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# A Comparison and Assessment of Attitudes Towards Sexual Violence at a Mid-Size Southern University

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*The University of Southern Mississippi*

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A Comparison and Assessment of Attitudes Towards Sexual Violence at a Mid-Size  
Southern University

by

Jessica M. Vinson

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science  
In the School of Criminal Justice

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Approved by

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to compare and assess undergraduate students' attitudes towards sexual violence at a mid-size southern university. The respondents were recruited through an online survey distributed through a Facebook event and also through the university's e-mail network. Attitudes were assessed through statistical means. Respondents were questioned regarding their attitudes towards sexual violence, sexual education, sexual victimization, level of self-control, and victimization of others.

## KEY TERMS

- Victim – A person harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action
- Victimizer – A person who victimizes others
- Victimize – To single (someone) out for cruel or unjust treatment
- Asexual – With sex or sexuality, in particular
- Bisexual – Sexually attracted to both men and women
- Heterosexual – Sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex
- Homosexual – Sexually attracted to members of the same sex

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## **Chapter 1: Problem Statement**

Sexual violence has existed since the dawn of mankind. However, not until relatively modern times has it become a significant social issue. Previous thought centered around the idea that it was the duty of the woman to fulfill her husband's desires, even when she did not want to be compliant. Such actions have not always been considered as rape, but perceptions and definitions have changed in recent years as victims' rights have assumed a greater priority. Sexual violence is not limited to women, as males have also been victimized for centuries. Pederasty (sexual activity of an underage boy with an older male) during the Roman Empire is still known to exist today.

There are many victim-oriented groups and organizations that provide counseling and advance victims' rights throughout the United States and abroad. In southern Mississippi The Shafer Center for Crisis Intervention counsels victims of sexual violence and family/friends of suicide. Shafer Center personnel have provided much needed and appreciated assistance in this research endeavor.

This thesis, in conjunction with the Shafer Center, assessed college students' attitudes towards sexual violence. Survey instruments were administered to undergraduate students at a mid-size southern university. The survey was distributed via social media such as Facebook and e-mail forwarding. Data was evaluated and compared on several levels, including whether the student had received any previous sexual education and their religious beliefs. Comparisons of attitudes towards sexual violence were analyzed and possible explanations for similarities or differences explored.

College students were selected because they are not a protected population and are convenient for surveying. Most college students are subjected to a wider variety of sexual violence as entering freshmen than previously since it is their first major experience outside the protection and influence of their parents. This vulnerability increases their chances of victimization. Thus, they are a prime population for research purposes. Also, as undergraduates and young adults, the university may have provided their first contact with others who have been victims. This experience could affect their attitude towards sexual violence. The generally “freer” atmosphere of college life could have an influence on their attitudes, as well as their personal sex lives.

Research concerning attitudes towards sexual violence can be useful to a variety of populations. On a local level, it can be used to increase the awareness of sexual violence among youth. Additionally, it can help adults and children in their preventive efforts. Nationally, this research can add to the collective knowledge of the causes and effects of sexual violence.

The primary objective of this research was to assess the ideas that college students in the Hattiesburg area had concerning sexual violence. Answers to questions like “what do individuals define as sexual violence?” and “what causes their definition of sexual violence?” have been explored. This research also inquired whether the participant had ever been a victim of sexual violence. A general assessment of respondents’ definitions of sexual violence will be ascertained as well as cultural factors that may influence their definitions.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Defining Sexual Violence**

There is no firmly agreed upon definition of sexual violence. According to Fowler et al. (2010) what one person considers sexual violence may not be the same for the next person. What some individuals view as conforming to a behavioral norm may be totally inexcusable to others. Several factors shape personal definitions of sexual violence. These factors are termed RSCB, or rape-supportive cultural beliefs (Fowler et al., 2010).

According to research findings, the greater a person's identification with RSCB, the greater their likelihood of not defining an incident as sexual assault. These identifiers include "victim-offender relationship, alcohol use by the victim, where the perpetrator and victim met, perpetrator's aggressiveness, and victim resistance" (Fowler et al., 2010). This is not an inclusive list of possible factors, but provides a good sense of what is generally used to understand how a person will define, or not define, their victimization.

Basile and Saltzman (2011) defined sexual violence in "Sexual Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements" as:

"Nonconsensual completed or attempted contact between the penis and the vulva or the penis and the anus involving penetration, however slight; nonconsensual contact between the mouth and the penis, vulva, or anus; nonconsensual penetration of the anal or genital opening of another person by a hand, finger, or other object; nonconsensual intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks; or nonconsensual non-contact acts of a sexual nature such as voyeurism and verbal or behavioral sexual harassment. All the above acts also qualify as sexual violence if they are committed against someone who is unable to consent or refuse" (p. 9)

There are many forms of sexual violence and anyone is a potential victim. Basile

and Saltzman (2011) identify four types of sexual violence, which are further clarified into five categories. The first type of sexual violence is a completed sex act perpetrated on a person who does not give consent or is unable to give consent. A second type of sexual violence is an attempted, but not completed, sex act perpetrated on a victim who does not/is unable to give consent. Abusive sexual contact is a third type of sexual violence. A final category is non-contact sexual abuse. A fifth category, a catch all, includes variants of the above types of sexual violence.

