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Media Perceptions on Sexual Assault on College Campuses

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Media Perceptions on Sexual Assaults on College Campuses

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

For the period of 1995-2013, females ages 18 to 24 had the highest rate of rape and sexual assault victimizations compared to females in all other age groups (Lynn & Sinozich, 2014). There is an even wider problem when among student victims, 20 percent of rape and sexual assault victimizations were reported to police, compared to 32% reported among nonstudent victims ages 18 to 24 (Lynn & Sinozich, 2014). With staggering statistics on sexual assaults, it is clear that this has become a national issue, which has further developed onto college campuses nationwide. This study aims to understand the relationship between how the media frames sexual assault and what type of perceptions students have developed because of it. Framing theory will be used to identify if and how the media frames sexual assault and how students react or behave from what they have gathered from the media. This study also aims to look at the broader implications of framing regarding sexual assault, more specifically the framing of the victim, the framing of sexual assault in general, and the framing of preventative efforts and programs. Qualitative focus groups were conducted on the University of South Florida's campus to gain rich data to fully understand student's perceptions. It was found that four themes emerged from the focus group that included moderate awareness of the programs, lack of support from the university, confusion about available resources, and the media has influenced students view on sexual assault. The conclusion and future recommendations all steam from the results and what was learned about campus culture.

Chapter One: Introduction

College campuses across the nation are participating in preventative programs and communication campaigns in order to prevent sexual assaults from occurring on campuses. According to a survey conducted by the Association of American Universities (AAU), 23 percent of female college students said they experienced some sort of unwanted sexual contact, ranging from kissing to rape, carried out by force or threat of force, or while they were incapacitated because of alcohol and drugs (Wallace, 2015). Sexual assaults have become an epidemic on college campuses in the past decade and more attention has been brought to this issue and the proper ways to handle these types of cases. Federal and local government have taken action numerous times to implement new laws and legislation, but the statistics show that rates are not decreasing. It is has become evident that attention to sexual assaults and violence on college campuses is not only important to talk about but also necessary to take action on for safety purposes.

In January 2014, President Obama announced the creation of a new White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. The task force joined forces with the already-functioning Council on Women and Girls (Ricketts, 2015). With the White House leading the movement, college campuses have begun making conscious efforts to prevent sexual assaults from occurring on their own campuses. Universities have also taken this opportunity to attempt to educate students on the resources available to them on campus; typically, services like

counseling centers and victim advocacy and violence prevention offices. Although these programs have been implemented, research on the effectiveness of these programs is limited.

Along with the preventative programs and initiatives, the media has a strong voice in the conversations regarding sexual assault.

The field of mass communications has had little research pertaining to college students' perceptions of sexual assault programming and awareness and how the media influences those views. Using framing theory as the framework, this study aims to gain in-depth knowledge about college student's perceptions to sexual assaults on college campus. By understanding student's perspectives and how aware and knowledgeable they are, there will be a better understanding on the effectiveness of these programs and initiatives. Any holes in the programs or communication efforts can also be identified, which will be helpful in what to recommend for the future.

The media has proven to be a powerful tool in framing stories of any kind. In regards to sexual assault cases and news, the media has the power to frame it in ways that have varying consequences. In the recent years, there have been several occurrences of sexual assault in the media and the news stories have started a national conversation from it. As of now, there are 44 National Football League (NFL) professional athletes that have been accused of sexual or physical assault (Broadly, 2015). Celebrities such as Bill Cosby have been accused of sexual assault, whereas other celebrities such as Kesha have been victims of sexual assault. The spotlight has even been on college campuses, predominantly Florida State University and Jameis Winston.

A freshman at Florida State University (FSU) reported that star football quarterback, Jameis Winston, of raping her at a fraternity house on a Saturday night. FSU took only 12 days to investigate the rape report, hold a hearing, and clear Jameis Winston and other football players

involved (Bogdanich, 2014). Florida State received a great deal of criticism for the lack of punishment given to Jameis Winston as both a student and as an athlete and received criticism for possibly mishandling the report. This case in particular received a great deal of media attention because in 2013, Jameis Winston was awarded the Heisman Trophy, won the national championship with Florida State in 2014, and earned the first-round draft pick in the 2015 National Football League draft to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (Tracy, 2016). Because of the publicity it generated, the Winston case became a centerpiece for a national debate over two intertwined issues: how universities handle allegations of sexual assault, and whether colleges and the police afford special treatment to athletes accused of misconduct (Tracy, 2016). Jameis Winston's accuser filed a lawsuit against Florida State claiming the university violated the federal Title IX law. She was later awarded a $950,000 settlement from Florida State (Tracy, 2016).

The dialogues following these well-known celebrities and athletes being accused of sexual assault furthermore brought attention to some of the consequences of reporting sexual assault and the process the victim's face. In 2015, CNN premiered *The Hunting Ground*, a documentary focused on colleges across the nation and various stories of sexual assault (The Hunting Ground, 2015). The stories revealed an endemic system of institutional cover-ups, rationalizations, victim blaming, and denial that creates perfect storm conditions for predators to prey with impunity (The Hunting Ground, 2015). This study aims to learn what universities can do to improve preventative programming and communication about these incidents and to create a safe environment for all its students. Preventative programming has been implemented across the nation, but has it been effective? This study wishes to learn the answers to these questions in order to help prevent sexual assaults from occurring on any college campus.

Chapter Two: Background & Literature Review

Background of Sexual Assaults on College Campuses

The Department of Justice defines sexual assault as "any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the 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". Throughout this study, this will be the main definition used when referring to for sexual assault.

To begin with, sexual assault occurrences on campuses ultimately result in negative consequences all around. Victims of sexual assault can experience negative consequences of their experience of the assault. Students come to college to get an education in a safe atmosphere, not to come and get assaulted and no longer feel safe to stay. Sexual assaults effect victims in ways that can be emotionally, psychological, and/or physical. Research shows that victims of sexual assault can experience depression, flashbacks, rape trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), and even suicide (RAINN, 2015.). The importance for universities and the media to pay attention to this issue closely is to help prevent another person from going through that trauma. Universities have an opportunity to prevent what we know to be true, that female college students are at the highest risk of being sexually assaulted. The consequences and effects of this tragedy are too great to not take action to prevent that type of pain to anyone else.

With an increasing number of sexual assault attention on college campuses nationwide, preventative actions desperately needed to be taken from a federal level in order to be successful

across campuses. However, there are multiple reasons on why these preventative programs are applied. Colleges and universities implement sexual assault prevention programming in part because of national mandates require them to do so to receive federal funds (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1994). Although these programs are required, statistics indicate that they are also necessary in order to keep students and campuses safe. Public universities rely on federal funds tremendously in order to fully function as a successful university. For the 2014-2015 academic school year the University of South Florida reported a total operating budget of $1,610,694,604, which included an education and budget section, an auxiliary expense section, and a contracts and grants section (USF System, 2015). Without a doubt there is a long list of where that money should be allocated, however, campus safety can be considered a priority.

