted in a non-confrontational way, such as telling Harry he needed help with something right away, so she could “discreetly” leave. Katherine recommended always telling friends where you are going when on a date, and have them call during the date, using a predetermined “code word” if you are not feeling safe. Katherine does not depend on outsiders to intervene on her behalf, rather, she depends on herself and her close friends.

*Participant 13: Claire*

Claire is a 22-year-old Caucasian senior. During finals week in the fall of her sophomore year, she and a couple of her friends went to a party at their friend’s, Aaron* and Bill’s* apartment. Claire was admittedly drinking and described herself as having “a low tolerance.” She had had “a crush” on Bill for a while, but “didn’t have any interest in sleeping with him,” adding, “I don’t sleep around.” Unbeknownst to her, Heather*, Claire’s best friend since first grade, took her phone and began sending Bill messages, as Claire. Heather told Claire she took her phone so Claire wouldn’t “drunk text” people, but her actions placed Claire in an even more precarious situation than the embarrassment of drunk texts.

From Claire’s phone, Heather sent Bill messages like, “I want to sleep with you tonight. I’ve wanted to sleep with you for a while.” Bill responded, “Ok, spend the night.” Meanwhile, Heather also was trying to convince Claire to have sex with Bill: “You should hook up with Bill tonight.” Claire made it clear she wasn’t interested, “No, I’m not into that. Like, I don’t know this kid. I’m really drunk.” Heather persisted, “Oh, don’t be a baby, hook up with him.” Claire maintained her position that she did want to have sex with Bill, and it seemed like Heather was backing off. At the end of the night, Claire started to fall asleep on the loveseat of the sectional
As Claire was drifting off, she remembers her friend, Victor*, one of the people she went to the party with, tried to get her to leave:

[He] was like, trying to get me to get up, but like, like they were lifting me up and I was just like, “No, just let me sleep.” Like, I just really wanted to sleep. And I was like, like I trusted these guys that were in the apartment because we had been friends for a while. And I was like, “I’ll be fine, just leave me on the couch and I’ll sleep.” And Heather was like, “Like, try to hook up with Bill.” I’m like, “Dude, I’m going to puke.” Like, I was so plastered. And she [Heather] was all like, laughing at it. And then Victor was like, “It’s not a good idea for you to stay here. I don’t trust these guys.” I was like, “I’ll be fine, really.”

Claire’s friends eventually left, and her memory is spotty after that. She knows at some point she was moved from the loveseat to the longer couch in the sectional. She remembers the TV being on, Bill being in the room with her, then falling asleep.

When Claire awoke the next morning, Bill was lying beside her, and her pants, underwear, socks, and shoes were missing. She woke up Bill, asking where her underwear was; he said he didn’t know. She eventually found them under the couch cushion, put on the rest of her clothes, and walked out. That’s when she noticed her lip was swollen and “busted.” She went to meet Heather for breakfast, and Heather immediately commented, “Dude, your lip looks so bad.” Claire went to the bathroom at the restaurant and was shocked to find bruises across her body: bruises on her thighs, her breasts, her arms, her pelvis bones by her hips, and “hickey-looking” bruises on her chest. She thought to herself, “What the hell happened?” Claire went back to the table and told Heather about the bruises. Heather confessed about the messages she
had been sending to Bill the evening before: “[W]hen you gave me your phone, I was trying to
like, help you out and I was telling Bill to sleep with you and stuff.” Claire was stunned, telling
Heather, “I did not want that. Like, I didn’t consent to that, I didn’t say I wanted it.”

After breakfast with Heather, Claire picked up Victor to give him a ride home for winter
break. His silence was palpable, and she finally asked him, “So, what’s your problem? Like, why
aren’t you talking to me?” His answer was devastating, “I walked in last night, I came back to
get you because I was really uncomfortable with you staying with Bill, and Bill was on top of
you like, having sex with you. I can’t believe you’d hook up with him like, I’m in love with you
like, I can’t believe you don’t even know this kid and you’d have sex with him.” Claire began
crying, saying she didn’t remember any of this. As Victor and Bill were friends, Victor agreed to
talk to Bill about what happened.

Bill insisted to Victor that it was consensual sex, that he had asked Claire several times
about having sex, and she had said yes. He wasn’t sure if he wore a condom, and agreed to pay
for Plan B, which he never followed through with. Claire spent $70 on Plan B, in addition to
going to the doctor to get tested for STD’s. Claire sent Bill pictures of her bruises, and Bill
couldn’t explain them, only saying, “Oh my god, I’m so sorry. I guess I just am rough when I
have sex, or something.” Victor was willing to accept Bill’s account of the evening, and Claire
reminded him, “[I]f I was so consenting about it, I wouldn’t have bruises.”

Claire sought therapy after the assault and was diagnosed with PTSD: “I just had like,
insane panic attacks every time I got drunk. I used to bawl and I would be like, ‘Bill’s going to
rape me.’ I would think I would see him everywhere. I had nightmares and like, problems with
sex after that for a little bit.” Aaron and Bill are still roommates, and Victor is friends with both
of them, but they don’t spend a lot of time together, especially when Claire is around. Claire is
now dating Victor, but severed her friendship with Heather telling her, “I don’t trust you and I can’t believe that you would consent for me.” Claire and Victor have had several conversations over the last two years about why he didn’t intervene when he walked in on them. Victor maintains it was a mixture of uncertainty if the encounter was consensual, as well as fear that Bill would physically assault him, adding, “I thought Bill would stop when I walked in the room, but he didn’t.”

Claire has tried to turn this experience into a positive light, and now does her best to be a “good bystander”:

*I feel pretty passionate about like, like, I’ve been a victim of domestic violence, sexual violence. So like, at this point I just want to make sure it doesn’t happen to anyone. Like, my friends think I’m annoying, but I’m the girl at parties like, “Don’t take her home, she’s too drunk.” And like, I just use what happened to me and just like, tell them, “Listen, she doesn’t want to have sex with you.”*

Claire hopes her experience can help others to not have to go through what she has been through.

**Summary**

Qualitative research protocol using interviews includes providing participants with a copy of the interview transcripts for accuracy, clarification, corrections, and/or elaboration. However, due to the sensitive nature of this study, I decided to give participants the option of receiving a copy of the transcripts, as reliving the details of their assault in writing could be triggering. Of the 13 participants, only two declined: Elena and Camille. Elena stated, “I’m ok with not having them.” Camille responded similarly, “I don’t need it.” The remaining 11 participants who indicated they wanted a copy of transcripts, often assented eagerly. Olivia enthused, “Yeah, I
would love to get that.” Farrah responded, “Yeah, that would be awesome.” Madison also appeared interested, replying “Yeah, that would be cool.” As did Lydia, “Oh, ok, yeah, I would actually.” Aurora seemed more inquisitive than eager: “I will say, can I have them just for fun? Just for curiosity. I mean, I’m not worried about any of it.” Katherine’s concerns about keeping her identity concealed were the motivating factor for obtaining the transcripts: “Okay. And then if I asked, ‘Oh, could you like, leave this part out’ or ‘change this part’ would that be okay as well?” The remaining participants were more tepid, but still accepting, like Kali who responded, “Sure, that’s fine.” And Genevieve giving another variation of the same response, “Yeah, that’s fine.” Jessica answered with a simple, “Okay.” Claire also had a one-word response, “Sure.” Kira was more ambivalent, “Sure, I don’t care.” Interestingly, although there was a wide range of interest for the transcriptions across the participants, as of this writing, of the 11 participants who agreed to receiving a copy of the transcripts, none have offered any feedback.

Although the participants clearly had different backgrounds, different personalities, and a wide range of experiences across the sexual assault spectrum, being survivors of sexual assault was the thread that linked them together. Elena best summed up this phenomenon: “People who are victims of this, like, we all come from, it’s kind of a funnel. We all come from different things and we all come out of it different. We’re all tied to the same event, or the same crime, really.” The same event, the same crime, is what drew the participants to this study. Speaking out about their shared lived experiences in this study relates back to feminist theory, as described in chapter two, which emphasizes the empowerment that can be invoked when a person’s voice is not only heard, but truly listened to. These women’s stories are the cornerstone of my research, sharing their experiences about bystanders (or lack thereof), and opening a space so we can gain a true sense of what they have been through. In the next chapter we will explore the themes that
emerged from the participants’ collective experiences.
Chapter 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS: THEMES

Introduction

As the participants shared their experiences, themes emerged, and using the qualitative methods software program, Atlas.ti, I initially coded ten themes: consent, empathy, empowerment, impact, intervention, recognition of assault, misinterpretation by bystanders, reporting, victim response, and post-intervention. I then decided to merge “consent” and “empathy” into “consent and empathy” as, when I was coding, there was a great deal of overlap between the two; apparent lack of empathy for the participant played a role in violating consent. In other words, the perpetrator’s inability or unwillingness to listen to and respect the victim’s direct wishes, implied body language, and/or understanding that when someone is intoxicated they are unable to give consent, directly impacted not gaining consent for sexual activity from the victim. I also decided to place “recognition of assault” and “misinterpretation by bystanders” under the heading, “recognition of assault by bystanders and survivors” as sexual assault can appear to the outside world as consensual in certain contexts and can even be confusing to sort out to the survivor during and/or after the incident. While not all of the themes are intrinsically connected to bystander intervention, they are all associated with sexual assault, and directly or indirectly linked to the lack of bystander intervention; if there had been effective bystander intervention, the assault would not have happened. The themes that addresses bystander intervention directly are Theme 3: Intervention and Theme 7: Post-Intervention. The tables below capture the final eight codes I used; Table 5.1 calculates the total number of quotations at the bottom, and Table 5.2 calculates quotation percentages in the bottom row.
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Themes

There were many options for arranging the themes in this chapter, and perhaps some could argue that there were better ways to segue into the final chapter. However, ultimately, I decided to move through the themes chronologically, from the participant’s initial reactions when the perpetrator began the assault through the aftermath of the assault, whether or not to report the assault, and for those who did, a description of what the reporting process was like for them, and post-intervention, how people responded to survivors after the assault. The closing theme, survivors’ feelings of empowerment from participating in the study, provides insight into the participants reasons for contributing to the study. The final themes are as follows: consent and empathy, variation of victims’ responses during assault, intervention, recognition of assault by bystanders and survivors, impact of assault on survivors, reporting, post-intervention, and survivors’ feelings of empowerment from participating in study. Under the reporting theme, since I had participants who chose to report and ones who chose not to report, I divided this theme into: reasons for not reporting and experience with reporting. As varying as the participants’ experiences were, the themes emerged quite organically and distinctly.

Theme 1: Consent and Empathy

From the perspective of the participants, if their perpetrators were being empathetic, they would have picked up on both verbal and nonverbal cues (including intoxication and/or unconsciousness) and not violated their consent. As Tuerkheimer (2015) describes, consent is the “pivot point for distinguishing rape from sex” (p. 41). Participants like Farrah and Madison, who had established relationships with their perpetrators prior to the assault, noted that these partners showed a lack of empathy early on in the relationship. Madison recalled, “[He] literally verbatim
said to me, this should have been a red flag, in the beginning of us talking, he literally told me he’s not capable of empathy.” Farrah, who is still in a relationship with her perpetrator, hopes one day he’ll see the impact his actions have had on her, “it’s hard for him to kind of see that because he has problems empathizing with people…he can’t really.”

Most of the participants, like Jessica, understood the nuances of consent, but their perpetrators did not. She acknowledges she consented to sleeping over, but not to having sex in the morning, while she was still sleeping. Katherine initially gave consent for sex, but when the condom broke, she revoked her consent. She gave verbal cues: “I said, ‘We shouldn’t do this; I’m not comfortable.’” And nonverbal cues: “it was very obvious, and I know he knows that it was obvious, I was hesitant.” Katherine is also aware that submission is not consent, “I tried to put up a fight”, but eventually he wore her down, “I just kind of gave up arguing.”