Understanding consent is essential to understanding sexual violence. Basile and Saltzman (2011) offer a few standardized definitions of several crucial terms. “Words or overt actions by a person who is legally or functionally competent to give informed approval, indicating a freely given agreement to have sexual intercourse or sexual contact”, defines “consent”. “A freely given agreement to have sexual intercourse or sexual contact could not occur because of age, illness, disability, being asleep, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs” defines “inability to consent”. “Inability to refuse” is defined as “Disagreement to have sexual intercourse or sexual contact was precluded because of the use or possession of guns or other non-bodily weapons, or due to physical violence, threats of physical violence, real or perceived coercion, intimidation or pressure, or misuse of authority” (Basile and Saltzman, 2011).

The actual sex act must be differentiated from an act that might be abusive. Basile and Saltzman (2011) define “sex act” is defined as “Contact between the penis and the vulva or the penis and the anus involving penetration, however slight; contact between the mouth and the penis, vulva, or anus; or penetration of the anal or genital opening of another person by a hand, finger, or other object” where as abusive sexual contact is

defined as “Intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person without his or her consent, or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse” (Basile and Saltzman, 2011).

Some forms of sexual abuse do not involve physical contact. This is referred to as non-contact sexual abuse and means “Sexual abuse that does not include physical contact of a sexual nature between the perpetrator and the victim”. It also includes acts such as voyeurism; intentional exposure of an individual to exhibitionism; unwanted exposure to pornography; verbal or behavioral sexual harassment; threats of sexual violence to accomplish some other end; or taking nude photographs of a sexual nature of another person without his or her consent or knowledge, or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse” (Basile and Saltzman, 2011). The actual act of sexual violence is called an “incident”. An incident is defined as “a single act or series of acts of sexual violence that are perceived to be connected to one another and that may persist over a period of minutes, hours, or days. One perpetrator or multiple perpetrators may commit an incident” (Basile and Saltzman, 2011).

### **Who is affected by Sexual Violence?**

Sexual violence can affect anyone, anywhere, at any time. No individual is immune from sexual violence and the often-traumatizing emotional, and sometimes physical, pain that follows. Available statistics indicate that sexual violence victims are overwhelmingly women who are assaulted by males (“Understanding Sexual Violence”, 2011). According to Tjaden and Thoennes (2011), 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 males reported having been the victim of an uncompleted or completed sexual assault. The New York Times published an article that reported, “1.3 million American women annually may be victims of rape or

attempted rape”. However, these numbers do not accurately reflect the total number of completed or uncompleted assaults annually since many people choose not to report their victimization. Non-reporting may occur for a variety of reasons because the victim does not classify the incident as sexual violence; others do not report out of fear of being disbelieved or suffering a subsequent violent consequence from the offender (“Understanding Sexual Violence”, 2011).

While sexual violence occurs primarily between a female victim and a male offender; however, it can occur between any combinations of gender. Many inmates are victims of same sex assaults each year, suggesting a wide-scale prison culture that seemingly encourages sexual violence (Fowler et al., 2010). Additionally, victims of sexual violence include children, disabled persons, fully functioning adults, and any victim selected by an offender.

### **Who can be an offender?**

Nearly anyone can be a victim, and nearly anyone can be an offender. Typically, perpetrators of sexual violence are known to the victim, but it can also be a random act on a total stranger (“Understanding Sexual Violence”, 2011). Basile and Saltzman (2011) offer definitions of a variety of offender groups. The first offender type is the “intimate partner”. An intimate partner may be a current or former spouse or significant other. A legal spouse is defined as someone to whom the victim is legally married to; however, someone who is no longer in such a position or title can also carry out sexual violence. Family members, either by blood or marriage, are often perpetrators of sexual violence, but this excludes intimate partner violence. Persons in positions of power or trust, such as teachers, coaches, religious leaders, police officers, may be sexual violence offenders.

A “friend or acquaintance offender” is defined by Basile and Saltzman as “Someone who is known to the victim but is not related to the victim by blood or marriage, and is not a current or former spouse, another current or former intimate partner, another family member, or a person in a position of power or trust. Examples include co-workers, neighbors, dates, former dates, or roommates (not an exhaustive list)” (p. 11). A more generalized category includes non-strangers. A non-stranger is a person whom the victim may see, identify, and interact with on an episodic basis, but does not personally know (guard, cashier, or any maintenance workers). A final offender category is the “total stranger group”. These offenders randomly attack people whom they have not met.