A Congressional survey of a random sampling of colleges with students who receive federally funded financial aid revealed that approximately six in 10 schools reported offering safety-related educational programs; of these programs, only about 60 percent address sexual assault (Paul & Gray, 2011). Campus safety can be seen as a broad task to tackle for universities and in earlier years, sexual assault has not been apart of those conversations. In order to have full investment from students and the university to decline sexual assaults on campuses, administration and faculty must see sexual assault prevention as a necessity, whether it is federally required or not.

Sexual assault has been a consistent story in the news and media outlets in recent years for various reasons mentioned in this study. Now more than ever there is pressure on university administration and staff to implement quality and effective initiatives in order to see a true deterioration in sexual assaults on campus. However, research in the past decade has indicated

that the campus sexual assault resources colleges offered were inconsistent in terms of their content and availability to students (Hayes-Smith & Hayes-Smith, 2009). With that being said, this study challenges that statement to find what exactly is inconsistent. If there is a minimal decline in sexual assault occurrences, universities must not be doing an effective job communicating to their students. Inconsistencies are expected as long as there is proper follow up to demolish those inconsistencies and bridge the gap. As of now, there isn't enough information of the effectiveness of these efforts and what students think about them or where the inconsistencies lie.

Preventative Programming on Campus

There are several different types of preventative programs that have been implemented across the nation ranging the potential interventions, from minimally intensive efforts (e.g., brochures) to more involved programs (e.g., college course) (Brecklin and Forde, 2001). Traditional sexual assault prevention programs often consist of special workshops or seminars that specifically target issues related to sexual assault prevention (Jozkowski, 2015). Such issues often include providing information about sexual assault prevalence among college students, debunking rape myths, addressing conventional gendered assigned sex roles, identifying risk-reduction behaviors, and training in how to be empathetic toward rape survivors (Breitenbecher, 2000; Schewe, 2006). These are some examples of the more practical applications that have been brought onto college campuses within the past decade. Jozkowski (2015) introduced a new study in response to a 1998 recommendation that created a course to examine the social and behavioral determinants of sexual assault exclusively in the college environment for students to take as an elective course (Jozkowski, 2015). This course was designed to deconstruct the larger contextual

factors that contribute to the occurrence and institutional acceptant of sexual violence in the college culture (Jozkowski, 2015).

The researchers in this study conducted one-on-one interviews with students enrolled in this course or participated in an hour-long workshop. As a result of the interviews, two themes emerged. The first was the endorsement of the mantra, "No Means No", in terms of defining sexual assault, regardless of other circumstances (Jozkowski, 2015). All participants seemed to agree that regardless of circumstances or previous sexual activity, once someone says "no" to sexual activity, proceeding to sexual intercourse would be considered sexual assault or rape. This theme shows that there was a basic understanding of what could and would be considered a sexual assault. The second theme to emerge was the endorsement of victim blaming. The workshop group, however, had a different take on victim blaming in regards to the situation. The group agreed that while no means no, people might put themselves in certain situations where they are responsible for getting themselves in a position where they can be "taken advantage of" (Jozkowski, 2015). This theme very easily points out that there is some blurred lines with sexual assault incidents and how this can be a complicated issue for all involved. Campus administrators and college health professionals often acknowledge the need for prevention programming; however, researchers and college health professionals continue to question whether such programming is effective (Jozkowski, 2015). This research is extremely prevalent because it shows the most recent update on how sexual assault is being perceived.

National initiatives should be evaluated for generalized progress, however, evaluations on a smaller case, such as college by college, should also be implemented. Not one college is the same as the next or has the same type of students, therefore more detailed evaluations will be

beneficial. It is also important to note that individual states have not implemented preventative measures, only programs from the White House.

Student Stereotypes Associated with Sexual Assault

As with any controversial issue, certain stereotypes have been developed for sexual assault victims and perpetrator. Most research efforts regarding sexual assault have been heavily focused on the victims rather than the perpetrator (Harway & Steel, 2015). However, it is important to note that certain stereotypes have already been developing for both the victim and perpetrator. In terms of sexual assaults, sorority and fraternity affiliation have singly contributed to the stereotypes associated with the victim and perpetrator. Sorority affiliation may increase the risk of sexual assault as a result of routine activities and lifestyle choices characteristic of greek membership, including frequent and isolated contact with members of the opposite sex who are often intoxicated and hold expectations for sexual intimacy (Franklin, 2015). Being a greek life member alone, unfortunately, already has a negative stigma with sexual assaults because of the negative stereotypes surrounding sororities and fraternities. It is important to stay cautious of these stereotypes as well and how they may play a factor in sexual assaults in general.

There have been stories in the news regarding fraternity member's involvement in rape cases. Doing a quick Google search of "fraternities and sexual assault", you will find article after article of fraternity members charged with sexual assault on their college campus. Fraternities themselves have already gained certain reputations of their members conducting sexual assault to females on campus. Sexual assault occurs on every campus, including Ivy League schools and smaller, private campuses so much that it was receiving attention from fraternity and sorority national headquarters. In the fall of 2015, despite hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on

lobbying the last few months, the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) withdrew support from the Safe Campus Act (Bishop, 2015). If passed, the Safe Campus Act would prevent colleges and universities from investigating such claims unless the victim also reports the incident to law enforcement (Bishop, 2015). The Safe Campus Act was introduced by three Republican representatives in the House, in hopes to better align the campus-adjudication process with the standards applied in the criminal-justice system (Bishop, 2015). After controversy spread about the limitations it would give universities, individual sororities started speaking out against the legislation, which in return, lead to the conferences to back its support as well. This legislation also brought a lot of attention to the fact that students had multiple outlets to report the assault; to university resources and/or to local law enforcement. Some argued that having the options to only report it to the university and not to local law enforcement as well was a good thing because students may feel more comfortable in reporting it.