Many of the participants, like Genevieve, were quite vocal about not giving consent, repeatedly saying “no” throughout the evening, and moving away from her perpetrator whenever he came close to her. When Madison told her then boyfriend, “no”, “he just like blatantly ignored me and just kept going.” However, some participants were less vocal, either due to being intoxicated, or just not knowing what to do. Camille was intoxicated, but her perpetrator was not, and he was aware that she was not “in the right state of mind to make a decision. So, it’s not even like a situation where like, I was drunk, [he] was drunk.” When confronted by mutual friends, Lydia’s perpetrator claimed, “Well, I thought she did want it, like she didn’t say ‘no,’ so I thought she consented to it.” What he failed to realize was the absence of “no” does not mean “yes.”

Kira was too intoxicated to give consent: “I feel like it might have been obvious, especially when I started vomiting. It was probably obvious that I wasn’t in a state where I was
capable of completely understanding what was happening.” Claire has no memory of the assault due to intoxication, and dismisses the idea that she may have consented: “And it like, makes me sick to think like, what it might’ve been like having sex with him, because I was like, ready to puke, and unconscious.” Camille believes there are misperceptions about who a perpetrator is, and these faulty ideas can allow perpetrators to not assume responsibility. She feels there is this picture of “grabbing someone in a dark alley or whatever, and a lot of times it’s not that. And people think because they’re not doing that, then they’re not the bad guy.”

A common thread was a desire to place more responsibility on perpetrators, and post-assault apologies felt hollow. Farrah shared, “If it [an intervention] would’ve happened after the fact and he was like, ‘Oh, sorry.’ Like, ‘No, you weren’t sorry when I was saying, please stop.’” Lydia’s perpetrator apologized to her and announced on Facebook in the wake of the #MeToo movement, “I know I’ve sexually harassed a few women, and it’s my fault, and I’m really sorry about that.” Lydia felt both apologies lacked sincerity: “I just kind of feel like he’s trying to make other people feel like he’s turned a new leaf.”

Some perpetrators acknowledged after the fact that they had done something wrong. Although Lydia’s perpetrator apologized to her, “I didn’t feel any better from it. I felt like oh, I felt like he needs to experience what I went through to actually be sorry for what he did.” This raises the question, do perpetrators need to experience sexual violence themselves in order to feel empathy? Lydia could not fathom how someone could not recognize that the other person is not engaged, “I just feel like you should really be able to recognize when a person is not enjoying it.” She added, “You should understand, how is this going to be enjoyable for you, this like, encounter, if it’s not enjoyable for the girl?” Katherine echoed this sentiment advising potential perpetrators, “you’re virtually breaking the law, hurting this person and breaking their trust.”
Like, it’s not worth it, you should just, you know, call it quits and get it out of your head.”

This theme highlights the connection between consent and empathy, supporting the established research on the success of empathy-based sexual assault prevention programs, as discussed in chapter two. Foubert & Perry’s (2007) study found, “[l]ow rape proclivity and high empathy toward rape survivors are strongly linked.” That research showed that empathy-based prevention efforts decreased the participants inclination to perpetrate a sexual assault. Based on these findings, increasing empathy-based sexual assault prevention programs and developing empathy-based bystander intervention programs could help eradicate sexual assault on college campuses.

Throughout the interviews, when there was a bystander present, participants indicated they would have wanted bystanders to do more, and sometimes noted a lack of empathy from bystanders. Perhaps a mixture of not knowing what to do and lack of empathy inhibited bystanders from taking action. Showing victims as human beings, not statistics, thereby increases the ability to empathize, and decreases the chance of a potential perpetrator violating consent or a bystander not intervening while an assault is taking place. This theme applies to RQ4: participants wanted bystanders to understand what it was like for them in the moments before consent was violated, hoping bystanders will garner more empathy and intervene before an assault can take place.

**Theme 2: Variation of Victims’ Responses During Assault**

Each participant’s response during the assault was unique to their situation and personality. As the participants came from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural factors should also be taken into consideration. Some were very vocal and assertive in saying “no;” others were
more passive and used body language, such as turning away or moving away to send the message that they did not want a sexual encounter. Some participants fought back; others submitted for fear of escalated violence or because they felt trapped and didn’t know what to do. Some participants escaped during the assault; others felt paralyzed or were unconscious. Some participants have very clear, detailed memories of the assault; others have pieces of the event missing, or don’t remember the assault at all. All the survivors have one thing in common: they did not want this to happen.

Olivia used body language to avoid being kissed against her will by her coach, “he just like, held me there, I couldn’t really move per se. He was just like, ‘Give me one kiss, just one kiss. I know you like me and I like you,’ and those kinds of things. And, I was just like shying my face away and I didn’t know what to say or do, because he was actually pretty strong. I just tried to get away as soon as possible.” The combination of her coach’s strength and the inherent power dynamic between them, likely influenced Olivia’s decision to try to avoid confrontation. Kira was also uncertain what she should do, but for different reasons, “I didn’t know what to do because I was extremely drunk.” Kira recollected her thought process in the moment: “I’m not into this, but I don’t really know what to do. I don’t want to be here. I want to go home, but I can’t really do anything.”

Lydia described feeling paralyzed in the moment when her friend from high school sexually assaulted her, “I couldn’t even say ‘no.’ I felt like I was just really scared.” She also felt fearful of further harm if she protested: “And even after the situation, I was like, ‘Why didn’t I say no?’”, but then, in that moment I just felt like, ‘Ugh, I can’t do anything.’ And it’s like, even if I say ‘no,’ I don’t know if he’s going to stop or anything.” When her perpetrator tried to take off her shorts, Lydia was able to say “no,” then made an excuse to go to the bathroom to get away
from him, spending the rest of the night on the couch. Madison also experienced the feeling of paralysis: “I think I was just frozen.” This reaction was primarily due to her history with her perpetrator, who was her boyfriend at the time of the assault, “because he had been very aggressive with me in the past, I was just like, I don’t really know, am I supposed to stop this?”

Elena used both verbal and nonverbal cues to indicate she did not want to be touched, saying “no” repeatedly and facing away from her perpetrator when he tried going beyond what she felt comfortable with sexually. Genevieve also used a variety of tactics to send the message to her perpetrator that she was not interested in him when he harassed her throughout the night, ranging from addressing the issue directly, “There [were] too many instances when I said, ‘Hey, get off of me,’” to having a friend call her and pretend to be her boyfriend, thereby inviting a bystander to intervene. She used nonverbal cues as well, such as moving away from him when he got too close. When none of these strategies made the sexually aggressive behavior stop, Genevieve shared that she felt “legitimately scared for the first time in my life, that something was going to happen. Like, I’ve never been in that position. So, it freaked the hell out of me.” She feared she would be “assaulted even more” if she stayed the night with her friends as they had planned.

When two men trapped Aurora in a bathroom at a party and began sexually assaulting her, she knew she would not be able to overpower them, but her survival instincts guided her escape: “My head was only in one space and it was in motion survival, not like, scream, yell, something. I was like, freaking out and...I found a way, I don’t remember how, I think I just dropped all my weight to the ground.” Due to her perpetrator’s strength, Kali was uncertain if she would escape the sexual assault, and like Aurora, quick thinking helped her do just that, “I bit him. Hard.”
Farrah initially tried to fight off her perpetrator, saying “no” and asking him, “What are you doing? Why are you doing that?” However, when he was hurting her and refused to stop, “at that point I kind of gave up.” Farrah submitted to avoid the escalation of violence. This incident triggered Farrah’s experiences with previous sexual assaults where she had been physically as well as sexually injured. Katherine vocalized that she was revoking her consent while having sex after the condom broke: “I didn’t feel comfortable having unprotected sex. So, I said like, ‘We just shouldn’t. I should probably just like, go. We shouldn’t do this. I’m not comfortable.’” However, when her perpetrator did not respect her wishes, Katherine recalled, “I just kind of gave up arguing.”

During her first sexual assault in the dorm room, Jessica was silenced with fear, “I wasn’t into it at all and he was very forceful and I wasn’t even responding with anything.” During the second sexual assault, where the perpetrator began assaulting her while she was sleeping, Jessica stated she was not afraid of him “hitting” her, but “kept pretending” she was asleep, hoping he would stop. It is likely that Jessica’s experience with the first sexual assault was triggering for her during the second sexual assault. Claire was “blacked out” when she was sexually assaulted by a friend, so is uncertain how she was feeling or what she did in the moment. Her clues that the assault was violent were her bruised and battered body the next morning. Claire disclosed she has been sexually assaulted two other times. She recollected, “I did say ‘stop’ to the third one many times and…tried to get away.” Unfortunately, as in her other two sexual assaults, no matter how apparent it was that she did not want the sexual encounter, from nonverbal cues, to clearly saying “stop,” to being blacked out and unable to give consent, Claire’s perpetrators ignored what she wanted and willfully violated her.

This theme helps answer RQ4: participants want bystanders to be aware of the varying
ways in which victims respond during an assault, from verbal to nonverbal cues. A decision to intervene can be derived from hearing a victim directly tell a perpetrator to leave them alone and/or reading body language that suggests the victim is uncomfortable, such as moving away from a perpetrator, turning their face away when a perpetrator tries to kiss them, and of course having the knowledge that when someone is incapacitated and/or unconscious, consent cannot be given, and therefore an intervention is necessary because a sexual assault is taking place.

Theme 3: Intervention

The thread that tied all participants together is that they all wanted someone to intervene. However, the ways in which they would have wanted someone to intervene varied. Some participants, like Olivia, would have welcomed a direct approach: “If they could see it… I don’t know if they saw that happening… just come over and say, ‘Stop.’ It’s as simple as that.” Kira shared that sentiment: “Maybe if someone sees you not being comfortable, they should do something,” specifically, “if you see something that doesn’t look like it’s completely consensual.” Genevieve felt a bystander could be directive, without even saying a word, “Like, to put a body between me and him, I feel like that even would’ve made it better. It probably would have stopped him.”

Other participants, like Aurora, felt someone simply checking in would have been a helpful intervention, “Maybe even just knock on the bathroom door and be like, ‘Are you okay?’ so I could say something. It wasn’t like they were covering my mouth.” Jessica also felt like a knock on the door would have made a world of difference, “Just to be like, ‘Oh, what’s going on? Something sounds weird.’” Elena had a similar reaction, wanting someone “To knock on the door and say, ‘Hey, is everybody ok in there? I heard yelling and I heard the word, no, a few
times. You guys good? Can I come in?’” Elena believed “anyone” in the dorms could have intervened, “Freshman dorms are crazy. There’s always something going on and there had to be somebody outside.” Lydia is still uncertain if her perpetrator’s roommate, who was in the bed next to them during the assault, was awake or not. If he had been, “I wish the guy would have said like, ‘Oh hey, dude like, she’s not enjoying it, you should probably like, stop.’ [O]r maybe if he can’t even say that to, maybe say something like, to his friend. He could’ve been like…just pulled me away and said, ‘Here, let’s let you sleep on the couch instead.’”