### **What are the consequences of sexual violence for the victim?**

Sexual violence can result in a wide range of effects on the victim. Basile and Saltzman (2011) offer information on some of the most widely experienced outcomes (p. 11-12). Some victims suffer depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and frightening flashbacks to the attack. The longest lasting result of sexual violence is the victim’s psychological well being. An individual may suffer from paranoia or depression, eating disorders, insomnia, or become be hypersexual or sexually dysfunctional. For some victims the effects can be long lasting; for others, they are random occurrences.

In particularly violent attacks physical disability can result. Physical injuries that include internal wounds from penetration or lesions on the skin from being restrained can result in disability. Physically abused victims may become mentally handicapped. Some victims turn to alcohol or drugs in an attempt to deal with the effects of their victimization. These choices can lead to additional complications. Some victims face the



moral dilemma of what to do if they become pregnant as a result of being sexual assaulted. An even more difficult ethical dilemma is posed for someone who does not believe in abortion but does not want to keep the baby, who would serve as a constant reminder of the attack (Basile and Saltzman, 2011, 11-12).

**Where does this research mesh with current literature?**

This research was designed to assess the general opinions of college age students about sexual violence via online methods. Hopefully it can increase our understanding of how this population of students defines sexual violence as well as factors that influence their definitions. In turn, this understanding should increase effectiveness in educating children about sexual violence. For example, is age an important factor in sexual assault education programs? If so, then the earlier a child learns about sexual violence, the less likely she/he will be a victim. Concomitantly, this educational awareness should lead to increases in reporting and charges filed against sexual offenders. Among adults many factors influence personal definitions of sexual violence including whether they received any sexual assault education in the past. Understanding sexual violence at the local level can be a purveyor of better education, more effective prevention methods, and greater understanding on a national or international level. Optimistically, the end result of this study will lead to better education and prevention methods relative to sexual violence.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Purpose**

A review of the literature suggested a strong relationship between sexual violence knowledge and views on sexual violence. The, the primary goal of this research was to expand the knowledge base by determining what sort of relationship exists with college students' perceptions of sexual violence and their previous sex education, both formal and informal. Individuals form their opinions about sexual violence through numerous influences. Such influences can range from participation in a sexual education class or presentation to a personal experience of sexual violence. Some individuals experience earlier introduction to formal and informal sex education than others and this may have an effect on their beliefs of sexual violence.

Individuals' initial knowledge of sex were derived from a number of sources: parents' direct or indirect conversations with the child, formal education through the school system, informal conversations from peers, older siblings, or other sources or individuals who play a role in the individuals lives. Therefore, individuals learn about sex and sexual violence from a multitude of sources and each interaction has a distinct effect on each individual as interpretation of information varies. Because of the discrepancies, definitions of sexual violence are ambiguous. Some individuals define sexual violence differently than others. This leads to discrepancies as to what constitutes sexual violence. Some individuals are unaware they have been a victim of sexual violence due to a lack of education or understanding. This research aimed to determine how inconsistencies in sex

education affects beliefs about rape.

### **Participants**

This study employed an internet-based survey instrument. The target population consists of undergraduate students at a mid-size southern university. College campuses often foster an environment conducive to drinking and drugs, which, in turn, increases an individual's vulnerability to certain attacks. Yet, many sexual assaults go unreported. Studying the student population at a mid-size southern university will hopefully provide a better understanding of students' definitions of sexual violence as well as increase awareness of the legal definitions of sexual violence. Increasing this awareness could result in increased reportage. Additionally, this insight could indirectly benefit younger children as the research may provide some contribution in modifications of sexual education. Sample size (200 undergraduates) is determined by the number of independent and dependent variables.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Undergraduate students were contacted primarily by means of a Facebook event and surveyed via the University's email network. Any student who completed the survey instrument but who was not an undergraduate was deleted from the data. The purpose of the survey, and the option to participate, were explained in both contact modalities. The survey took approximately fifteen minutes to complete and participants were free to withdraw at any time. Anonymity was assured. The concluding section of the survey contained questions ascertaining demographic information. The duration of this event coincided with the data collection time frame. The survey instrument was posted on a

website called Kwik Survey. This website offered the advantage of combining data effectively over a prolonged period of time. The site is simple to navigate and facilitated accurate statistical gathering and measurement. The Facebook event linked students to the survey. In turn, they were encouraged to extend the invitation to other students at the University. Potential undergraduate survey participants were also contacted via e-mail. Subjects contacted through e-mail were provided with a through short summary of the nature of the study and given a link to the survey.

## **Variables**

### **Independent Variables**

The survey contained approximately 77 questions. Many of these questions were collected from three previous surveys. The first survey instrument, Easteal's (1992) "Beliefs about Rape", consisted of approximately 15 items. Of these items, eight independent variables were constructed and four dependent variables. The independent variables include, age, which was measured on a ratio level; gender; political orientation (a categorical variable), religion (a categorical variable), classification (freshman – senior, other), and previous sexual education (dichotomous). The purpose of this study was to determine if the aforementioned variables have any impact on perceptions of sexual violence.