Because rape mostly affects women, it is not seen as a crime that concerns the social body as a whole (unlike violent crimes that predominantly victimize men), which could possibly be true for college campuses as well (Mardorossian, 2014). Unfortunately for men, sexual assault conversations typically put a negative connotation around the men, because of that exact reason. In 1997, Schwartz and DeKeseredy based a study off of the male peer support model for a range of social and individual factors empirically established to influence sexual assault. The two were highly criticized when they inferred, "the literature in psychology may disagree on many things, but one point of agreement is that men who have been identified as sexual aggressors on college campuses have been generally those men who are immature and irresponsible and have less respect than others for society's rules (Schwarts & DeKeseredy, 1997). While this statement may

be true or not, it is a primary indicator on the stereotype of male accusers, which ultimately leads to a stereotypical definition of male college students. Regardless of the manner in which the all-male group is defined (in a peer group), according to Shwartz and DeKeseredy, members draw on the social networks fundamental to the peer group and in doing so may "normalize" woman abuse (Franklin et al., 2012). One of the first all male peer groups that have been scrutinized is college fraternities, however, fraternities are not the sole peer group that indulges in this type of behavior. In recent studies it has even been shown that males can play an effective role in changing this stereotype and take a stand against sexual assault and violence on campuses. Early studies on peer groups and university sexual assault proposed that formal social institutions, such as fraternities and athletic teams, conditioned adverse ideologies, prompting members to deem it appropriate to perpetrate sexual assault (DeKeseredy, 1990).

As previously mentioned, the NFL has several players under investigation for sexual assault accusations. It is without surprise that athletes on the college level are also being scrutinized for sexual assault accusations as well. Players like Jameis Winston have received media attention only adding to him to getting more famous over time. Combine that with what we know about male peer groups, male athletes could possibly be stereotyped as sexual assault perpetrators. The argument surrounding the student athlete- sexual assault accusation conversation is that it is a fine line for the university to take regarding their athletes. Universities don't want to overlook any accusations or not properly investigate them. However, at the same time, they want to be fair to their athletes and not assume that they're guilty right away.

College athletes aren't the only ones in the spotlight, however. In 2011, former Pennsylvania State University football assistant coach Jerry Sandusky was indicted for forty

counts of sex crimes against young boys (Mardorossian, 2014). College athletics in general have been in the media for sexual assault accusations and improper handling of sexual assault claims.

History of USF's Efforts to Prevent Sexual Assault

Being fearful of being sexually assaulted on a college campus can be an extremely real feeling for some students. Lund and Thomas (2015) saw this dilemma and conducted a study that investigated the availability, location, and content of sexual assault information presented on college and university websites. A random sample of 102 accredited, non-profit, bachelors-granting U.S. colleges and universities was selected for webcoding. Websites were coded for the availability and location of sexual assault information, including what resources and information were provided and whether topics such as date rape, consent, and victim blaming were addressed (Lund & Thomas, 2015). This study resulted in 88.2 percent of the 102 schools in the sample made some information related to sexual assault available within their .edu domain (Lund & Thomas, 2015). This information was located in multiple locations within the domain with 66.7 percent of schools having sexual assault information available in two or more location on their website. The most common locations were campus safety or security (Lund & Thomas, 2015).

For this study, a collection of information from the University of South Florida's website and social media accounts was made to develop a similar analysis, although, not as concentrated.

In early 2015, the University of South Florida (USF) was added to a list of 95 universities that are being federally investigated for possibly mishandling a sexual assault case (Johnston, 2015). This makes USF the second Florida school to face scrutiny since the White House created a task force on campus rape in January 2014 (Johnston, 2015). The University of South Florida prides itself on being one of the most diverse college campuses in the nation; USF certainly can't afford to be under scrutiny for sexual assault. In the 2015 incident, the accuser sent a complaint

against USF to the U.S. Department of Education alleging discrimination and retaliation for

reporting the rape. The complaint outlined the events the occurred between and investigation,

and included more than 750 pages of documents (Johnston, 2015). Incidents like this one, are

becoming more common on campuses.

Here is a brief overview of the efforts made on the University of South Florida's campus

from 2013-present:

- It's On Us Campaign

- Walk a Mile in Her Shoes Event

- USF Counseling Center Services

- Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention

- University Police

- Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities

- Title IX: Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity

For this study, messages about sexual assault and sexual assault prevention were

collected the University of South Florida's website and Facebook account. The very first item to

show up when searching "sexual assault prevention" in the USF website search bar, was a PDF

document titled "Guide for Victims of Sexual Assault and Harassment: Domestic, Relationship

& Dating Violence, Stalking" from the office of Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention. This

document contains information specifically for USF students and employees who are victims of

sexual violence (i.e., sexual assault, harassment, etc.). The document offers information and

includes resources available for several phases relevant to victims such as reactions to

victimization, victim disclosure, official reporting options for victims, confidential campus

resources and non-confidential campus resources. This document provides a cohesive and

detailed message from the University of South Florida that aims to be supportive of victims of sexual violence. It is also important for students to understand that there are confidential and non-confidential options for them.

The next item to appear is a document from the University of South Florida Police Department- the 2015-2016 Annual Security Report and Fire Safety Guide. In the document, it is stated that "the USF System policy prohibits sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking in all academic, educational, extra-curricular, athletic and other programs of the university, whether those programs take place in university facilities, at a class or training program sponsored by the university at another location, or elsewhere (2015-2016 Annual Security Report & Fire Safety Guide, 2015). Definitions of these topics are provided, along with tips on how to prevent sexual violence and how to intervene as a bystander. This document is important in that it comes from the universities police department, showing that higher authority is also taking preventative measures on sexual assault. The police department also plays a role in educating the community on information about sexual assault, information for victims and bystanders, and resources across campus and the Tampa Bay community that can help with those affected by sexual assault. However, it is unknown on how the Police Department delivers this information to students or if students will have to look for it themselves. With the USF Police Department and the office of Victims Advocacy and Violence Prevention, there is substantial general information related to the issues. Next, there were a couple of tangible events and programs that were available for students to participate in.

"It's On Us USF" was the next item to appear in the website search and also appeared on some of USF's social media accounts as well. In 2014, the University of South Florida joined the national campaign; It's On Us, which is a campaign rooted from the White House. It's on Us'

purpose is to encourage students to take "the pledge" against sexual assault and violence on college campuses. According to the official It's On Us website, the overall goal of the campaign is to recognize that non-consensual sex is sexual assault, to identify situations in which sexual assault may occur, to intervene in situations where consent has not or cannot be given, and to create an environment in which sexual assault is unacceptable and survivors are supported (It's On Us, 2015). All of these factors are significant on a national level, but to be successful, it needs to transcend on all college campuses regardless of external factors that could hinder the program or the perception of the program.

On USF's campus, the university communications and marketing office released a video that featured student leaders who encouraged their fellow Bulls to take the pledge and stand up against sexual violence. This campaign is a collaborative effort between Student Government, University Communications and Marketing and Student Affairs to encourage students and staff to be vigilant against sexual violence. In 2015, Student Government introduced a new aspect of the campaign- blue tape. Students could place blue tape on their mouth as a way to "break the silence" about sexual assault on college campuses. Stations were put up around campus for students to participate in the blue tape challenge during It's On Us week- a week in November dedicated to getting the word out about sexual violence. The university also introduced the hash tag #ItsOnUSF. Images from this campaign can be found in the appendix section. This allowed students to participate in conversations about the topic and hopefully spread awareness that sexual violence is not accepted on campus. Images from the It's On Us week can be found in the appendix section.