Some participants, like Katherine, would have preferred an indirect intervention, “If someone were to come in like, I think I’d feel awkward. First of all, because I was butt ass naked and because like, I mean, what am I supposed to say, ‘Like no, everything’s not okay and I really want to go home.’ Like, I’m not that confrontational.” For her, an ideal intervention would involve distracting the perpetrator, “It would’ve been like, discreet enough for me to just be like ‘Oh, I should go.’ Maybe if someone was like, ‘Hey like, I really need you to like, do this thing that’s like, important and needs to be done right now.’ I’d be like, ‘Oh man, you gotta go do your thing, I should just go.’” Madison felt like an indirect distraction from her perpetrator’s roommate, who was asleep in the bed next to them, would have either stopped the assault or could have given her an opportunity to remove herself from the situation, “maybe even just like, stand up, act like you’re going to the bathroom or act like you’re getting something from your desk. Just…do something…to just make it stop altogether and like, maybe give me a way to like, maybe think my way out of it.” Claire would have welcomed an “accidental” intervention as well, such as her perpetrator’s roommate “getting up to get a drink.” When her friend came back to the apartment to take her home and saw her on the couch with her perpetrator, she felt a direct intervention would have been appropriate, for her friend to have said, “Yo, stop.”
Farrah also would have preferred an unobtrusive intervention, but for different reasons; she needed to consider her safety both at the time of the assault, as well as after the assault, since she is still in a relationship with her perpetrator:

*I feel like I would’ve been scared if someone actually did intervene because I feel like I would’ve been penalized for being so like, loud. You know what I mean? Like I brought the attention so it’s my fault. Like, I need to be more quiet. Like that type of deal. So, the fact that somebody was acknowledging it, I would have been like very grateful, like thank you someone heard my cry for help, but at the same time I would’ve been like, you got me in trouble, you know what I mean?*

A successful intervention for Farrah would not only have included someone else recognizing that something was wrong, but also her perpetrator acknowledging he was about to do something wrong: “Now, if it like, was while events were starting to transpire and then someone had intervened earlier and he was like, you know, ‘What I was about to do was wrong,’ I would’ve been like, ‘Thank you for seeing that what you’re doing is completely one hundred percent not right.’”

Some participants noted that one of the reasons why bystander intervention is not as effective as it could be, is because the other people present are often intoxicated. Genevieve wanted her friend who was with her at the party to intervene, but she was too “far gone.” Kira found herself in a similar situation: “I think it’s important also to consider that I mean, everybody was drunk, which kind of sucks when it comes to you know, bystander intervention.” However, she doesn’t believe that is an excuse for potential perpetrators and potential bystanders to not pick up on observable cues: “[W]hen this drunk dude could tell that I didn’t want to talk to him, and I get it, you’re drunk but at the same time like, someone around us should have been
like, ‘Hey dude, how about you quit talking to her, obviously she’s not comfortable.’"

Almost half of the participants had no bystander present, but if there had been someone around, they would have wanted someone to intervene. As Kali explained, she would have wanted someone to “Help me make it stop.” Camille echoed that sentiment, stating that she would have wanted someone to “Just get me out of that room.” Jessica would have wanted someone to “do what they could to stop it.”

Interestingly, some of the participants felt they could advocate for others better than they could for themselves. Katherine explained: “If I’m acting confrontational on someone’s behalf… I can justify it if it’s for someone else, I have no problem sticking up for them, but when it comes to myself like, I am not so good at it.” Farrah believes she would have intervened if she had heard something suspicious: “I feel like if I would have heard that situation, I would have been like, you know, I hear some ruckus going on, ‘cause like, I was being pushed into a closet…I did say no…so if I was around and I would’ve heard that I feel like I would’ve like, alerted authorities and been like, this just sounds a little bit fishy.” Lydia thinks that if she had been in her roommate’s position, “if it was me on the bed too, if I was like, if I woke up from that, I would’ve just pushed the guy off, like, ‘What the hell are you doing? This is not ok.’”

Although Camille wished her friends would have taken her home before she even reached her perpetrator’s fraternity house, her friends do not blame themselves for the assault, “Mostly because…it’s not like I held them responsible.” Claire also expressed that she “didn’t want anyone else to feel responsible for it [the sexual assault].”

The participants had a message to potential bystanders. Genevieve urged:

*It’s ok to step in. You’re not going to get in trouble, obviously. There’s no physical harm that should come to you. If someone starts attacking you because you stepped in, yeah*
that would be intense, and I’m sorry for that, but you’re still a good person. Everybody thinks, “Oh, ok, someone else is going to do it,” but if everybody thinks that way then nobody’s going to do it.

Lydia would like potential bystanders to keep in mind:

So...if the person just looks any bit uncomfortable or isn’t reacting at all, like, I think you should be able to recognize that she’s like, she doesn’t want this and that you should really just try pull her away if you can’t stand up to your friend. [B]ecause like, the brief enjoyment the guy has is nothing compared to the long term suffering the girl has to go through.

Kira believes that sometimes people don’t want to intervene because they don’t want to jeopardize their friendships. She feels like it is important for potential bystanders to understand: “Don’t be afraid...to intervene. So like, if you step in and that person doesn’t talk to you anymore, congratulations, you’re no longer friends with a rapist.”

The intervention theme encapsulates all four research questions, from identifying bystanders, to describing what an intervention could look like, as well as how bystanders could have intervened in their situations, and finally, what the participants would want bystanders to know regarding intervention. The participants clearly wanted an intervention, and bystanders can benefit from understanding the varying options of interventions. The question of “Would someone want me to intervene?” is not only answered here, but also includes a roadmap of how to do so effectively.

**Theme 4: Recognition of Assault by Bystanders and Survivors**

While some participants immediately identified their experience as sexual assault, others
did not, sometimes only registering the encounter as assault after a friend pointed it out. Camille recalled, “I had no idea until my friend said, ‘Did you want to?’” After the assault, Lydia remembered, “I didn’t think it was ok, but I also didn’t know how to react to it.” However, when she spoke with her friend about the incident, her friend made it clear, “Oh like, actually what happened to you was really bad like, it was more, it was really sexual assault or harassment.” It was then that Lydia realized she had been minimizing what happened, “I didn’t know if I was making a big deal out of it.” In retrospect, Madison realized she had dismissed other questionable sexual encounters with her ex-boyfriend, “there had been a lot of times in the past where he like, violated my consent that I was like less aware of at the time. Like, it makes me feel weird, but I didn’t really come to terms with the fact that they were actually like quite rape-y until much after the fact.”

Katherine also didn’t immediately classify her experience as sexual assault: “at the time I didn’t even really think of it as sexual assault. Or like, I didn’t think of it as anything other than just like, a hookup.” It wasn’t until she spoke to her friend, who she had called to help get her out of the situation, that she recognized the incident for what it was:

> I explained to him what happened and he was the one that was kind of like, “Yeah, this is kind of like, borderline rape, if not rape, and it’s definitely sexual assault.” And I was like, I don’t know. I wasn’t in shock. I wasn’t shooken up. I wasn’t like, I didn’t feel traumatized, which I think is one of the main things. Because I always thought, in my head, if you’re sexually assaulted you’ll feel traumatized, you’ll feel like shooken up and like, you can’t function or something, but I went on life like normal.

Katherine’s exposure to bystander intervention training did not mitigate this:

> [E]ven though I did Stand for State [the university’s bystander intervention
...and even just from non-workshoppy type things, I knew what sexual assault looked like. I knew the background and I knew that’s what it was. I just didn’t connect them or consider it that. Like, I just didn’t put the label on it.

Participants were sometimes perplexed about how the assault appeared to bystanders. Olivia wrestled with why no one intervened, “It’s honestly kind of hard to say ‘cause he obviously was a lot bigger and older than me, but I guess maybe people just assumed that it wasn’t anything big per se. I don’t know.” Aurora thought her situation should have looked very suspicious to onlookers, “I don’t know, just in any context, I feel like, I mean it could be, that I could’ve been trying to just have a good time with two guys. Like, anything in that scenario just stood out to me as, that would have stood out to anybody as odd.” Elena believes that friends of the perpetrator may fail to intervene because of the “bro code,” implying they value loyalty to their friend above all else, with the frame of mind, “Like, if a guy’s doing something with a girl, I’m not going to bother him.” Genevieve postulated that another barrier to bystander intervention is that sexually aggressive behavior from men has been normalized: “I don’t want to say I would’ve expected them [people at the party] to step in because it’s kind of normal for guys to do that”. Farrah speculated that people may not think to intervene in the dorms because loud noises from a dorm room may not draw attention: “I’m sure college students think that like, kids are just like, having loud sex all the time or whatever, so they don’t really think anything of it.” Kira is uncertain how the situation appeared when her perpetrator’s roommate and friend walked in the dorm room, “I mean, they came in and left so quickly that I don’t know if they thought it was you know, just a regular like, college hook up.”

Camille suggested that when the victim and perpetrator have a pre-existing relationship, friendship or otherwise, seeing two people go into a room goes unquestioned, “I mean they [the
perpetrator’s fraternity brothers] knew who I was. They knew that we were friends, so I don’t think it would have looked strange to anyone if I was going into his room.” Even if there was no prior relationship, expectations of the interaction may be a deterrent for bystanders to intervene, as in Katherine’s Tinder date: “And even if he did have a roommate that was like, right next door, I think he would’ve like, his roommate would’ve known, ‘Hey, he has a girl from Tinder that he has in his room, so like, I’m not going to bother them.’ So, I wouldn’t have expected anything.” Lydia was concerned that because she kissed someone else earlier in the evening, it appeared to others, including her perpetrator, that she would kiss anyone: “I think maybe other people may have seen me at the party kissing that other guy, so, but even though like, in that moment I might’ve wanted to kiss him, that guy…that didn’t mean I wanted to do it with like, anyone. Just because you kiss one guy doesn’t mean you’re going to have a sexual encounter with every other guy.”

When sexual assault does not immediately register as such to both victims and bystanders alike (and maybe even to perpetrators) in some scenarios, this makes bystander intervention all the more challenging. Unpacking this here helps answer RQ4 in that the participants understood how in some scenarios the encounter may not have appeared suspicious, while in others it was blatantly obvious something was amiss. Minimizing, chalking a sexual assault up to a “hook-up” gone awry, the “bro code,” societal norms of excusing sexually aggressive behavior in men, having a pre-existing relationship, and the expectations of certain encounters, such as a Tinder date, were examples some of the participants cited as reasons why they struggled with identifying the incident as a sexual assault and speculated why bystanders may not have intervened. However, participants want bystanders to begin questioning those societal norms generally, and rape culture specifically, in order to look at encounters with a more critical eye.
and intervene when appropriate.

Theme 5: Impact of Assault on Survivors

A noteworthy finding was that the impact of the assault on the victim was not always dependent on level of assault sustained, nor if they fully remembered the incident. This is supported by research, such as Muldoon et al.’s 2016 study which concluded that the legal distinctions of a “minor” or “serious” sexual assault are “meaningless” to survivors (p. 565). It is important for bystanders to be cognizant that sexual harassment and sexual assault impacts everyone in different ways. Therefore, a situation that a bystander may interpret as “minor” could have significant negative after-effects for the victim.

When recruiting, my flyer stated “sexual assault,” not rape, and the participants’ experiences spanned a range of sexual violence. Some of the participants who had not been raped questioned their qualification for the study, but I assured them I was looking at the spectrum of sexual assault. Participants like Genevieve indicated that they were sometimes reluctant to share their story: “I haven’t really wanted to say it to anybody else or bring it up because I know it’s not on the level that a lot of other people experience and talk about.” That being said, she was able to convey how the assault affected her:

*For me it was still pretty intense because I’ve never experienced it and I have never thought I would experience it. I don’t really go out to parties that often. I don’t really put myself in that position and I felt like I didn’t put myself in that position. That’s why I was like, why did this happen?*

Olivia, whose coach forcibly kissed her and touched her without consent noted, “That actually kind of left a bad mark.” Lydia, whose high school friend kissed and touched her without her
consent, would like him to understood the impact the assault had on her:

*I wish [he] realized that this was a serious offense to me and a serious offense to any of the girls he might harm in the future. I don’t know if [he] really realize[s] how much he hurt me, because that whole first freshman year, like that whole semester, I like couldn’t stop thinking about it, and I was really scared to go to parties after that… just because I was like, really scared that some guy would just come on to me again.*

The assault itself combined with the lack of bystander intervention has had a lasting impact on Lydia: “even when I go like, drinking or anything, I’m kind of scared now. Because like, if I don’t have control of myself, no one’s going to stand up for me in that situation.”