The first part of the instrument included questions from Easteal's (1992) "Beliefs about Rape". The questions were modified to ensure the survey was gender neutral. Also, questions were phrased to help participants quantify their definitions of sexual violence. The second half of the survey came from "Sexual Experiences Survey" (Koss and Gidycz, 1985). Students quantified their personal sexual activity by answering questions

on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “more than 5 times”. An additional question probed what type of sexual education, if any, they have received, from formal and informal sources. The dependent variable of specific interest in this research is the “previous level of sexual education”. Students were asked an additional question about whether or not they received any previous sexual education. If so, they chose from several options as to its source. “Level of sexual education” was compared with their beliefs on sexual violence. The third survey instrument, the “Informal Sex Education Survey”, also employs a five-point Likert scale ranging from “a lot” to “nothing” in an attempt to determine the sources of informal sexual education for most participating students. The fourth survey instrument, the Grasmick Scale (1993), uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” to discern respondents’ level of self control.

### Dependent Variables

The dependent variables in this study were “opinions” and “definitions of sexual violence”. Is there is any correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable, sexual violence? Easteal’s “Beliefs About Rape” (1992) Scale was used to measure perceptions of sexual violence. This scale consists of fifteen items which can be collapsed into four dimensions including: “who is the rapist?”, “what is rape?”, “the role of the survivors”, and finally “rape: the laws and the courts”.

### Hypotheses

This study posited five hypotheses. Does previous sexual education have any effect on definitions of sexual violence? If so, do different forms of sex education have an impact on the dependent variables? An integral part of any research includes positing the

null hypotheses. Null hypotheses indicate that there is no relationship between the indicated variables. Hypotheses to be formally tested are listed below:

Hypothesis 1: The type of previously received sex education will have an effect on the individual's definition of sexual violence, such as "what is rape?" (Easteal, 1992)

Hypothesis 2: An individual's religious affiliation will have an effect on definitions of sexual violence.

Hypothesis 3: An individual's religious affiliation will have an effect on previous levels of sexual activity.

Hypothesis 4: The gender of the surveyed individuals will affect their definition of "who is the rapist?" (Easteal, 1992)

Hypothesis 5: The gender of the individual will affect their source of previously received sexual education

### **Testing Hypotheses**

#### Univariate Statistics

A variety of statistics were used to analyze the survey data. Univariate statistics are descriptive statistics that include the mean, median, mode, and range of the data. Confirmatory factor analysis will be employed to confirm the validity of previously constructed scales. Confirming validity of these scales is important to make sure that they remain valid in this study, as the parameters are different than in previous research.

#### Bivariate Statistics

A correlation matrix was conducted to determine whether any independent variable was statistically associated with each dependent variable. Relationships between

all independent variables were examined to determine if there were any issues with multicollinearity.

### **Timeline**

The survey was available online from September 2011 to December 2011. Data collection continued during these months even if the number of participants exceeded sample size. The time frame was deemed appropriate to obtain the desired population sample of 200 participants. Statistical analyses followed data collection. Finally, conclusions and recommendations were offered. The research is expected to be complete in late February or early March of 2012.

### **Chapter 4: Analysis**

The goal of this study was to assess college students' perceptions of sexual violence based on responses to inquiries regarding their sexual experiences, sexual education, and beliefs about rape. The researcher used an online survey instrument that included the aforementioned scales and demographics in order to assess attitudes towards sexual violence. Some variables were excluded within the scales based upon the results of the confirmatory factor analysis. The remaining responses were analyzed using several statistical techniques. Univariate statistics described the composition of the sample. Bivariate statistics, specifically correlation matrices, determined if there was a significant relationship between variables of interest.

Questions in the "Self Control Scale" (composed from questions 47-70) relate to respondent's level of self-control. Questions concerning personal definitions of rape, opinions about rapists, and being a rape victim are included in the "Beliefs About Rape Scale" (questions 31-46). The "Formal Sex Education Scale" (questions 25 and 30) inquires whether respondents have received sexual education from formal sources (i.e. school, church, or community programs). The "Media Sex Education Scale" (questions 26-29) contains questions pertaining to the amount of sexual education the respondent received from the media (i.e. television, magazines, radio, books, etc). Questions regarding the sexual education received from friends and family are featured in the "Friends and Family Sex Education Scale" (questions 21-24).



## **Statistical Techniques**

### **Frequencies**

Frequencies were generated for gender, political affiliation, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, major, classification, and previous levels of formal sexual education (Tables 1 - 7). The sample included 197 respondents (70.1% female, 20.1% male, and 9.8% no response). In terms of political affiliation 38 (19.3%) respondents identified as Democratic, 69 (35%) Republican, 1 (.5%) Green Party, 51 (25.9%) Independent, 21 (10.7%) other, and 15 (8.6%) gave no response. When respondents were asked about religious affiliation 120 (60.9%) identified as Protestant (Christian – all other denominations), 1 (.5%) Jewish, 23 (11.7%) Catholic, (28) 14.2% none, (8) 4.1% other, and 17 (8.6%) gave no response.