The University of South Florida also participated in Domestic Violence Awareness Month in the month of October. This was a smaller initiative than It's On Us, however, it still

provided great context on how to prevent domestic violence. To go along with this campaign, the office of Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention provided some tips such as warning signs of an abuser and how bystanders can intervene. On October 22, 2015, the university encouraged members of the USF community to wear purple to raise awareness about domestic violence. An image of this campaign is located in the appendix section.

Another notable message from USF was "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes". Hosted by the student organization N.I.T.E. (Network, Improve, Transform, Empower), hundreds of USF students gathered to indeed, walk a mile in high heels. Male students put on high heels to represent "walking a mile in her shoes". This program is focused on the male role of sexual assault and is inspired by the idea that you cannot truly understand the experiences of others until you have walked a mile in their shoes (USF News, 2015). This is a great visual to go against the male stereotypes mentioned earlier. In addition to the march, multiple inspirational speakers participated and presented to show their support. The keynote speaker was Zuleika "Zuly" Gonzalaz, an accomplished artist, advocate and survivor of domestic abuse (USF News, 2015). Joining her was Melissa Dohme, a domestic violence advocate who was proposed to at a Tampa Bay Rays game, who introduced Tampa Bay Rays pitcher, Jake McGee who led the group in the march (USF News, 2015). Participants from the campus and community walked in the march to stop rape, sexual assaults and gender violence (USF News, 2015). This is one event that USF involved the USF community and truly makes this issue more than a college campus issue, but a human rights issue.

These campaigns were the most advertised on the USF website and social media accounts. It is important to note that data was only collected from these two mediums and other programs could be in place, but not as well promoted from the university.

With these programs and initiatives at USF, some themes were developed in the messages and implementations. First, it is no doubt that the University of South Florida values sexual assault and violence prevention. Several initiatives have been developed on the university as well as adapted from other organizations and the government. It is also apparent that USF sees victims of sexual assault and violence as a priority, but not necessarily anyone else who may be involved. The university's guide shows the commitment to sexual assault victims and the police department shows awareness and a processes in place for the victims. Also shown by the police department is the seriousness of these incidents. By providing definitions and information on sexual assault, the police department is making a conscious effort in providing adequate knowledge to the USF community and not wanting students to "not know" what defines sexual assault and victims.

Another positive effort from USF was the It's On Us campaign being a collaborative effort by three departments on campus. Although all three departments are student affairs related, it shows that collaborating on this project is important in order to be successful and reach as many students as possible. Specifically with It's On Us and Walk a Mile in her Shoes, preventative measures are taken but also allow student participation to gain personal insight on the problem at large.

After completing the analysis of the messages and programs, it is evident that the University of South Florida wants to prevent sexual assault and sexual violence from occurring on campus. Though, in order to ensure that these campaigns and programs are working, there needs to be some measurement taken to see if they are effective on campus. The university can advocate about this issue, but ultimately in order to be successful and change the stigma, the university needs the student body to be invested in the cause. This study sets up that research in

being able to analyze the effectiveness, specifically from a mass communications and public relations standpoint.

One question after analyzing this is where is the support from the rest of the campus? As mentioned, most of these programs are hosted from student affairs offices, but there is really very little or no input from the academic side. One way the university can benefit from these programs is finding a way to implement them in the academic setting. This would also benefit from having faculty and staff support and can then be classified as a university-wide campaign. As with any college campus, students are there to learn first and foremost. Implementing some of these campaigns in the classroom will allow for a more effective campaign and hopefully a decrease in sexual assault incidents on campus. Educating people about the issue is most likely the most effective route to go and should be a main priority across campuses. With statistics clearly showing that several female students will be affected every semester, it is not a matter of "if" but more of a matter of "when" it will happen. Instead of waiting for it to happen, students need to be educated on what to do if it does happen, but also what to do to prevent incidents like this to ever happen. Most importantly, the university needs a strategic plan on how to educate students on the issue and the resources available.

One message strategy that could be effective and beneficial would be educating students when they are new to campus or new to college. No messages were found that were geared to first-year or transfer students and those messages can be extremely valuable in educating students when they first get to campus. Orientation would be a great place to start in educating students and introducing them to some of the programs that are already in place that they can look forward to.

Overall, the University of South Florida has several preventative measures currently on campus to help prevent sexual assault and sexual violence on campus. It is clear that the university sees this issue as a priority and will most likely continue the effort to prevent incidents like sexual assault and violence on their campus.

Framing Theory

In order to appropriately understand the epidemic of college sexual assaults and the media is to have a clear understanding of media practices, such as framing. The framing theory has been chosen for this study for being one of the most popular theories in mass communication and the media to understand the influence of both. This theory will ideally give a deeper understanding on how the media frames news and how framing can bring negative or positive consequences. For this study, there are several variables that can be framed in the media: (a) framing the victim, (b) framing sexual assault on campus, and (c) framing sexual assault information. All three variables will be closely looked at for this particular study.

Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing is a powerful tool for the media to use with any issue or story. Journalists are able to present information to their audience in either a positive or negative connotation. Depending on the story, this can ultimately persuade someone to view that story in a specific way that they may not have if it was presented in a different way. Framing is often associated with the agenda setting theory, which can be described as the media telling you what to think about, not necessarily what or how to think. Framing, instead, is more focused on how the information is being presented from the media or journalist. For sexual assaults, framing can greatly hinder or benefit the

conversations surrounding it. With such a sensitive issue, a closer look in how this issue is being framed to college students is essential.

Many researchers in the mass communication field have a difficult time defining framing because it is so case-sensitive. One definition of a frame in communication is that it "organizes everyday reality" (Tuchman, 1978) by providing "meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) and promoting "particular definitions and interpretations of political issues" (Shah et al., 2002). Given this definition of framing, it is evident that framing has a place in several disciplines. In particular, this definition mentions providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events. When applying that characterization to sexual assault, it is clear how great the implications are to the consequences of framing sexual assault. According to this explanation, the media will provide meaning for sexual assault stories, which is a very powerful tool to have in developing the frame of the story. Lastly, although the physical act of sexual assault isn't a political issue, how universities manage these crimes can be considered a political issue. Especially with 2016 being an election year, it is useful to note that many politicians will address the sexual assault epidemic we are seeing on college campuses.