Like Lydia, Elena is aware of the lasting impact the assault has had on her after her perpetrator refused to let her leave his dorm room when she did not want to have sex with him, “I had no control over the situation at all. I know what happened to me. I’m living with it. It ultimately did change who I am.” Aurora, who was assaulted in the bathroom at a party, seems to have reconciled her feelings with assault: “So, it’s not awesome but I guess everything makes you the person that you are.” Kali, who was assaulted by someone she was dating, but was able to get away, wondered if “I even wanted to come back and finish dealing with it. It was just hard.” Farrah, who is still dating the man who raped her, discussed how the aftermath of the assault impacted her: “I left a week early last semester and I had deferred grades and stuff because I wanted to get away from him so bad, because he was ruining my life and I couldn’t focus. It was just like everything was like, him and he was controlling my life so bad and I was like, scared.” However, Farrah is optimistic about her long-term outcome, “It’s going to be what happened for the rest of my life. But I never let it like, hold me down or not let me do anything.”

Madison describes herself as “pretty strong,” and when recounting the assault by her ex-
boyfriend she asserted, “it wasn’t traumatic. It was just infuriating.” Nevertheless, the aftermath of the assault did impact her, especially after she learned the DA’s office would not be taking her case: “I had to postpone my exam, I actually had to go to my male professor and like, cry.” When the people around her invalidated her after the assault by a stranger at a party, Kira felt like she had to repress her feelings, “from that point on I just kind of shut up about it because I was like, I’m not in like, a mental state to deal with this right now.” In retrospect, even though she tried not to deal with the assault, it continued to have an impact on her: “in the future it led to a lot of problems with like, believing myself, if that makes sense. Over the last two years I’ve had a lot of struggle with, well, ‘Am I overreacting? Did it really happen?’ Which I know is totally normal.” At this point, the impact on Kira has lessened, “I tend to cope with things with humor, and also, I mean, it’s definitely been like, it’s been a ride, the last 2 years.”

Katherine, who revoked consent, and was subsequently assaulted, stated she has felt a minimal impact:

I wasn’t in shock. I wasn’t shook up. I wasn’t like, I didn’t feel traumatized, which I think is one of the main things. Because I always thought, in my head, if you’re sexually assaulted you’ll feel traumatized, you’ll feel like, shook up and like you can’t function or something, but I went on life like normal. It’s not weighing on me like a huge gloomy cloud. It’s just something that happened.

While Claire, who was sexually assaulted by a friend while unconscious, felt the effects for quite some time after the assault: “I just had like, insane panic attacks every time I got drunk. I would just bawl and bawl and bawl. And I would think I saw him everywhere. I had nightmares and like, problems with sex after that for a little bit.”

In many ways, the participants were able to intervene for themselves after the assault,
such as finding support in friends and/or families, going to therapy, or reporting the assault. As discussed in Theme 8, even participating in this study was a form of intervention that they actively sought out. The participants noted that their willingness to share their stories was often an act of intervention for themselves, as well as an intervention to hopefully prevent future assaults from happening through the findings this research may bring. While each assault impacted the participants in a variety of ways, ultimately, they chose to mitigate that impact in some way by participating in this study. In addition, participating in the study allows others (bystanders) to understand how sexual assault has affected these survivors. In this way, we contribute to RQ4: Participants are hoping that this newfound understanding could motivate more bystanders to intervene, with the knowledge that no matter the level of assault, the impact on a victim could be devastating.

*Theme 6: Reporting*

Four out of the thirteen (31%) participants reported their assault to the university, which aligns with national statistics that sexual assault is an underreported crime. This section addresses reasons why participants did not report, as well as the experiences participants had with the system from the four who did report.

**Reasons for not reporting**

The main reasons participants gave for not reporting fell into three categories: not wanting to “ruin his life;” the desire to leave the incident behind and “move on” with their lives; and fear of being blamed or a general fear of how they would be treated by the university. Often times it was a combination of the three. Genevieve falls into the third category, “I’ve kind of been afraid to mention it because I don’t want people to be like, ‘Oh, it’s your fault.’” Lydia
described a lack of faith in the system, “I just felt like nothing would have changed. Like, I see those sexual assault alerts and they don’t seem to really do anything.” Lydia also feared being blamed for the assault, “I didn’t want to be judged I think, for like, not saying, ‘no.’” Kira was wary of the system, relating that she chose not to report because of the reputation of the process being hostile to victims. Jessica was worried that she wouldn’t be believed because, “I consented to sleeping over.” She also noted, “I don’t feel like disrupting my life. It wasn’t enough for me to do that. I just never talked to him again, basically.”

Claire was fearful of the additional stress going through the legal process would have on her, “at the time I was so traumatized I didn’t want to go through court. Like, I didn’t want to see him. I didn’t, like, I wasn’t even seeing him and having panic attacks.” Claire also factored in that she had no memory of the assault: “I don’t want to go to court and them ask me what happened and I say, ‘I blacked out on a couch and woke up with bruises.’” Claire resents the implication some people make, questioning the validity of the assault because she didn’t report it: “a lot of people are like, ‘Ok, if he raped you, why didn’t you go to the police?’” Though these types of reactions to her sexual assault are frustrating, she hasn’t changed her mind, “I mean, to this day I don’t regret not going [to report], because it messed up my life at that point so badly.”

Aurora shared that although she didn’t report her assault, she did complete an anonymous consensus for the university. Aurora maintained, “I understood that this was wrong but…I’m not going to press charges and I’m not going to make that this whole thing.” Elena is still contemplating pressing charges, noting, “I have evidence.” However, she has reasons why she hasn’t reported thus far: “I want this guy to live with what he did, I want him to suffer for what he did, but I don’t want to go out of my way to ruin his life if that makes sense. I don’t know
how to explain it.” Elena is also concerned there could be negative consequences for her if she reported: “Another big part of why I’m a little hesitant to come forward is my family would find out.”

Farrah admitted to having complicated feelings about reporting her sexual assault because she is still in a relationship with her perpetrator:

‘Cause your scared. When you’re close to someone, you don’t want to tell on them and get them in trouble. It’s hard because like, I do feel people should be held accountable, but it’s so contradicting for me because I’m like, “you should be held accountable for your actions, but I wasn’t to be the one to hold you accountable.” Like, I don’t want it to be my fault.

Katherine hasn’t reported, but has considered it:

I thought about maybe doing it, but I don’t know. In my head I always picture rape as like, Bob Baker, or like a horrible, horrible human being who’s never done anything good in their lives. But like, these guys for as much as I fault them for, like, they have done good things, and I was like, this could really ruin their lives. Even if I did do it anonymously or whatever, like, I don’t know. And I know like, it’s like, “Katherine, you have a right to, because they kind of ruined your life.” but it’s like, my life’s not ruined.

Katherine is trying to use what she has been through as a learning experience, but wonders if the people who have assaulted her will do the same: “I’m not looking for an eye for an eye. I’m just not, I’m going to learn from this. But at the same time, will they learn from this? Because they should.”
Experience with reporting

Of the four participants who did report, one decided to report without prompting, and three reported at the suggestion or insistence of someone else. In a sense, being encouraged (or discouraged) to report is a form of post-assault bystander intervention. More instances of post-assault bystander intervention are detailed in Theme 7. Although it was Olivia’s parents’ idea to report her coach to the university, she believes it was the best decision, if nothing else, then to avoid another assault, “I mean, I am kind of glad my parents did talk me into reporting before something worse happened.” While Olivia doesn’t regret the decision, which resulted in her coach being fired, it is not without mixed feelings, “I see two different sides in a sense. One is yes, it was really intimidating and really scary. I mean, I cried so much actually that night and when I had to tell the [university] as well, but I was also thinking about he is losing his job. I guess [it was] somewhat of vindication of sorts, but we also lost a good coach.”

Camille was also reluctant, “I wasn’t going to press charges. I wasn’t going to do anything. And then one of my roommates was like, ‘if you don’t then I will.’” Camille knew she needed the push, “Yeah, I wouldn’t have done anything if she didn’t.” Camille had specific reasons why she went through the school: “I reported it with the school because I couldn’t have it get out to my parents. So, I didn’t want to take it to the courts. So, I went to the school instead, because I figured that was the most controlled and it couldn’t get out.” Camille thought that going through the school would be the least disruptive and bring her justice. Unfortunately, she was wrong on both counts; the case went on for ten months, and the school eventually ruled in her perpetrator’s favor.

After reporting to the university, Camille “was down at the police station and then to the hospital”, where a rape kit was conducted. Camille described going through the process at the
hospital was intimidating:

[T]hey have a detective in there, they have a police officer, they have a person from the Women’s Resource Center. They just have everyone in there and it’s just, it’s pretty overwhelming, and then someone’s talking to you and they’re asking you again everything that happened, which you just told the detective. It’s very overwhelming.

There’s a lot of issues with the system.

Camille recounted the 10-month ordeal:

He [perpetrator] just kind of kept it going, and he had a really good lawyer and his parents have a lot of money. So, they just kind of kept it going and they started talking to a bunch of people and then they were saying they had this witness they talked to, and this person. And then all the sudden all my friends are roped up into this. It was a disaster, but in the end, I ended up losing. Yeah, I had text messages of him admitting guilt. Like, “Can I come over? I need to apologize. I’m so sorry this happened.” Of him admitting that he has something to be sorry for, and all, “you can’t go to the cops, I can’t go to jail, this is really bad on me.” I have pictures of him calling me hundreds of times. Yeah, he came to my house to apologize. I was considering changing the locks on my doors. And yet I had all of that. They even made me miss class to go to my own hearing. I was like, “I have a lab, he’s taken enough away from me, I’m not risking my academics too. This is something that’s important to me, I’m going to class.” They were like, “We can’t move this.” And I was like, “this has been going on for ten months, there’s no possible way you can move it for another day, so I don’t have to miss my classes?” They were like, “Well we have to go by his schedule too.” I was like, “Ok, how many classes is he missing? None”.

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Despite a plethora of evidence, taking away her choice of who was informed about the assault, in addition to catering to her perpetrator’s schedule, Camille still lost her case. When asked if had she known what she would have to go through, would she have gone this route, Camille replied, “I would’ve taken it to court or something, I don’t know. Got and paid for a lawyer, I don’t even know. But I would not have went through the school. Ever.” The legal system has a long-standing reputation for re-traumatizing victims, and Camille’s case was no exception.

Kali had no intention of reporting her assault, “I was like every other female apparently. I was like, I just want to forget what happened.” Kali did, however, tell a friend, who subsequently “freaked out and he told his friend, she worked for the university.” The woman Kali’s friend told was then mandated to report the incident to the Title IX office, per the university policy. It was not Kali’s choice to report at all, and after having her choice first taken away by the assault, it was again taken away by university policy. After feeling twice violated, the university ruled in her perpetrator’s favor. Kali detailed her experience with the Title IX office:

> And so they called me into their office and it was months of a process, like it was months. Apparently, they only called him in twice. They called me in over ten times. And at the end, um, they pretty much just said you don’t have enough evidence. Even though I had text messages of like, stalking and harassment. They were like, “We are just going to close this case and nothing is going to happen”.