The majority of respondents identified as heterosexual, 163 (82.7%), while only 6 (3%) acknowledged being homosexual, 3 (1.5%) were asexual, 8 (4.1%) were bisexual, and 17 (8.6%) gave no response. The majority of respondents, 76, identified as having a major in the College of Science and Technology (38.6%), 26 (13.2%) were from the College of Arts and Letters, 17 (8.6%) were from the College of Health, 39 (19.8%) were from the College of Education and Psychology, 17 (8.6%) were from the College of Business, 5 (2.5%) were undecided about their major, and 17 (8.6%) gave no response. According to class standing 76 of respondents were seniors, 34% of all responses. They were followed by 53 juniors (26.9%), 25 sophomores (12.7%), 35 freshmen (17.8%), and

17 (8.6%) gave no response. Slightly more than one-fourth indicated having have received no sexual education in the past.

Table 1 – Gender of Respondents

| Variable    | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender      |           |            |
| Female      | 138       | 70.1%      |
| Male        | 42        | 20.1%      |
| No Response | 17        | 9.8%       |
| Total       | 197       | 100%       |

Table 2 – Political Affiliation of Respondents

| Variable              | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Political Affiliation |           |            |
| Democratic            | 38        | 19.3%      |
| Republican            | 69        | 35.0%      |
| Green Party           | 1         | .5%        |
| Independent           | 51        | 25.9%      |
| Other                 | 21        | 10.7%      |
| No Response           | 15        | 8.6%       |
| Total                 | 197       | 100%       |

Table 3 – Religious Affiliation of Respondents

| Variable              | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Religious Affiliation |           |            |
| Protestant            | 120       | 60.9%      |
| Jewish                | 1         | .5%        |
| Catholic              | 23        | 11.7%      |
| Hindu                 | 0         | 0%         |
| Buddhist              | 0         | 0%         |
| None                  | 28        | 14.2%      |
| Other                 | 8         | 4.1%       |
| No Response           | 17        | 8.6%       |
| Total                 | 197       | 100%       |

Table 4 – Sexual Orientation of Respondents

| Variable           | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Sexual Orientation |           |            |
| Heterosexual       | 163       | 82.7%      |
| Homosexual         | 6         | 3.0%       |
| Asexual            | 3         | 1.5%       |
| Bisexual           | 8         | 4.1%       |

|             |     |      |
|-------------|-----|------|
| No Response | 17  | 8.6% |
| Total       | 197 | 100% |

Table 5 – Respondents’ Major by College

| Variable                            | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Major                               |           |            |
| College of Arts and Letters         | 26        | 13.2%      |
| College of Health                   | 17        | 8.6%       |
| College of Science and Technology   | 76        | 38.6%      |
| College of Education and Psychology | 39        | 19.8%      |
| College of Business                 | 17        | 8.6%       |
| Undecided                           | 5         | 2.5%       |
| No Response                         | 17        | 8.6%       |
| Total                               | 197       | 100%       |

Table 6 – Class Standing of Respondents

| Variable       | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Classification |           |            |
| Freshman       | 35        | 19.4%      |
| Sophomore      | 25        | 13.9%      |
| Junior         | 53        | 29.4%      |
| Senior         | 67        | 37.2%      |
| No Response    | 17        | 8.6%       |

|       |     |      |
|-------|-----|------|
| Total | 197 | 100% |
|-------|-----|------|

Table 7 – Previous Formal Sex Education of Respondents

| Variable                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Previous Formal Sex Education |           |            |
| Yes                           | 137       | 69.5%      |
| No                            | 52        | 27.5%      |
| No Response                   | 8         | 4.1%       |
| Total                         | 197       | 100%       |

### Descriptives

Descriptive statistics were utilized for age (Table 8). As can be observed in Table 8 the youngest respondent was 18, oldest was 31, with a mean age of 20.57 years (2.275 standard deviation). Each dimension extracted from factor analysis was also analyzed via descriptive statistics (Table 8).

Table 8 – Summary Statistics for Respondents

| Dimension            | Range       | Mean   | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|--------------------|
| Age                  | 18 - 31     | 20.57  | 2.275              |
| Forcible Sex Play    | .00 – 2.44  | .0520  | .21886             |
| Sexual Victimization | .00 – 30.00 | 1.9326 | 3.90387            |
| Self Control         | 1.08 – 3.96 | 2.3973 | .47401             |
| Beliefs about Rape   | 1.07 – 3.60 | 2.5560 | .35048             |

|                              |             |        |        |
|------------------------------|-------------|--------|--------|
| Formal Sex Education         | 1.00 – 4.50 | 2.1885 | .71346 |
| Media Sex Education          | 1.00 – 4.25 | 2.2008 | .65757 |
| Friends/Family Sex Education | 1.00 – 3.50 | 2.1950 | .44528 |