Frames in the communications context matter- that is, they affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audience (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The way someone perceives sexual assault can greatly affect, and possibly determine, the way they act and the decisions they make. Having someone perceive sexual assault as an acceptable action ultimately could change the culture surrounding sexual assault. The most vital aspect of sexual assault is that it is just that, it's assault. How the media frames the assault can be further down broken down to how the victim is framed, how sexual assault in general is framed, and how sexual assault information and programs framed to students is.

The majority of literature on sexual assault focuses primarily on the victim. Victimization alone has been studied in various disciplines and has had a prone affect in various different ways. In her book, *Framing the Rape Victim,* Mardorossian uses an analogy for understanding the significance of being labeled a victim. After the 2001 terrorist attacks, Karen Hughes, one of George W. Bush's longest survivors wrote in her memoir that originally, President Bush's first speech to the American people after the attacks read 'America today was the victim of…' Quickly, Hughes stepped in and made the correction that America was attacked, but America was not going to be victimized. The speech was later changed to 'America today was under attack.' (Mardorossian, 2014). Changing that one word made a significant impact on America's response to the tragedy and how ultimately, Americans viewed themselves. This is a great example of how these type of words can have a great impact on people nationally.

The feminist movement has also played a large factor in the victimization of women and changing that stigma. In the late 1960's and 1970's, the second wave of the women's movement began and included the emergence of a pro-victim approach to rape in public policy. In order to do this however, some feminist proclaimed women's status as victims of patriarchal oppression in order to bring about social change (Mardorossian, 2014). The fight to change the stigma surrounding female victims and the stereotypes has been a work in progress the last couple of decades, and there is still much work to be done.

As stated earlier, studies have shown that college students also endorse victim blaming, meaning, students believe that sometimes the victim of sexual assault are somewhat at fault for the assault happening. For this study, students didn't endorse victim blaming but rather refuted it. This implies that student culture surrounding sexual assault might be changing regarding how students view the victim and the perpetrator.

There have been several conversations surrounding how universities take a stance against sexual assault and how to do it in the least controversial way for all students and faculty. As stated before, sexual assault cases truly vary case to case and there are processes implemented to address those specific cases. Though, how the university communicates to its students that sexual assault is not acceptable can also be controversial in how it is done. Nationwide, there has been discussion on if universities are taking the correct approach in their communication efforts to prevent sexual assault and if the messaging is informative enough for students to take the correct call to action. One argument that has come up numerous times is "society teaches 'don't get raped' instead of 'don't rape'" (Mardorossian, 2014). This misconception on how sexual assault conversations are handled can very much affect a person's behavior about sexual assault and change their attitude about it. Understanding statistics that show that sexual assaults unfortunately will happen should be the root of the communication plan. In many cases, sexual assault has been framed as only "don't do it" and nothing more. This study challenges that thinking and how universities could be communicating to their students.

Lastly, framing the resources and preventative programs also could play a factor in how students perceive sexual assault. If the program is a hit and draws a lot of students, it can be a positive frame for students. If the opposite happens, students may start getting disconnected from the message and don't take it seriously. This frame is crucial for universities since it is in fact, the only area they have complete control over. Framing this type of information as "required" or "mandatory" could also cause negative reactions from students since they may not take it seriously since it a requirement.

Chapter Three: Method—Rationale, Research Questions and Sampling

The purpose of this study is to better understand student perceptions and opinions of sexual assaults on college campuses along with the communication frames that are associated with it. This research will assist to better understand what are effective messaging strategies for sexual assaults awareness campaigns on college campuses and a deeper understanding of student's knowledge of preventative resources and programs available to them. Communication frames for the victim, sexual assault, and preventative efforts will all be included in the research. Three research questions have been developed for this study:

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions undergraduate students have with sexual assault awareness
        campaigns on the University of South Florida's campus? (2014-2016)

RQ2: Are there, if any, differences in perceptions about sexual assault awareness campaigns
        according to gender?

Both research questions addresses the overall purpose of this study; the awareness students have of the preventive measures of sexual assault on campus. However, that question develops several different elements to it that need to be addressed as well. One in particular, is do male students view these efforts differently than female students and vice versa? Working on how to target various message strategies to different genders will be beneficial since this is such a gender-sensitive issue and can truthfully affect anyone. Focus groups were chosen to be used in this study for multiple reasons, which will later be explained. Initiating this discussion is important for the future of less sexual assault and violence on college campuses everywhere.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were the qualitative method chosen for this study for several reasons. First, the researcher wanted a qualitative study since most sexual assault research that has been conducted in the past is quantitative-based with an abundance of statistics. Majority of the conversations surrounding sexual assault are the staggering statistics that concern people of all ages. While quantitative research is valuable in several ways for sexual assault research, it doesn't show the whole story behind the numbers. Focus groups in particular were chosen because of the aspect of a group conversation. The focus groups lasted from 35-55 minutes in length.

Morgan defines focus groups as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher (1996). Gaining several perspectives on a topic like sexual assault in a healthy discussion could possibly benefit universities tremendously. For this study, the researcher chose to separate the female and male participants so all students felt free to express themselves without feeling judged from the opposite sex. A male also moderated the male focus groups in order to make the conversation as comfortable as possible. This was also done in order to properly address RQ2.

Recruiting and Participants

Students were recruited using snowball sampling recruiting methods on USF's campus by contacting student organizations, promoting the focus group on various social media sites, and hanging posters in popular locations on campus such as the Marshall Student Center, the USF Library, Cooper Hall, and various resident halls. The researcher also used snowball-sampling methods by recruiting to student organizations that have an interest in social justice. No compensation was provided for participating. A total of 24 undergraduate students participated in

the focus groups, 12 females and 12 males. All participants are currently enrolled at the University of South Florida as undergraduate students. The first 3 focus groups consisted of 4 females in each group, ranging from freshman to senior status. The last 3 focus groups consisted of 4 males in each group, ranging from sophomore to senior status.

Protection of Human Participants and Confidentiality of Data

An informed consent form was provided to all participants before the focus group began.

Type of Data Collected and Questions Asked

The data collected in this focus group will consist of comments, observations and opinions shared by the participants and is qualitative in nature. As the focus groups were completed, the researcher transcribed all 6 audio recordings and later used thematic analysis to analyze the data.

The definition of sexual assault read at each focus group: The Department of Justice defines sexual assault as "any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the 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"

A set of open-ended questions were constructed to guide the focus group:

1. What information, campaigns, or materials have you gathered from USF regarding sexual assault awareness on campuses?

2. Do you think students feel safe in reporting violent crimes on USF's campus?
    a. Why or why not?
    b. Would you say students are fearful in reporting crimes?

3. Are you aware of any campus resources or programs specifically for sexual assaults on campus?

4. Do you feel comfortable utilizing these resources for yourself or recommending them to others?
    a. How likely would you be to utilize these resources in the event that something occurred?
    b. Do these resources apply to bystanders or people other than the victim?