Kali shared that after her case was closed, she has since learned of other women having similar experiences with the Title IX office, an office that was instituted to support victims of sexual assault and harassment. Kali has strong feelings about the Title IX office: “I like to keep Title IX out of my life now other than the fact that I wish that they were no longer a department involved in anything.”
Madison took it upon herself to report the sexual assault and was even encouraged to do so by her perpetrator, her boyfriend at the time, the day after the assault, “He was like, ‘Oh my god, I raped you. You should report me. I’m so sorry.’” After Madison reported the assault in February, when the assault happened, the university emailed her perpetrator twice to be interviewed. He never responded, until the week before finals in May, Madison’s friend saw him working at a convenience store, and said, “rapist” under her breath, “He finally replied so he could report her and he tried to get me in trouble.” After his interview, the Title IX office emailed Madison stating, “you can’t do this, it could be harassment.” They also informed her, “they were putting his transcripts on hold and he’ll be able to walk at graduation but won’t get his transcripts.” The Title IX office explained to Madison that the process was near completion, they just needed one more interview with each of them. Madison promptly completed her interview, but her perpetrator had moved out of state, so a Skype interview was to be scheduled.

Madison contacted the Title IX office every two weeks over the summer to check in on the progress of her case. On July 14th, she was informed they had an interview scheduled with him that day. The following week, Madison called to see how the interview went, and was told that the meeting had not even been scheduled. Madison was outraged, “I was like, you literally told me that this was the day of the meeting. How are you just going to lie to me like that?” At that point Madison’s mother contacted the Title IX office and learned, “they apparently lied to me all summer. They never held his transcripts, never held his record. Just like, he had everything because there was nothing they could do at that point because of a [computer] error, or something like that.” The university explained that the only potential consequence he would receive is that he would not be accepted to graduate school there if he applied. Madison felt this was an empty penalty, “It’s like, he’s not going to apply here. He never planned on it.” Madison
summed up her sentiments of her experience with reporting:

The way they acted towards me in the beginning made me think, wow, they’re handling things very well. They didn’t ask me what I was wearing, they didn’t blame it on me. Wow, thank god. It’s just funny like, for me, my situation felt very black and white. There was really no substances involved, there was really no, like, he literally said it. Like, no other case is like, really black and white, like, right out, “I raped you.” And in his statements to Title IX he actually admitted to the other times he raped me. So, I wonder how they’re handling all these other cases they’re getting.

Madison had also reported the assault to the local police, who initially told her there was “a 50/50 chance” they would take her case. She received a call from the DA’s office a few weeks ago notifying her they would not be taking her case, “I was preparing myself for it. I already knew I wasn’t going to get anyone to take my case. I knew I wasn’t going to get justice.”

It is important for bystanders to understand that reporting does not define sexual assault. Reporting does not make the assault more valid, nor does choosing not to report imply that the assault was insignificant or did not have a lasting negative impact on the survivor. Sexual assault is a crime that is difficult to report, for a variety of reasons, many of which are discussed here. One of the reasons victims do not report is fear of being re-victimized, a fear that is validated by the survivors in this study who did report. This gives us a deeper understanding of RQ3 and RQ4: realizing why people do and do not report, as well as having insight into the reporting process better prepares bystanders to support survivors after an assault.

**Theme 7: Post-Intervention**

From the perspective of the participants, there were two layers of bystander intervention:
bystander intervention prior to or during the sexual assault and bystander intervention when the survivor discloses to someone after the assault. This second layer can shape how survivors frame the assault and can either aid or impede their recovery process. Recent literature supports these findings, such as Wagner, Monson, & Hart's study on “social factors in the context of trauma,” which found that social support could be a mitigating factor in the development of PTSD after trauma (2016). Wagner et al., (2016) reported a connection between “the positive influence of social support initially following trauma, and the deterioration effect of PTSD symptoms on social support over the longer term” (p. 831).

Participants’ experiences with bystander intervention upon disclosure of the assault ranged from support, to being supported initially but not throughout the process, to lack of support entirely. There were also participants who were supported (or not) on various levels from different people. Olivia described her friends reactions: “all of them were really supportive about it.” Katherine, who had revoked her consent during a sexual encounter after the condom broke, felt a sense of support from her friend immediately following the assault, who told her “yeah, that is really not ok.” Another friend effused, “I actually really hate him and if I ever see him like, I’m going to fight him.” While Katherine would not have wanted her friends to get into a physical altercation with her perpetrator, she found their reactions, “oddly reassuring.” Although Katherine had experienced multiple sexual assaults along the range of the sexual assault spectrum, she maintains that she “didn’t feel traumatized.”

Genevieve, whose friend was intoxicated at the party where a man sexually harassed her throughout the night, didn’t originally inform her of how she experienced the evening, but when she did: “I had to re-explain everything to her. She was like, ‘Oh my god. I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize that.’ I was like, ‘Yeah, I know.’” Once Genevieve divulged what the evening had been
like for her, her friend was supportive, and agreed to never interact with the man who assaulted her again, “I was like, that’s awesome, thanks for backing me now.” Even though people at the party had minimized her perpetrator’s behaviors at the time, “this is what he does,” after the fact they realized, “that’s too far.” Genevieve believes her sharing led to a deeper understanding of the situation, “Now they think it’s too far because now they understand how awkward and how bad it makes other people feel. Like, the people that it’s directed towards.”

Kali felt initial support, but unfortunately, it did not last: “At first people were helpful. And then people started to turn, quickly.” As Kali moved away from the friend group she felt was trying to “ostracize [her] from everyone,” she did find support in other friends: “I just had other people that, they believed me, they kind of held me together.” Kali would have liked support from her parents, but they ended up doing more harm than good:

_I kind of just pushed my parents out of it. Like, I didn’t want to tell them. My mom kind of tried to force her way in. She didn’t want me to come back when I told her. ‘Cause like, my grades kind of slipped a little bit and, um, I was like, “Listen, I have some things that are going on.” So she forced her way in. Which was also a little traumatic because then I had to deal with her and her crying and whining._

Camille also did not get the support she had hoped for from her mom: “I tried telling my mom, but she blamed me for it.” Camille’s friends were initially supportive, but their support waned when she continued to struggle longer than they thought was a reasonable time frame:

_My friends were, they were good at first. But they were good when I didn’t want anybody around. And then when it was more so like, I was more okay, well not okay, but like it settled and I realized what happened, like after a month or few weeks or something. That’s when it was kind of like, they were like, “Are you not over this yet?” _[A]t first it
was like, “Do you need anything, what’s going on, are you ok?” And I was like, “No, just leave me alone.” And then when I wanted them it was kind of like they were more distant because I had pushed them away.

Lydia’s friends were also initially supportive, but when her perpetrator, a friend from high school, explained to their mutual friends that he thought the encounter was consensual and apologized, they were comfortable forgiving him, and expected her to do the same:

They were pretty supportive of me...but then like, they heard what he said. He was kind of like, “Well I thought she did want it, like, she didn’t say no, so I thought she consented to it.” And so, like, I feel like after he apologized though, they expected me to be friends with him again. So, I think initially they were supportive but towards the end they heard like, his side of the story and when they saw that I wasn’t still forgiving him they like, didn’t understand. They didn’t fully support me anymore. They were like, maybe fifty-fifty because they were like, “Well, uh, his side of the story sounds like, reasonable why he did that.” And then he apologized, so it’s okay. I feel kind of like, betrayed by some of my friends because they still hang out with him and like, I don’t expect them to stop hanging out with him, just because of this one incident that happened to me, but at the same time every time they talk about him in conversation, they’ll just like, bring him up or say something dumb he did in college. And then I’ll just feel like, do you not remember what happened to me?

Kira felt supported by some friends, but completely invalidated by others. Her roommate and a friend were the first people she told when she went back to her dorm the day after the assault:

I talked to my roommate and another female friend of mine about it, and they seemed
very disturbed. Like, they seemed very uncomfortable with it. I mean, they didn’t say to me... “Hey, like, that’s called rape.” You know, they didn’t have like, concrete answers. They were just kind of like, “That’s weird.”

Although Kira’s roommate and friend didn’t label what happened to her as rape, she felt supported. However, the following day, when Kira got together with two people who were at the party, she received a mixed reaction from them. One of the women validated her, saying, “That is not okay, like that’s not cool.” Conversely, the other woman was dismissive: “Listen, it happens to everybody, like, you have to just deal with it.” Just when Kira thought that people could not respond any worse, the day after that, when at a club meeting with the people who were at the party, she was grilled by one of her male friends about if she had spent the night with her perpetrator. When Kira indicated she had spent the night with him, but did not want to elaborate, implying that the encounter was not consensual (“I didn’t really want it to happen.”), her friend, and other men in the organization who overheard the conversation, responded with, “Oh my gosh, that’s so funny!” And then they laughed at her. Even another male friend who did not laugh at her, did not validate her either: “[I]t’s okay to have sex with someone and regret it later.” Kira expressed how her friend’s reactions impacted her:

I mean the big thing for me was just that, like, it wasn’t my fault, and I mean it would’ve been really helpful as far as recovery for me, if all of these people around me wouldn’t have been giving me shit the whole time about it.

Kira feels strongly that believing a friend who shares they have been sexually assaulted has no negative repercussions, but can be invaluable to the survivor:

One thing I think is really important is if a friend comes to you and talks to you about something, like, you’re not a judge that’s sentencing someone. If you choose to believe
them, even if they are, you know, the two percent or point two or whatever of people who make up a sexual assault allegation [false reports make up 2-10% of all claims, comparable to statistics for other falsely reported crimes (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015)]. You believing them has no consequences. If someone comes to me and tells me that, and I choose to believe them, it doesn’t affect anything. Because your belief has no bearing on anything else, other than maybe helping that person.

Participants like Aurora, who was assaulted in a bathroom at a party her freshman year of college, did not feel supported by her friends:

I can’t blame anyone for not intervening, but I would probably liked to have just felt like somebody could’ve intervened after. Like even if like, they, even if there was no way to like, stop this from happening that somebody would’ve done more after the fact. Like all my friends were kind of just like, “that sucks,” “that’s really bad,” “that’s horrible,” “like, I am never going near there [the apartment where Aurora was assaulted] again,” like, but I don’t know. IfIt’s beginning of freshman year and most people like, didn’t understand or didn’t get it. I don’t know. I felt kind of very alone about it. So I just kind of put it behind me, like whatever, just move forward, get over it.

Elena shared these sentiments, after her friend did not respond to her request for support immediately following her sexual assault: “You see who’s really there for you and really understands.” The person she tried to seek support from let her down, and this “hurt my experience with my friend there, that she wouldn’t come up to my dorm and see me. That really hurt me.”

Claire was appalled by the reaction she received from some people upon sharing she had been sexually assaulted: “People kind of blamed me. They were like, ‘You shouldn’t have stayed
there,’ and people were just like, ‘You’ve had a crush on him for how long.’” In addition to skepticism about Claire’s claim because she had had a crush on her perpetrator prior to the assault, despite her body being covered in bruises the following morning, Claire had to contend with the “classic annoying questions that I never thought people would ask until I was raped.” Questions included, “What were you wearing?” “Did you like him?” “How much did you drink?” “Did you want it?” Claire’s response epitomizes the definition of consent: “I don’t remember, so obviously not.”

Farrah did not have particular expectations from her friends, “Just because I know that they really won’t get it or they really won’t be able to relate or understand. And I wouldn’t want them to. Like, I can’t expect so much.” However, she did describe her friends from home as supportive: “One of my friends, she was freaking out and she wanted to tell like, whatever, but obviously you know I was like, ‘please don’t do that.’ Cause you’re scared.” Because Farrah is still in a relationship with her perpetrator, and her continued safety is at stake, it is important to her that the people she tells support her in ways that respect her wishes, even if they disagree with her decision:

> Something I really wouldn’t have wanted was like, my friends to take the step further. So I guess for bystanders I would say, really do what they know is best for the person that it happened to. Because like, I would really like, probably truly dislike my friends if they went and you know, told like, all the information.

Farrah had a message for all potential bystanders: “The only thing I can say for bystanders is just, definitely what bystanders should do is be supportive.”

Farrah’s quote speaks directly to RQ3 and RQ4. It is likely that most people want to be supportive to someone in the aftermath of sexual assault, and for a variety of reasons, simply
don’t know how to show support in an effective and positive manner. The participants outlined here what types of post-intervention were helpful, and what types did more harm than good. This can be utilized to aid bystanders in better supporting survivors after an assault takes place.