#### Bivariate Analysis

Pearson's r correlation coefficients were analyzed for each factor in the "Sex Victimization" (questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 10) and "Forcible Sex Play" (questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20) scales generated for this investigation. Following this analysis the correlations were displayed in correlation matrices (Tables 9 - 10). The Pearson r correlation coefficient range from -1 to +1 and can be used to determine the strength of the relationship between two variables. A positive value is indicative of a positive relationship, i.e. as one variable increases so too does the other. A negative value indicates a negative relationship between the two variables, i.e. as one increases the other decreases. A Pearson r-value of 0 indicates an absence of a relationship. Multicollinearity is important to consider for this data, because the predictor variables are highly correlated.

Table 9 – Forcible Sex Play Scale

|       | Pearson Correlation |
|-------|---------------------|
| FSPS  | 1.000               |
| FSE   | .051                |
| A     | .149*               |
| G     | .099                |
| PA    | -.046               |
| RA    | -.077               |
| SO    | .154*               |
| M     | .010                |
| C     | .008                |
| SCS   | .340**              |
| BRS   | .235**              |
| FSES  | .170*               |
| MSES  | .126                |
| FFSES | .148*               |

*Note.* FSPS = Forcible Sex Play Scale; FSE = Past Formal Sex Education received; A = Age; G = Gender; PA = Political Affiliation; RA = Religious Affiliation; SO = Sexual Orientation; M = Major; C = Classification; BRS = Beliefs about Rape Scale; FSES = Formal Sex Education Scale; MSES = Media Sex Education Scale; FFSES = Friends and Family Formal Sex Education Scale. \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$

The first correlation matrix (Table 9) displays the relationship between variables and the “Forcible Sex Play Scale”. The correlation matrix contains respondents’ demographic information (age, gender, political affiliation, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, major, class standing) and any relationship between these variables and the “Forcible Sex Play Scale”. In addition there are five scales: “Self Control Scale”, “Beliefs About Rape” (Easteal, 1992) Scale, “Formal Sex Education Scale”, “Media Sex Education Scale”, and the “Friends and Family Sex Education Scale”.

The correlation matrix reveals a fairly strong positive linear relationship between the following variables where  $p \leq .05$ : forcible sex play and age ( $r = .149$ ), forcible sex play and sexual orientation ( $r = .154$ ), forcible sex play and formal sex education, forcible sex play and friends and family sex education. There also was a fairly strong positive linear relationship between forcible sex play and beliefs about rape ( $r = .235$ ) and forcible sex play and self control ( $r = .340$ ), where  $p \leq .01$ . The propensity to victimize others is seemingly related to an increase in age.

A second correlation matrix was generated to represent the relationship between the “Sex Victimization Scale” and a multiplicity of variables (Table 10). Included in this scale are demographic factors (age, gender, political affiliation, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, major, classification). Following demographic factors are five scales: “Self Control Scale”, “Beliefs About Rape” (Easteal, 1992) Scale, “Formal Sex



Education Scale”, “Media Sex Education Scale”, and the “Friends and Family Sex Education Scale”. These scales (Table 9 - Table 10) revealed a fairly strong positive linear relationship between sex victimization and sexual orientation ( $p \leq .05$ ). This suggests that homosexuals, asexuals, and bisexuals have increased prospects of being victims of sexual violence. The correlation matrix (Table 10) also indicates a strong positive linear relationship between sex victimization and self-control ( $p \leq .01$ ). This relationship suggests that as an individual moves towards lower levels of self-control their likelihood of victimization increases.

Table 10 – Sex Victimization Scale

|      | Pearson Correlation |
|------|---------------------|
| SVS  | 1.000               |
| FSE  | -.104               |
| A    | .068                |
| G    | -.124               |
| PA   | -.132               |
| RA   | .097                |
| SO   | .156*               |
| M    | -.089               |
| C    | .018                |
| SCS  | .199**              |
| BRS  | .043                |
| FSES | .010                |
| MSES | -.081               |

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FFSES .026

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*Note.* SVS = Sex Victimization Scale; FSE = Past Formal Sex Education received; A = Age; G = Gender; PA = Political Affiliation; RA = Religious Affiliation; SO = Sexual Orientation; M = Major; C = Classification; BRS = Beliefs about Rape Scale; FSES = Formal Sex Education Scale; MSES = Media Sex Education Scale; FFSES = Friends and Family Formal Sex Education Scale; \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$

### Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine reliability for the scales in this survey instrument. Scales were constructed through factor analysis for: "Forcible Sex Play" ( $r = .774$ ), "Sex Victimization" ( $r = .857$ ), "Self-control" ( $r = .849$ ), "Beliefs about Rape" ( $r = .649$ ), "Formal Sex Education" (no  $r$  formulated because there were only two questions), "Media Sex Education" ( $r = .715$ ), and "Friends and Family Sex Education" ( $r = .692$ ). All scales, except "Beliefs About Rape" were found to be reliable through internal consistency.