5. What would you suggest the university to do to improve prevention measures for sexual assault?

6. What types of message strategies should the university use to promote sexual assault awareness on campus?
    a. Examples may include video messages, emails, flyers

7. Do you believe stereotypes play a factor in your perceptions with sexual assault?
    a. Why or why not?
    b. Do fraternity and sorority stereotypes specifically influence your opinion?

8. Is there anything I haven't asked but you would like to mention or comment on?

The focus group content was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify any themes in student's answers. The researcher coded all the transcriptions and made a codebook to help organize the themes that were being identified. The researcher coded all transcripts until coding efforts were exhausted and no more themes were identified.

Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative methods to help identify popular themes within the separate focus groups. Thematic analysis can be defined as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within date and it minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By identifying these themes, the study can then recommend specific targets and strategies that can be used in the future to help demolish some of the issues and problems at hand. For sexual assault in particular, thematic analysis allows in-depth insight from college students that may not have been discovered if using another method. Focus groups and thematic analysis allows rich data surrounding the perceptions students have for sexual assault and the consequences from it. By using focus groups, themes are developed from conversations rather than interviews to allow more insight and understanding of their insight and perceptions.

Chapter Four: Results and Findings

After analyzing the focus group discussions, several themes emerged that were both expected and unexpected. The themes have been identified as: (a) students are aware of sexual assault preventative programs- to an extent, (b) students don't feel supported in reporting sexual assault crimes, (c) some resources are known on campus for victims and (d) the media has influenced the way students view sexual assault. These themes were identified by the coding method explained in chapter three. From these themes, several subthemes have also been identified in hopes to get to the root of each problem. By doing this, measurable tactics can be put in place specifically for those problems. Each theme does overlap with each other, but it is important to look at each individually to fully understand the student's perspectives.

Students are aware of sexual assault preventative programs- to an extent:

In each focus group, participants mentioned some preventative programs on USF's campus such as the It's On Us campaign and Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event. Both male and female students were able to give a brief synopsis of each program, however, only 16% of participants actually participated in either of the two programs mentioned (taking the It's On Us pledge or participating in the walk). One male student gave the following statement on USF's programming for sexual assault,

> 'I would like to add that really when I see attention on sexual assault the most
> is during the It's On Us campaign week. Walk a Mile in Her Shoes is also a great
> event that happens every year. I also know that the Title IX Committee also tries
> to host different events over the year whether it is giving information at Bull

Market or hosting an event with another organization or department. There has been more of an effort from USF since I started as a freshmen, but I do think there needs to be more effort than just hosting an event on one day a semester or It's On Us one week a year. Sexual assault happens too frequently for us to only do something one week or one day a year.'

Outside from It's On Us and Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, students didn't necessarily know too much about any other initiatives USF has currently for preventing sexual assault. It is important to note that the focus groups that had the most in-depth discussions about preventative programming included students that have served as a resident assistant on campus or students that have worked in Student Government or another department on campus that has involvement with the It's On Us campaign. There was definitely a noteworthy difference in the focus groups that had more involved students participating whom gave more insight on these programs rather than the students who aren't as engaged on campus and not as knowledgeable. Nevertheless, when It's On Us and Walk a Mile in her Shoes was mentioned as examples, 100% of the focus group participants said they were familiar with the marketing for the events, at the very least.

A female student responded,

'I know about these programs but I don't really know what they're about. I know what "got consent" is and I know what that program stands for because I've heard that phrase since I was little. Now people know what getting consent means, but we don't really know what that next step is.'

Participants also mentioned the consistency of the preventative actions in almost all of the focus groups. Majority of participants felt that USF has made progress during their time as a student, but the programs are not up to par with the demand of educating students about this

issue. This result indicates that there could be a disconnect between the programs and resources on campus to what students are actually aware and knowledgeable about. Linking this gap will be a massive task for USF to accomplish, but it is substantial in terms of the outcome.

With all of this information and the additional transcriptions from other students, the two subthemes that emerged were that students didn't gain any additional information at these types of events and that there are little "call to actions" at these events. First, It's On Us and similar programs don't necessarily provide students with any additional information about sexual assault or resources that student's don't already know. Secondly, there is little to actually participate in regarding these programs. It's On Us offers students the opportunity to take a pledge against sexual assault and Walk a Mile in Her Shoes allows male students to participate in a walk around campus. Besides that, there are little opportunities for students to engage in this topic. This is definitely one area where universities across the nation can improve.

Students don't feel supported in reporting sexual assault crimes

Although this study doesn't look at specific sexual assault cases or reporting statistics, the media does play a part in those decisions. As mentioned, there are consequences for victims for reporting what happened that brings unwanted attention and stereotypical labels. Students in the focus group aligned heavily on what current research tells us about females blaming themselves or feeling fearful in reporting. Fear is a prominent variable for students when making these types of decisions. By understanding what specifically students are fearful about, a message strategy can be developed to help eliminate those fears.

The focus groups recognized that 60% of female students felt that their university would not be supportive throughout the process if they were to report. Colleges everywhere want to create an environment for its students to feel safe. Especially on a campus like USF's where first

year students are required to live on campus their first year of college, students and parents expect the administration and staff to do everything in their power to keep the students safe at all times. By having female students state that if they were to get sexually assaulted, they don't feel that their university will support them speaks volumes for the culture on campus.

> 'Truthfully, I don't think there is a problem with the programs or initiatives we have on campus for sexual assault. My biggest problem is how universities handle the cases. This is more than a PR move and making sure the school looks bad. These are student's lives and we should all be trying to make life better for each other. And I don't know if USF would handle it correctly.'- Female student

With that being said, there are numerous reasons why students may not feel supported to report on campus, however, there are areas that can be identified where the university can work to improve that relationship. One area where there was confusion throughout all focus groups was the proper process for reporting sexual assault. Students could possibly be unaware that they have multiple options on and off campus to report.

And, of course, the media hasn't helped make students feel comfortable in reporting. Students in the focus group brought up Bill Cosby, Jameis Winston, Kesha, and Erin Andrews specifically when talking about how the media spun these stories in specific ways. One female student explained how she felt,

> 'I don't really think Florida State supported the student who filed the complaint. They barely took any time reviewing the case. She ended up leaving FSU because of that and I don't blame her.'