Theme 8: Survivors’ Feelings of Empowerment from Participating in Study

From the very first email new participants sent to me, their enthusiasm for being part of this study was clear. There was no hesitation, they expressed their interest, followed up with the screening questions quickly, and generally scheduled the interview within a week of their first contact. In the beginning of Aurora’s interview, she shared, “I don’t even like Starbucks [the study incentive].” She stated that she feels “very involved with this topic.” Being part of the study made her feel, “really excited, this is actually super exciting,” adding, “I think it’s important.” Farrah was pleased that the study was victim/survivor focused, “I was interested to see what your research study was about and glad to see it’s through the lens [of survivors] because there’s a lot of things in my perspective that other people don’t realize or understand.”

Many of the participants expressed wanting to make a positive contribution to this issue and being part of the study allowed them to do so. I initially wondered if there would be a difference in motivation between participants who reported their sexual assaults versus those who didn’t. What I found was that participants who reported often did not feel that they received justice through the university’s judicial system, so they wanted to contribute in some other way. Participants who didn’t report wanted to be part of sexual assault prevention efforts in a way that felt comfortable for them – as in being part of this study. Elena shared, “That’s kind of why I wanted to participate in the study. Just to help a little bit. I feel like I can actually help another person, help others understand the dynamics and everything. I feel like that’s a little bit of a
healing thing.” Discussing the sexual assault can have a positive impact on participants, as Kira explained, “talking is kind of something that definitely helped me.”

Claire was motivated to participate in the study due to misconceptions about consent, expressing disappointment when people do not understand the meaning of consent, and that it cannot be given while intoxicated: “it’s the most frustrating thing, that’s why I’m signing up for this because this pisses me off. [T]he conversations just piss me off so badly because some people are like, ‘It’s hard, it’s not as black and white.’ That’s how they describe it. They’re like, ‘You both were drunk, you might’ve said yes while you were having sex and you don’t remember it.’ So, it’s like, ‘No, I don’t remember it, that’s it.’” This theme speaks directly to RQ4: for the participants, creating a deeper understanding of the dynamics of sexual assault, consent, and bystander intervention in the interest of prevention, were their main motivators. Making sure their messages will be heard by bystanders in order to prevent future assaults, moved them from feeling powerless to empowered.

**Summary**

Due to the nature of this study, in that the participants were self-selected, and I knew nothing of the circumstances of their assault prior to the interview outside of the screening questions, there was much uncertainty in what I would find. I knew I was looking for bystander intervention through the lens of survivors of sexual assault, but there was no guarantee of what would be discovered through the interviews, including the frequency and relative impact of bystanders’ interventions. I found that approach refreshing, leaving me open to consider all possibilities of what each participant offered. Nevertheless, there were some outcomes I was expecting, and did find, namely, each participant wanted someone to intervene, even
hypothetically, if there were no bystanders nearby. It seemed logical that no one would have wanted to be sexually assaulted if it could have been prevented. What did surprise me, however, was the range of feelings surrounding intervention, from desiring a very direct, intentional intervention, to interventions that on the surface didn’t seem like interventions at all, such as a roommate going to the bathroom.

An insight I had hoped to glean from this study was to expand the definition of who a bystander is. I thought an expanded definition could be valuable in reaching more people, perhaps people who would not have considered themselves bystanders, and by engaging more people in bystander intervention, sexual assaults would decrease. At the conclusion of my interviews, I did not gain a significant deeper understanding of who a bystander could be. This may have been partly due to the fact that nearly one half of the participants had no bystanders present prior to or during their assault.

Initially this was frustrating. I thought, how can I conduct a study on bystander intervention when this was not a factor in almost half the cases? I had not included “Were bystanders present?” as part of the screening criteria, because I thought it would defeat the purpose of expanding this view if participants already had a concrete idea of bystanders present. However, with each new participant I met that had no bystanders present, I began second-guessing that decision. Ultimately, this was the best decision I could have made, but for a very different reason that I had going into the study. While I did not necessarily expand the definition of who a bystander is, what I realized was that if nearly one half of the participants did not have a bystander present, one wonders if it is a likely possibility that many sexual assaults occurring on college campuses also do not have bystanders present. The implications of this finding are discussed further in chapter six.
Another finding I had not anticipated is the significance of post-intervention – how bystanders responded after the assault. For some participants, how people reacted upon disclosure of the assault had almost as much of an impact on them as the assault itself. Within this frame, the results are not surprising: when people responded in supportive and kind ways, the effect was positive; when people invalidated survivors, or re-traumatized them (e.g. through the reporting process), survivors were negatively impacted.
Chapter 6. DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this final chapter, I first revisit my research questions, and draw connections from my data to the questions. I then focus on the next steps in the prevention of sexual assault on college campuses. My goal throughout this process was ultimately to help eradicate sexual assault and make our campuses as safe as they can be for all of our students. Bystander intervention seemed like a logical springboard, as it has gained momentum across higher education institutions, due to both social and legislative pressure, such as the 2013 Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE) stating “that primary prevention and awareness campaigns for all incoming students and new employees include bystander intervention training (Coker et al., 2015, p. 1508). Listening to the perspective of survivors of sexual assault was crucial to this study, particularly their experiences with bystander intervention. I was certain that they could offer a unique standpoint on this issue and that their voices should be heard.

What was gained through speaking with the participants was a deeper understanding of bystander intervention with the benefit of insight from people who have been sexually assaulted. This viewpoint provided a wealth of information ranging from what they would have wanted bystanders to do, how they would have wanted bystanders to intervene, in conjunction with how being a survivor has impacted them. The participants’ willingness to share their stories allows us to put a name to a statistic, to humanize them in stark contrast to the way they were dehumanized during the assault, and sometimes after the assault – to remind us that these are people, not statistics, not text alerts, not newspaper articles. Rather, these are human beings who came to college for an education, to make friends, to make memories, not to be violated by friends and strangers.
The insights acquired about bystander intervention were unique, particularly given what I thought that I may hear. However, what became increasingly clear throughout the interviews was that bystander intervention is but one piece in the puzzle of prevention efforts. Bystander intervention has room for improvement, and I am in favor of an empathy-based model, grounded in the existing research on the connection between increased empathy and decreased sexual assault (Foubert & Perry, 2007) and further supported by my findings on lack of empathy amongst both perpetrators and bystanders from the perspective of the research participants. What is also needed is a more comprehensive approach to eliminate sexual assault on college campuses. The following findings are by no means exhaustive in suggestions for moving forward. However, this research revealed several significant directions prevention efforts can continue.

**Connection to the Research Questions**

Once again, this study was driven by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Whom do survivors of sexual assault identify as bystanders?

Research Question 2: How do survivors of sexual assault understand the concept of intervention?

Research Question 3: How do survivors of sexual assault describe how bystanders could have intervened?

Research Question 4: What do survivors of sexual assault want bystanders to know?

*Research Question 1:*

The participants in my study generally identified friends and other people in a party scenario as bystanders, as well as roommates if the assault took place in an apartment or dorm
room. When asked to think beyond friends, people at a party, and roommates, participants were able to identify others they had not initially thought of, like people in the hallway in the dorms. Elena’s perpetrator asked his roommate to leave when she visited him at his dorm but she was able to describe “basically anybody in the halls” as potential bystanders because “in the freshman dorms you can hear everything and anything.” Farrah also mentioned that people in the dorm hallway could have intervened, especially because there was a “ruckus” happening in her perpetrator’s dorm room as she was “being pushed into a closet” in addition to her saying “no.” Jessica recognized that people in the hallway outside of her perpetrator’s dorm were all potential bystanders.

Lydia was aware that her friend in the bed with her and her perpetrator, as well as his roommate, were bystanders. She was sure her friend was asleep, but uncertain if his roommate was also asleep. Madison’s perpetrator’s roommate was also in the room with them during the assault, and she wished he had been an active bystander, either stopping the assault or creating a distraction, allowing her time to “think [her] way out of it.” Katherine wasn’t sure if her perpetrator’s roommate was home at the time of the assault and wasn’t able to think of any other bystanders that were around, as he lived in an apartment.

Aurora identified anyone at the party who was near the bathroom where she was assaulted as a bystander, as well as people in the apartment and in the hallway when she was being chased by one of her perpetrators. Olivia initially thought of her teammates as bystanders, then, when asked to think beyond that scope, described patrons and employees as bystanders. Genevieve also believed her friend she was at the party with should have been the initial bystander, but that friend was too intoxicated to notice what was going on. Genevieve felt that everyone at the party was a bystander, as it was obvious she was uncomfortable when her
perpetrator would not leave her alone. Between the party Kira was at when she met her perpetrator, and her perpetrator’s dorm room where the assault continued, there were multiple people who Kira recognized as bystanders and she wished “that everyone would have intervened, literally at any point.”

For the participants where there was no bystander present, they were able to identify hypothetical bystanders. Kali believed her perpetrator’s roommate could have been a bystander if she had been home. Camille wished her friends had taken her home earlier in the night before she went to her friend’s, who became her perpetrator, fraternity house. No one was home at the fraternity house when she went over, but if his fraternity brothers had been home, they would have been bystanders. Claire also would have liked her friends to have taken her home before she was left alone in the apartment with her perpetrator. His roommate was home but was in his room. Claire does not know if he was aware she was being assaulted, though she questions this based on how battered her body was in the morning.

There is a bridge connecting RQ1 and RQ2 that became more and more apparent as the interviews progressed, which is the presence of bystanders after the assault, and how those interventions impacted the participants. Even if no bystanders were present before or during the assault, participants were able to identify bystanders after the assault, and sometimes even labeled them as bystanders. While the identification of bystanders prior to or during the assault was not greatly expounded upon in the study as I had anticipated, what I did find was the participants identified many people who often had a profound impact on them in the hours, days, weeks, and sometimes months after the assault took place.
Research Question 2:

Participants seemed to have a clear understanding of the concept of intervention, in that its purpose was to prevent a sexual assault from occurring or interrupting an assault while it was happening. Olivia noted an intervention would be appropriate if someone “saw that [the assault] happening.” Aurora believed that if something looks suspicious, like someone being pulled into a bathroom, an intervention would be crucial to interrupt the assault. Elena and Farrah echoed this sentiment, feeling that questionable sounds coming from a dorm room would warrant an intervention to prevent or impede an assault. Genevieve and Kira, who both met their perpetrators at a party, asserted that there were multiple levels of entry throughout the night to intervene.

Camille and Claire understood intervention as something that could occur before someone is in actual danger, as in removing someone from a situation because they are too intoxicated, to prevent any potential harm. In addition, participants consistently alluded to multiple layers of intervention, not only the sort that transpires at the time of the assault. For many participants, they were deeply impacted (positively or negatively) by how people reacted to the disclosure of the assault, and this reaction felt like another layer of intervention. As discussed in RQ1, bystander intervention was not designated only to people present before or during the assault; participants clearly understood intervention on a continuum: before there is danger of an assault, when a situation begins to look suspicious, during an assault, and intervention after the assault takes place.
Research Question 3:

From the perspective of participants, intervention could take on many forms from direct confrontation to distracting the perpetrator. A concrete example of direct confrontation as Olivia suggested would be to, “Come over and say ‘Stop.’” Another direct confrontation mentioned several times was informing the perpetrator that the victim was not interested and letting him know he was making her feel uncomfortable, and that was not okay. If a bystander didn’t feel comfortable confronting a perpetrator directly, a bystander could alert authorities, such as an RA, as Farrah proposed she would do if she heard something that sounded “fishy.” Knocking on the door to check on a situation was the most commonly suggested intervention. This appeared to participants to be less confrontational, while still interrupting a potential assault. Genevieve offered an intervention that didn’t require the bystander to even address the perpetrator, by putting “a body” between victim and perpetrator.