Table 11 – Cronbach's alpha Reliability Analysis

| Scale                            | Cronbach's alpha |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Forcible Sex Play                | .774             |
| Sex Victimization                | .857             |
| Self-control                     | .849             |
| Beliefs About Rape               | .649             |
| Formal Sex Education             | None             |
| Media Sex Education              | .715             |
| Friends and Family Sex Education | .692             |

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### Hypotheses

Several hypotheses guided this research. The hypotheses are listed as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Previous sex education affects definitions of sexual violence (i.e. “what is rape?”) (Easteal, 1992).

**Hypothesis 2:** Religious affiliation affects definitions of sexual violence.

**Hypothesis 3:** Religious affiliation and sexual activity are directly related.

**Hypothesis 4:** Gender affects definitions of “who is the rapist?” (Easteal, 1992)

**Hypothesis 5:** Gender and the source of sexual education are related.

#### Hypothesis 1

Previous sexual education and personal definitions of sexual violence were found to be positively correlated (Formal Sex Education = .170\* and for Friends and Family Sex Education = .148\*). This association between these two variables bears directly on questions such as “what is rape?” (Easteal, 1992). The results demonstrated support for Hypothesis 1 because there was a significant relationship between the types of previously received sexual education and the dependent variable. Thus, sexual education classes do play a role in shaping opinions about sexual violence. More specifically, how this role varies from person to person suggests another avenue for future research.

#### Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis posited a relationship between an individual’s religious affiliation and their definition of sexual violence. Neither correlation matrix revealed a statistically significant relationship between these two variables (-.106 and .003). Hypothesis 2 was not supported: there was no statistically significant relationship between religious affiliation and the dependent variable. In fact, there was a negative relationship. This suggests that, for this study, religious affiliation had little or no influence on student’s definition of sexual violence.

### Hypothesis 3

It was hypothesized that an individual's religious affiliation would be directly associated with previous levels of sexual activity. The two correlation matrices yielded  $-.077$  and  $.097$  for this inquiry. The results did not support Hypothesis 3 since there was not a significant relationship between religious affiliation and the dependent variable. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 evinced either a negative or minimal relationship. A negative relationship means that students' levels of sexual activity were unaffected by religious affiliation. This is an especially interesting finding, because this study was conducted in the "Bible Belt" where it is a common stereotype that people are more likely to abstain from sexual activity based on their religious associations. This study indicates otherwise. The majority of students who participated in this survey were Protestant, indicating that despite their being so affiliated had no effect on their levels of sexual activity.

### Hypothesis 4

Does gender affect definitions of "who is the rapist?" (Easteal, 1992). Correlation matrices revealed that gender and definitions of "who is the rapist?" were not statistically related and Hypothesis 4 was not supported. Surprisingly, in this study gender was an insignificant contributing factor in identification of "who is the rapist?".

### Hypothesis 5

Does gender affect the source of previously received sexual education? The correlation matrices for both the "Forcible Sex Play Scale" and the "Sex Victimization Scale" yielded statistically insignificant values (formal sex education =  $-.026$ , media sex education =  $-.052$ , and friends and family sex education =  $-.093$ ). Gender and previously received sources of sexual education were not positively correlated. In fact, there was a

negative statistical relationship. This hypothesized relationship between gender and the type of previous sexual education received was not affirmed.

While most of the relationships between the hypotheses and the dependent variables were not found to be significant, the results for Hypothesis 1 were significant. The type of sexual education an individual receives is relevant to their definition of sexual violence. In other words, effective sexual education leads to broadened definitions of rape, potentially resulting in a larger number of victims but could decrease victimization. Most individuals commonly believe that being forced to have sex is rape, and that other types of sexual violence are not in the same category. A greater understanding of what constitutes rape and other forms of sexual violence can lead to more effective safeguards. This increases their capacity to assist others in identifying risky situations leading to potential victimization.

### **Chapter 5: Discussion**

Arguably, perceptions of sexual violence are influenced by an individual's environment, especially during the adolescence maturation process. Opinions as to what defines sexual violence vary, as do perceptions of what is deemed acceptable sexual behavior. A variety of societal factors impact the formation of definitions and these differ from person to person. For example, some individual's definitions of sexual violence are most influenced by their familial upbringing, while others more so by the mass media or school. Whatever authority shapes personal definitions, plays a major role in their life. Thus, education has a strong, meaningful influence on individuals' interactions and behaviors from adolescence to adulthood. This being said, it is important that the sources of sexual education received be effective. Results from this study suggested that current types of sexual education are ineffective, and in fact often leads pushes individuals towards increased likelihood of victimizing others. This approach to sexual education should be changed. Higher standards for sexual education provide potential victims with strategies for avoiding sexual violence. Effective sexual education programs can also reach potential victimizers. If the number of victimizers can be reduced, then it logically follows that the number of victims will be reduced as well.