It is hard to not pay attention to these cases in the media because they are constantly happening. Students are exposed to media on and off campus that can influence their decisions. While

students recognized that USF's campus culture is different than FSU and other colleges that have been in the spotlight, it could easily still happen on USF's campus and have the same problems. One male student described that scenario,

> 'I don't because of the way sexual assault has been displayed on other campuses. Maybe FSU is an extreme case, but it is still a pretty prominent case. And it's not just FSU, USF has had similar instances on this campus too, maybe not with our football star, but definitely similar situations. I don't think students feel safe because they don't want to be put in the spotlight and don't want to be associated with sexual assault. Nobody wants to be in the news about this, or even in this case the Oracle (USF's school newspaper)'.

It is evident from the focus groups that students don't feel supported for good reason, but there is always time to improve. Universities can take what they have direct control over and improve that area for students. Earning students trust is key, and communicating that to students is what will make the difference.

> 'Recently, Erin Andrews has been all over the media regarding a sexual assault case that happened a couple of years ago. Because she decided to report it, she has had to deal with literally the world knowing and of course there is going to be consequences because of that. Victim blaming happens, why would anyone want to be punished more for being a victim of sexual assault?' – Female student

The two subthemes that emerged were female students in particular did not feel that USF would protect them in a sexual assault case and students referenced the media for reasons why they don't feel comfortable in reporting crimes on campus. First, the fact that the majority of

female students that participated stated that they didn't feel that USF was a safe environment to report violent crimes speaks volumes. This clearly shows that USF is not doing everything they need to do to prevent these types of situations.

Some resources are known on campus for victims

One theme that appeared in both groups was the uncertainty of the resources and even further, what resources are available to victims vs. bystanders. Depending on the group, some students new of additional resources available to them such as Students Rights and Responsibilities and Title IX coordinators. Students did discuss how it is evident that the communication isn't reaching across to all students. One female student explained her experience,

> 'As a resident assistant, I know a good amount of the process because I have been trained on it for the past three years. I know what to do if one of my residents gets sexually assaulted. I know my role then, but honestly, I don't know what I would do if it was one of my friends. Yes, I know what office to send them to and I will tell them to go to the counseling center, but shouldn't there be more?'

This theme overlaps directly with the last two themes. The gap between communicating to involved students as well as not involved students could be an affect of the minimal programming and campaigns happening on campus. Students explained that they may not be on that side of campus, or even on campus that day to see Walk a Mile in Her Shoes. It is also clear that the lack of effective communication on reporting options to students is affecting how much trust they have with the university. By improving the problems for the first two themes, ideally, students will gain enough trust for their university to feel supported in any crime.

'If I was sexually assaulted, I don't know where I would go. The first thing that

comes to mind is the counseling center, but that is it. I don't know if I would

report it, but even if I wanted to I wouldn't know what my options are or where to

go to get my options.'- Female student

The two subthemes that emerged from this theme were that there was no consistency in

knowledge of offices and departments throughout the groups and University Police was only

mentioned in 20% of the focus groups. When asked about what resources were available on

campus, no groups had consistent answers. These subthemes show that there is an inconsistency

in what the goals of the programs are and what students are aware of. Students didn't associate

University Police and the Counseling Center with sexual assault crimes. This is concerning for

all because student's lack of knowledge should not be as low as it is currently.

The media has influenced the way students view sexual assault

This last theme confirms the second research question in that the media is fostering

negative emotions or fear in students regarding sexual assault. National and local mediums were

mentioned as well as college newspapers and social media platforms that have influenced both

the male and female students. This theme really embraced several of the factors mentioned in

literature such as the stereotypes, being fearful, and a skewed vision of victimization to give the

study an altogether finish.

First, it is important to note that major differences and similarities were brought up

regarding how the media influences students between the two groups. The most recent stories in

the news were all mentioned (Bill Cosby, Erin Andrews, Kesha, Jameis Winston, Florida State

University, and Penn State University). Both the male and female students were similar in

explaining the stories and all the negative connotation and consequences from these actions. Yet,

the opinions on how the media framed certain stories differed. One female student explained the Jameis Winston incident as,

> 'A student filed charges against Jameis Winston before he won the Heisman or any of that. I don't think it's fair that she was punished for doing the right thing and reporting it and he got to go off and play in the national football league. I don't get it.'

A male student explained the same incident,

> 'After everything happened with Jameis Winston's rape case, he only got better and more famous. Whether he did it or not, it didn't stop him. If he did do it, it shows a terrible example of how guys get away with this type of stuff all the time. It's messy.'

Without a doubt, both students mentioned valid arguments on the concerns of discussing sexual assault in the media. One male student also brought up an interesting point that not one female mentioned,

> 'One thing that I don't think is fair, and maybe it's because I'm a male, is that when women falsely accuse a man of sexual assault it hardly gets any attention. And when a woman does that, it's almost just as bad. Men's lives are ruined after that. I don't know, I'm obviously against sexual assault of any kind, but it sucks that everyone will probably just believe the girl even if it didn't happen.'

Unfortunately, there are always going to be people who abuse the system for their own personal gain. This student revealed something that hasn't been discussed- how to educate students to know the seriousness of these claims and what they imply.

Gender differences were minimal but definitely evident. When discussing stereotypes for victims, both the male and female students mentioned several of the same things. How women dressed were discussed in both groups and everyone came to the conclusion that what a woman is wearing isn't an excuse to commit sexual assault. When asked about how stereotypes influence how they perceive sexual assault, one female student answered,

> 'It sounds bad, but I can sit here and list what I know about each fraternity. Like which ones are known for drugging girls, what fraternity house has a "smash wall" and which ones kiss and tell. It's terrible. It really is. But I know all of that because it's happened to my friends and people I know. Students may not realize it but it does happen on this campus. Maybe not as extreme as other campuses but it absolutely happens.'

Unfortunately, in this case a stereotype seems to be true. Working to demolish that stereotype on campus should be a top priority for all universities.

There has been a lot of discussion on how the media in the larger area, but very little discussion on media at the college level. College newspapers are still around today and can be the most personal media outlet for college students. College students are completely in charge of the newspaper, so they are writing stories on their peers and what is going on around campus. The last thing any student wants is to be exposed by everyone on that kind of level. The Oracle, which is USF's campus newspaper, was mentioned in 50% of the focus groups. Students mentioned how they would be scared to report it because although they do expect the Oracle to report on it, they do not want their name associated with it. After the moderator mentioned that the reporter would likely keep the story anonymous, the students still didn't change their mind.

'If I ever was rapped or sexually assaulted, I wouldn't want anyone to know. And

that is the problem. There is too much victim-blaming surrounded sexual assault.

Victims have to choose which battle they want to fight: reporting their assailant,

or dealing with all your family and friends knowing you were raped. It's not

right.' –Female student

Lastly, all six focus groups discussed the negative stigma surrounding being a sexual

assault victim. Victim blaming was mentioned by both males and females as something that not

only victims do to themselves, but what other students can do to victims. This is actually

contradictory to what previous research has said about victim blaming. This is one subtheme that

occurred in the focus groups that wasn't expected. From the results of this study and knowing

these students don't feel the same about victim blaming, this is an interesting factor that could be

further explored to see if the perception has changed on a larger scale and not just on USF's

campus.