In Camille and Claire’s cases, they would have preferred the intervention to have taken place well before they were in danger; they wished their friends would have taken them home when they knew they were too intoxicated. Katherine and Farrah felt strongly that they would have been most comfortable with an intervention that distracted the perpetrator without alerting him that they thought there was a problem. Madison wished for a distraction too, such as the perpetrator’s roommate getting up to go to the bathroom, so the perpetrator would stop. Kira thought being removed from the situation with the perpetrator would have been the most helpful since she was too intoxicated to safely remove herself. Post-intervention played a significant role as well. There are of course many factors to tease out, but Katherine’s recovery may have been aided by the support of her friends, while Claire being blamed for her assault likely contributed to the development of PTSD symptoms.
Research Question 4:

All of the themes in some manner connected to RQ4: participants realized they have a first-hand perspective of sexual assault and because of this experience, had valuable insights to share that could benefit bystanders and thereby benefit would-be victims. Some participants understood that in certain situations intervention could be challenging. As Olivia noted, “I kind of understand this was hard for strangers to intervene.” Other participants wanted bystanders to have a glimpse into how they struggled with why someone didn’t intervene. Kira conveyed utter disbelief: “I just can’t, looking back, I just can’t understand what would possess anyone, you know the multitude of people that were there that night [to not intervene].”

As we look across the themes, the participants had key messages they wanted bystanders to hear. The concept of consent was paramount: enthusiastic, affirmative consent should be the sole indicator in proceeding with sexual activity. The presence (or even absence) of “no,” intoxication, and unconsciousness are all indications that sexual activity should cease. Using empathy, partners and bystanders are able to ascertain when an encounter is consensual and when it is not, and if it is not, a partner should stop; if the partner does not stop, it is then time for a bystander to intervene.

Throughout this study, participants have enlightened us that intervention is not necessarily a particular point in time, rather, it is on a continuum, and there are many opportunities for intervention, before, during, and after an assault. Participants have reminded us that whether or not a survivor reports an assault does not subsequently validate or invalidate the assault and gaining a new understanding about the decision to report or not, and what the reporting process can be like for survivors, can better prepare bystanders to support survivors after an assault. The participants sharing how they felt at the time of the assault and how the
assault impacted each one of them will hopefully lead to a greater sense of empathy for victims of sexual assault which will result in more bystanders taking action.

**Implications of the Findings for Practice**

There were four unexpected data points that arose through the interviews that I believe have implications for prevention efforts of sexual assault on college campuses. These findings add more layers to the phenomenon of interest and are worth exploring. The first, and most relevant to bystander intervention, was the observation that with almost one half of the cases, there were no bystanders present before or during the assault. With this information I wondered, is bystander intervention the most effective way of preventing campus sexual assault? I believe bystander intervention is important, but if bystanders are often not present before or during a sexual assault, other prevention methods are necessary to include in educational efforts.

The first step would be investigating other prevention efforts already being utilized, then look at the data for effectiveness. Affirmative consent, described as an “enthusiastic yes,” not just the absence of “no” is one model that has shown promise (Mettler, 2018). However, critics argue that there are many flaws with this approach, such as indoctrinated sociocultural norms that intercede its intended effect (Jozkowski, Marcantonio, & Hunt, 2017). Taking into account my data on consent and empathy (Theme 1), combined with the literature on empathy-based bystander intervention described in chapter two, I assert that empathy-based prevention efforts could effectively complement existing bystander intervention strategies for eradicating sexual assault on college campuses. Previous studies, including one conducted by O’Donohue et al. (2003) showed that “modifying rape myths, increasing victim empathy, and identifying negative outcomes that could occur as a result of engaging in sexually coercive behavior” (pp. 514-515)
decreased the participant’s “proclivity to engage in sexually coercive behavior” (p. 528).

The second observation I found significant, but unexpected, was that 12 out of the 13 participants were sexually assaulted at the perpetrator’s dorm or apartment. I am reluctant to warn women not to go to a man’s residence for fear that this will come across as victim-blaming if they do and are sexually assaulted (e.g. You knew this was a risk factor, so why did you put yourself in that situation?). In addition, I am certain that sexual assaults occur at victim’s residences, as well as neutral locations, such as the restaurant where Olivia was assaulted. This finding could aid potential victims in avoiding dangerous scenarios, where they are disadvantaged by possible isolation or absence of supportive bystanders, and lack of familiarity with their surroundings. As Madison astutely observed from her experience being sexually assaulted at her then boyfriend’s apartment: “this isn’t my safe space, this isn’t my home where I could just say, ‘Get out.’ It’s like, what if I woke up his roommate, will his roommate even do anything?” Educating students that this is a risk factor could potentially avert some sexual assaults from occurring, considering when in someone else’s residence, there is less certainty about bystanders being present, and if there are, if these bystanders would actually intervene on a potential victim’s behalf.

The third data point that struck me as unexpected, yet important was that less than one half (six out of thirteen) of the participants reported being significantly intoxicated at the time of the assault, thus contributing to the phenomenon of interest through debunking rape myths, specifically campus rape myths, that alcohol “causes” sexual assault. While alcohol education is important for a variety of reasons with this population, blaming drinking on the sexual assault epidemic obscures the actual reason for sexual assault: people who choose to sexually assault other people. To focus more effectively on sexual assault prevention, teasing out alcohol and
taking a direct approach to addressing the issue of sexual assault could be a better expenditure of time and resources. Factors such as exertion of power and control, lack of empathy, rape culture, among others, will serve to place sexual assault in its proper context and shift the blame from alcohol to perpetrators. Perhaps this shift would also empower would-be bystanders to not dismiss sexually questionable behavior as “a drunk hook-up,” looking more through the lens of consent, and taking action, as needed.

Finally, the intervention theme (theme 3) revealed that bystander intervention requires a more nuanced approach and there is not a “one size fits all” solution. This is particularly important in cases where a direct intervention could place a victim at more risk. As Farrah noted, “So, the fact that somebody was acknowledging it, I would have been like, very grateful…[b]ut at the same time I would’ve been like, ‘you got me in trouble.’” Allowing bystanders to hear the voices of survivors can help navigate appropriate intervention methods. Having bystanders develop an awareness regarding if someone is actually consenting, and if not, how to best intervene, could help dramatically decrease the incidences of sexual assault across college campuses.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The theme of post-intervention developed as the study unfolded, and I believe this warrants further exploration. Future studies could use my research as a foundation for delving further into post-assault bystander intervention, and perhaps create an empathy-based model that could combine pre/during assault and post-assault prevention education. Research that highlights survivors’ voices on what was or could have been helpful (and what had a negative impact) could provide support people (post-assault bystanders) a roadmap to promote healing for people
Another possible area of future research inspired by this study is to explore sexual assault through the lens of both bystanders and perpetrators. A qualitative study like this one could provide valuable insight into why bystanders do and do not intervene, and what would encourage them to intervene more. Similarly, a qualitative study on how bystander behavior might impact a perpetrator could be used in the development of future bystander intervention models. Creating an axis of the three perspectives could result in a comprehensive bystander intervention tool that will allow bystanders to intervene in the most effective way possible. Additionally, future research could look at bystander intervention from the male survivor perspective, as well as survivors from the LGBTQ community.

**Conclusion**

There is not simply one solution that will effectively address sexual assault on college campuses; rather, a myriad of approaches complementing each other should be considered. Movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp are validating, supportive, and gaining momentum in shifting us from rape culture to a society where women are looked upon as human beings, not commodities to be conquered, who don’t have a say in their sexual experiences, and are for the purpose of satisfying men’s desires. Several of the participants remarked that a sexual encounter should be mutually gratifying and should cease to continue if it is not. One person not thoroughly enjoying a sexual interlude does not always equate to sexual assault, but it should certainly be taken into consideration, and stopped if it is in fact unwanted.

This study began prior to the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, and is inadvertently, yet proudly now situated within this time of reckoning where more and more women are
speaking out about lifetimes of sexual misconduct directed at them from men in power to passersby on the street. As women are gaining ground through positions of power in society, they are no longer tolerating the once commonplace sexual inappropriateness that infringes on most women’s lives from puberty (and sometimes earlier) and across their lifespans. By volumes of women speaking out, this empowers more people to become active bystanders for themselves and others. As our culture shifts from a place of silence and enabling, we can move towards a society where we aren’t afraid to speak up when we and the people around us are preyed upon.

The most eye-opening outcome of the #MeToo movement was not that it applied to almost every woman; it was that men were shocked that it applied to almost all women. Being in a position to speak out is how eyes are opened. Being in a position to speak out is how empathy is gained. Being in a position to speak out is how bystanders become aware of the severity of a problem and are moved to action. Having read these women’s stories here, they have spoken and you have listened. Something so simple can have such a profound impact for generations to come. Let us continue to listen. And then let the bystanders we are all capable of being do our part to create change in every possible way.
Appendices

Appendix A: Penn State Institutional Review Board Approval Form

Appendix B: Screening Form

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Appendix E: Matrix of Research Questions Intersecting with Interview Questions
## APPENDIX A: PENN STATE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

**Date:** August 29, 2017  
**From:** Courtney Whetzel, IRB Analyst  
**To:** Christy Beck

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Submission:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Study:</td>
<td>Bystander Intervention Through the Survivor’s Lens: Campus Sexual Assault and the Role of Bystanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator:</td>
<td>Christy Beck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00008032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00008032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND, IDE, or HDE:</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documents Approved:**  
- Beck BI 2017 Screening Questions.docx (8-28-17), Category: Recruitment Materials  
- BeckC BI Interview Protocol 2017.docx (8-22-17), Category: Data Collection Instrument  
- BeckC Recruitment Flyer 2017.docx (8-22-17), Category: Recruitment Materials  
- HRP-SBB BeckC ORP Consent Form-Signed.pdf (8-22-17), Category: Consent Form  
- Title IX Resource Sheet University Park.pdf (8-28-17), Category: Other

**Review Level:** Expedited  
**IRB Board Meeting Date:**

On 8/29/2017, the IRB approved the above-referenced Initial Study. This approval is effective through 8/28/2018 inclusive. You must submit a continuing review form with all required explanations for this study at least 45 days before the study’s approval end date. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking ‘Create Modification / CR’.

If continuing review approval is not granted before 8/28/2018, approval of this study expires on that date. To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.
DATE: September 5, 2017
FROM: Courtney Whetzel, IRB Analyst
TO: Christy Beck

Type of Submission: Modification

Title of Study: Bystander Intervention Through the Survivor's Lens: Campus Sexual Assault and the Role of Bystanders

Principal Investigator: Christy Beck

Study ID: STUDY00008032

Submission ID: MOD00012150

Funding: Not Applicable

IND, IDE, or HDE: Not Applicable


Review Level: Expedited

IRB Board Meeting Date:

On 9/5/2017, the IRB approved the above-referenced Modification. This approval is effective through 8/28/2018 inclusive. You must submit a continuing review form with all required explanations for this study at least 45 days before the study’s approval end date. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking ‘Create Modification / CR’.

If continuing review approval is not granted before 8/28/2018, approval of this study expires on that date.

To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (http://irb.psu.edu). These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Documenting consent
- Requesting modification(s)
- Requesting continuing review
- Closing a study
- Reporting new information about a study
- Registering an applicable clinical trial
- Maintaining research records

This correspondence should be maintained with your records.
APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

Date: November 6, 2017
From: Courtney Whetzel, IRB Analyst
To: Christy Beck

Type of Submission: Modification/Update
Title of Study: Bystander Intervention Through the Survivor's Lens: Campus Sexual Assault and the Role of Bystanders
Principal Investigator: Christy Beck
Study ID: STUDY00008032
Submission ID: MOD00012859
Funding: Not Applicable
IND/IDE, or HDE: Not Applicable
Documents Approved: • BeckC Facebook Recruitment Post (10-30-17), Category: Recruitment Materials
Review Level: Expedited

On 11/6/2017, the IRB approved the above-referenced Modification/Update. This approval is effective through 8/28/2018 inclusive. You must submit a continuing review form with all required explanations for this study at least 45 days before the study’s approval end date. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking ‘Create Modification / CR’.

If continuing review approval is not granted before 8/28/2018, approval of this study expires on that date.
To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (http://irb.psu.edu). These requirements include, but are not limited to:
- Documenting consent
- Requesting modification(s)
- Requesting continuing review
- Closing a study
- Reporting new information about a study
- Registering an applicable clinical trial
APPENDIX B: SCREENING FORM

Beck BI 2017 Screening Questions

1. Are you currently a Penn State Student?
   YES  NO

2. Are you female?
   YES  NO

3. Are you between the ages of 18-22?
   YES  NO

4. Are you a residential student living in the dorms or off-campus?
   YES  NO

5. Have you been a victim of sexual assault while in college?
   YES  NO

6. Were you a Penn State student at the time of the assault?
   YES  NO

7. Did the assault take place on or around Penn State’s campus? (e.g. dorm, off-campus apartment, fraternity house)
   YES  NO

If the respondent answers yes to ALL questions, she is eligible for this study.
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Project: Bystander Intervention Through The Victim’s Lens: Campus Sexual Assault And The Role Of Bystanders

Principal Investigator: Christy Beck, M.Ed. LPC
Advisor: Dr. David Guthrie
The Pennsylvania State University
400 Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
cub24@psu.edu
(814) 441-5571

Advisor: Dr. David Guthrie
The Pennsylvania State University
405D Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
dsg18@psu.edu
(814) 863-3766

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to develop an understanding of people who may have been around prior to a sexual assault occurring, and what they could have done to stop the assault from happening.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to meet with me and have our interview audio recorded. You will be asked a series of questions leading up to the sexual assault.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort. Talking about the events leading up the sexual assault may be triggering.
4. **Benefits:** Talking about a traumatic event is often helpful in processing it, so that could be a potential benefit to you. The benefits to society include developing a better understanding of what the sexual assault victim/survivor experienced may lead to a greater sense of empathy amongst people who are near these situations and may be able to stop them before a sexual assault takes place.

5. **Duration/Time:** This study will consist of two sessions. Today is the first session, and should take approximately 90 minutes. The second session will take approximately 30 minutes and will occur within the next three months. It will be for the purposes of clarifying anything from the first session and/or asking additional questions.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. I will be using pseudonyms and will remove any identifying information. Only I will have access to your real name. I will be using a professional service to transcribe the interview, and they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Penn State’s Institutional Review Board may review records related to this research study. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. As a licensed therapist, I am a mandated reporter; therefore, if you disclose plans of suicide or homicide, or child or elder abuse, I cannot keep that information confidential.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Dr. David Guthrie at (814) 863-3766 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you.
8. **Payment for participation:** You will be compensated with a $20 gift card to Starbucks for participation in this study, which you will receive today.

9. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

__________________________________________________________________________  ______________
Participant Signature                                                                 Date

__________________________________________________________________________  ______________
Principal Investigator                                                                Date

Adapted from: www.clayton.edu/Portals/549/irb/consent-template-expedited-full-signed.doc
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Start Time:

Interview End Time:

Justification of interview questions are in italics following each question.

Before interview begins (script):

- Introduce self, tell interviewee information about my background.
  - Hello, my name is Christy Beck, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. To give you some background about me, I am a licensed therapist, practicing for over 17 years, specializing in domestic violence and sexual assault. I am also a PhD student, and my research interests include sexual assault on college campuses. Do you have any questions before we get started?

- Explain what the study is about and what will be done with the results.
  - The study I am working on is Bystander Intervention (BI) from the perspective of survivors of sexual assault. I am hoping to enhance current BI programs by possibly expanding the scope of who a bystander is, through your experience. As
of now, the information I receive will be part of my dissertation. However, I hope to one day use the results to better inform BI training in higher education.

- Explain that the interview is confidential, limits to confidentiality, and interviewee may chose to leave the study at any time.

  - This interview is confidential. However, because I am a licensed therapist, there are limits to our confidentiality, such as if you tell me you intend to kill yourself or someone else, and I think you would act on that, or if you report child abuse or elder abuse, I am a mandated reporter. Other than that, when I write my dissertation, I will be using alias names and will conceal any identifying information. Your participation is voluntary, and you can leave this study at any time. I am using audio equipment to record our interview to ensure I don’t miss anything we discuss, but only I will be listening to the recording and a professional transcriber who does not have access to your personal information and who has signed a confidentiality agreement.

- Explain that the interviewee does not have to answer any questions she does not feel comfortable with and can stop the interview at any point.

  - I will be asking questions that may be difficult for you, as we will be discussing a traumatic event from your past. You do not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, and we can stop the interview at any point.

- Obtain informed consent.

  - This form is called “informed consent”, and it basically states that you agree allow me to interview you. Could you please take a moment to read it, let me
know if you have any questions about it, and sign it at the bottom, along with today’s date? I can make you a copy of this if you wish.

**Interview Questions:**

1. Demographics: *(This is to obtain background information, as well as build rapport.)*
   a. How old are you?
   b. What year are you?
   c. How long have you been at the Penn State University Park campus? (started here? transfer student? commonwealth campus?)

2. Tell me about when the assault took place? (date, time) *(This question will provide background contextual information leading up to the assault)*

3. Tell me about where the assault took place? (University Park or somewhere else? On or off campus?) *(This question will also provide background contextual information leading up to the assault)*

4. Can you describe in detail all of the events leading up to the assault? *(This question is intended to get the survivor back into the frame of mind of when the assault happened. This also gives the survivor the opportunity to discuss the background without talking about the assault itself.)*

5. Can you describe who (if anyone) was around prior to the assault? *(This question is the heart of my research – I am looking for bystanders who were present prior to the assault and what they did and/or didn’t do)*
   a. (Follow-up) Did anyone try to intervene? If so, who? What actions did they take?
6. Tell me about who else was around prior to the assault? *(This is a probing question to possibly identify anyone who the survivor might not have thought of right away as a bystander, e.g. friend at the party, to others, such as bartender, others at the party the survivor did not know well, passersby on the street, etc.)*

7. What would you have expected the people who were around to do? *(As I seek to expand my definition of who a bystander is, learning which bystander behaviors are acceptable to survivors could be extremely valuable)*
   a. (Follow-up): Who would you most have expected to intervene? Did they? *(Are the expectations the same for friends as strangers?)*
   b. Did you want them to intervene? If not, why?
   c. In what ways would you have liked them to intervene?

8. Is there anything else related to people who were around prior to the assault and what they could have done that I didn’t ask that you wanted to share? *(This is an open-ended question to gather any insights I hadn’t thought to ask. Depending on what is shared, I may use information obtained in this section as questions in future interviews, and/or go back and ask them to previous interviewees. This also signifies to the interviewee that the interview is almost over.)*

**Post-interview (script):**

- Thank you statement.
  - Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I know this was not easy to talk about, and I appreciate your willingness to talk about your experience. After I transcribe the interview, I will send you a copy, if you’d like, for clarification
and/or elaboration. Here is my card with my contact information should you have any questions. Let’s set up a follow-up time to meet in case I need to clarify anything we discussed and/or have follow-up questions. The next interview will be much shorter, probably about a half hour. *(I am leaving sending them a copy of the transcript as optional, as not everyone will want to read through the transcripts and relieve this experience yet again, while others may find it helpful.)*

- **Checking in**
  - Before we leave today, I wanted to check in to see how you’re doing. Do you need a few more moments before leaving (e.g. if the interviewee is crying and/or looks upset). Are you interested in a therapist referral? *(I want to make sure the interviewee is okay before sending them out due to the sensitive nature of the topic. If they are not in therapy, but feel it would be helpful, I am happy to provide them with a referral. Since the interviews will likely take place in my office (it is at a convenient location downtown, close to campus and provides privacy) I will need to make sure it does not look as though I am soliciting for patients, so I will provide a list of names of therapists in the area who specialize in sexual assault. So as not to get myself into a dual relationship as researcher and therapist (which is against my governing body code of ethics) I will make clear that because I am seeing them in a researcher capacity I cannot also be their therapist.)*
APPENDIX E: MATRIX OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS INTERSECTING WITH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Protocol Questions</th>
<th>RQ 1</th>
<th>RQ 2</th>
<th>RQ3</th>
<th>RQ4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whom do victims of sexual assault identify as bystanders?</td>
<td>How do victims of sexual assault understand the concept of intervention?</td>
<td>How do victims describe how bystanders could have intervened?</td>
<td>What do survivors of sexual assault want bystanders to know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INTERVIEW #1

*Begin with Question 1 (not listed here) which addresses demographics and background (age, year in school)*

1. Tell me about when the assault took place? (date, time)  | X  |
2. Tell me about where the assault took place? (University Park or somewhere else? On or off campus?)  | X  |
3. Can you describe in detail all of the events leading up to the assault?  | X  | X  | X  |
4. Can you describe who (if anyone) was around prior to the assault?  | X  | X  |
   a. (Follow-up) Did anyone try to intervene? If so, who? What actions did they take?  | X  | X  |
5. Tell me about who else was around prior to the assault?  | X  | X  |
   a. (Follow-up): Who would you most have expected to intervene? Did they?  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
b. Did you want them to intervene? If not, why? | X | X | X | X |

c. In what ways would you have liked them to intervene? | X | X | X | X |

6. Is there anything else related to bystander intervention that I didn’t ask that you wanted to share? | X | X | X | X |
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Vita
Christy Beck

Education
Ph.D. Higher Education, The Pennsylvania State University, 2018
M.Ed. Counseling Psychology, Temple University, 2000
B.S. Early Childhood Education, The Pennsylvania State University, 1993

Professional Experience
Beck Psychotherapy, LLC Owner and Psychotherapist, 2014 – Present
The Pennsylvania State University Clinical Services Provider, 2010 – 2013
The Renfrew Center New Jersey Admissions Coordinator, 2010
Self-Employed Psychotherapist, 2005 – 2008
White Deer Run Mobile Assessor, 2005 – 2008
The Renfrew Center Philadelphia Admissions Coordinator/Therapist, 2006 – 2007
The Renewal Centers Community Liaison, 2004 – 2005
PHMC Clinical Evaluator, 2004
Kirkbride Center Utilization Management Supervisor, 2002 – 2003
LSH/BDVP Medical Advocate & Trainer, 2000 – 2002
Holcomb Behavioral Health D&A Assessor, 1999 – 2000
Holcomb Behavioral Health Therapeutic Staff Support, 1998 – 1999
Magic Years Assistant Director/Teacher, 1993 – 1995

Licenses & Certifications
Graduate Student Online Teaching Certificate, Penn State World Campus, 2017
Licensed Professional Counselor, Pennsylvania, 2005
National Certified Counselor (NCC), 2006

Conferences & Presentations
The Pennsylvania Mental Health Counselor Association (PAMHCA) & Penn State’s
Counselor Education Program, So You’ve Graduated, Now What?, Pennsylvania State
University, Panelist, 4/7/2018
15th Annual Women’s Studies Graduate Organization Conference, Crossing Borders,
Building Bridges: Connecting Personal Narratives, Art, Activism, and Feminist
Knowledge Projects, Pennsylvania State University Moderator, Seeing Women through
the Feminist Gaze: Implications of Feminist Art Panel Presenter, Dualism in Feminist
Art, 2/20/2017

Publications
“Developing a Title IX Curriculum for Penn State University – University Park:
Recommendations for the Future” Title IX Curriculum Task Force Member, Co-author, 6/2017