The last two subthemes that emerged were that students established what "no means no"

is and the definition of sexual assault and that students don't want their reputation in danger. As

stated, an overall understanding of sexual assault has been defined by "no means no". The first

phase of sexual assault included the "no means no" campaign and what it means to not sexually

assault someone. This is a great step in moving in the right direction to ensure no other students

are sexually assaulted. Secondly, from all the negative media attention it has received, students

don't want to report sexual assault in fear of their reputation being ruined in the media. This

shows that the media's influence can truly affect students' behavior regarding this topic. In some

focus groups, the Oracle (USF's newspaper) was mentioned in particular and how student's

wouldn't want their name mentioned in fear of having their classmates read it.

Chapter Five: Discussion & Directions for Future Research

Overall Interpretations of USF Students Perceptions

This study has proven over and over again the importance of constantly researching and evaluating efforts concerning the safety and well being of students on college campuses anywhere. The findings from this study have proven the importance for universities to take action in order to prevent any student from experiencing sexual assault of any kind. Student lives can be impacted greatly by what the university choses to do or not do.

University administration, as well as local and federal government officials, should take any factor that makes students fearful or uncomfortable on campus tremendously seriously. The focus groups participants confirm that there have been great strides in preventing sexual assaults on campuses across the nation, but we aren't where we need to be. Generally, as a nation we have established several groundbreaking initiatives for law and for practical uses on campuses. We have reached a place to where now universities have to be more strategic in communication the holes that have been identified.

Students are aware of what sexual assault is and what it can be defined as. We have successfully established dialogue surrounding "no means no" and what "got consent" means regarding sexual assault. That isn't necessarily what the message needs to be to students anymore and we can possibly move into the next phase of messagin. We have turned into, as mentioned, a society that is too focused on saying, "don't get raped" than "don't rape". We have accomplished the first task of educating students on what defines sexual assault. A follow-up

phase can be implemented now so the conversation can shift to a more personal conversation-

it's not acceptable to sexually assault another individual and it's not acceptable to falsely accuse

someone of sexual assault. In order for that message to stick, we need to hold each other

accountable. This can start at the college level and make its way into every day culture; sexual

assault will not be tolerated. Universities have the opportunity with the help of the media, to shift

the dialogue surrounding sexual assault.

Recommendations for USF

While this study was conducted on the University of South Florida, there are some

recommendations for how to further prevent sexual assault. It is important to note that it is

recognized that several other factors go into making these types of decisions but the purpose of

this section is to give recommendations based on the findings of this research.

The current programs that USF have been implementing the past couple of years have

been somewhat effective. The purpose of the It's On Us campaign and Walk a Mile in Her Shoes

are both relevant and timely to college students today. Small enhancements can be made such as

developing target market communication strategies that are targeting to specific student groups.

Since preventing sexual assault is a cause that almost every department and office can agree on,

these programs can work to implementing new ways on how to include them. That will allow the

reach to grow and more students to learn about these programs.

Aside from It's On Us and Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, an additional campaign or program

should be added to address the holes that have been identified from this study. One issue that

absolutely needs to be addressed is educating students on the resources available to them for

different roles i.e., victim, bystander, student leader. USF offers both confidential and non-

confidential reporting options, something that all students may not know. Educating students is

also important because students that have experienced sexual assault may not know what to do but knows a student who probably does. Having more consistent training across campus with student leaders will also benefit the campus.

Lastly, as we have seen with the separate focus groups and differing answers, men and women have different views on sexual assault. Instead of trying to get everyone on the same page, USF should cater different communication strategies to the different genders. By doing this, both genders will be receiving the communication that will influence them in the best possible way.

Study Limitations

It should be noted that there are some limitations and constraints for this research. First, the method of this research was implemented on only one campus and cannot be generalized due to varying different campus cultures. However, this purpose of this study was to begin research surrounding framing sexual assault on college campuses. The researchers hopes are to start a foundation for more detailed and concise research. Secondly, only six focus groups were conducted. If given the chance to continue this study, it is recommended to continue having the types of conversations that were had in the focus groups in this study. Gaining insight on student's perspective of programs is a great way to get valuable evaluation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Sexual assault research in the mass communications field is just beginning to emerge and hopefully, the field sees the importance of the research and what it is capable of. With health communication on the rise, this is one area that can be greatly affected by strategic and creative minds to implement programs and initiatives on college campuses. This study can eventually branch out to several different communication areas that can target the many different types of

students at universities across the nation. Ultimately, future research is desperately needed to minimize sexual assaults from occurring on campuses. Research is the tool that can guide administration and students from making a difference in million of lives. Preventing having another student experience this is type of assault is worth it.

A great supplementary tool to this study would be to add a quantitative element to it. Having students take a survey on communication messages to see which are most effective would be a great element to add. There are also several other mass communications theories that could be applied such as agenda setting theory or cultivation theory. The elaboration likelihood model could also be applied to this study or one similar to it.

Practitioner and scholars should find the findings from this study important and substantial simply because of the impact it could make around the nation. Sexual assault has become a very dangerous epidemic that needs to be tackled from every discipline.

Participants' Recommendations for USF

Across all six focus groups, students gave ideas that they believe USF would benefit from. Several focus groups mentioned the idea of having a similar required program like the alcohol education course that is required for all first year students. Participants also mentioned implementing educational presentations or similar efforts during orientation. Participants believed that if the university presented sexual assault as a big deal and not tolerated, students would take it seriously and have that mind sight from day one. Some argued that although some students probably still won't take it seriously, it is still better than having nothing, which is what is happening now.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Program Analysis at USF

1. It's On US
   Marketing:

Take the Blue Tape Challenge for It's On US Today

ItsOnUs.org   #ItsOnUSF   #ItsOnUSF

2. Violence Prevention Month

USF SUPPORTS
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

3. Walk a Mile in Her Shoes

Appendix B: Thematic Groups and Subgroups

Students are aware of sexual assault preventative programs- to an extent	Students don't feel supported in reporting sexual assault crimes	Some resources are known on campus for victims	The media has influenced the way students view sexual assault
Don't gain any additional knowledge about sexual assault information at these events	Female students in particular did not feel that USF would protect them in a sexual assault case	There was no consistency in offices or departments throughout the groups	Established what "no menas no" is and the definition of sexual assault
There is not many call to actions at these events	Students referenced the media for a reason why they don't feel comfortable in reporting crimes	University Police was only mentioned in 20% of the focus groups	Students don't want their reputation in danger