Typically, there is a mixture of influences on a person's definition of sexual violence. Diverse learning experience and teaching cycles contribute to disparate definitions. What one individual deems acceptable sexual activity, another may find appalling. To examine these queries the study focus was twofold: (1) to determine what types of influences affect the definitions of sexual violence for undergraduate students at a mid-size southern university and (2) how these individuals have been affected in their roles as either victim or victimizer. Concisely stated, how did the information gathered relate to their sexual experiences, sexual education, and beliefs about rape?

### **Methodology**

This study included 77 questions compiled from Easteal's (1992) "Beliefs about Rape", "Sexual Experiences Survey" (Koss and Gidycz, 1985), "Informal Sex Education Survey", and "Low Self Control" (Grasmick, 1993). Each of these survey instruments was proven highly reliable in previous research. Using Cronbach's alpha the survey instruments were found to be reliable through internal consistency in this study as well, and only the "Beliefs About Rape" Scale (Easteal, 1992) was found to be a little low. The survey instrument was available online to facilitate student participation. Students were linked to the survey via social media or the university's e-mail network. Scales were constructed through factor analysis for: "Forcible Sex Play" ( $r = .774$ ), "Sex Victimization" ( $r = .857$ ), "Self-control" ( $r = .849$ ), "Beliefs about Rape" ( $r = .649$ ), "Formal Sex Education" (no  $r$  formulated because there were only two questions), "Media Sex Education" ( $r = .715$ ), and "Friends and Family Sex Education" ( $r = .692$ ). Then the "Forcible Sex Play" and "Sex Victimization" scales were framed in two separate correlation matrices to compare frequencies as well as the aforementioned

scales.

### **Findings and Implications**

Descriptive statistics for this study yielded many interesting results. In the correlation matrix the “Forcible Sex Play Scale” demonstrated a positive relationship with age ( $p \leq .05$ ). Thus, age increases, so does the likelihood of forcing another into sex acts. Moreover, the likelihood of being a victim actually increased with age. If individuals are better educated about sexual violence at a younger age would the likelihood of becoming a victimizer decrease? Certainly this question provides an opportunity for future research.

The correlation matrix contained a positive relationship between sexual orientation and forcible sex play ( $p \leq .05$ ). This means that students who identified themselves as homosexual, asexual, or bisexual had a greater likelihood of forcing someone into a sex act than those who were heterosexual. Interestingly, the “Sex Victimization Scale” also revealed a positive relationship between sexual orientation and sex victimization ( $p \leq .05$ ). This implies that non-heterosexuality increases their chances of victimization. Seemingly, identification as a non-heterosexual increases the likelihood of perpetrating sexual violence as well as being a victim. A possible explanation for this finding is the stigma experienced by homosexuals, asexuals, and bisexuals in this region of the country often leads to discrimination.

The literature review revealed that women are most commonly victims of sexual violence. This is particularly interesting, as this study revealed that non-heterosexuals are more likely to be victims of sexual violence. No effort was made to delineate whether non-heterosexual respondents were male or female. However, the results suggest that



female student may experience greater victimization, but non-heterosexuals are also at risk. Perhaps there is a need for more directed focus on teaching non-heterosexuals of the dangers of sexual violence.

The “Forcible Sex Play Scale” also revealed a positive relationship between formal sex education and forcible sex play ( $p \leq .05$ ). This indicates that with increasing levels of formal sex education (i.e. a school or church program) the likelihood of becoming a victimizer increases. This may suggest that the structure and content of current formal sources of sex education are ineffective. They fail to provide the necessary information for development of appropriate attitudes towards sexual violence. The “Friends and Family Sex Education” scale was positively related to “Forcible Sex Play” ( $p \leq .05$ ). This implies that the sexual education one receives from friends and family increases likelihood of victimizing another person. This finding suggests a lack of realistic sexual education within families or, non-healthy sex related values are being taught in homes. This could also imply that individual’s associations with others affect personal definitions of sexual violence. More reliable sources of both formal sex education and family sex education should increase knowledge of sexual violence and hopefully decrease victimization. This is deemed another worthwhile research venue.

A strong relationship was evidenced between the “Forcible Sex Play” and “Self Control” scales ( $p \leq .01$ ). In other words, as self-control decreased, the likelihood of victimizing others increased. Individuals who exhibit less control over their actions are more likely behave without premeditation or consideration of others. The “Sex Victimization” scale on the correlation matrix also showed a strong relationship with self-control ( $p \leq .01$ ). This suggests that the less self-control a person exhibits the higher the

likelihood that they will become a victim of sexual violence. Further, individuals lacking self-control are also more likely to victimize others, be a victim himself /herself, or maybe even play both roles (victim and victimizer) simultaneously. This could suggest a need for teaching younger children about self-control. This study revealed that as an individual ages, the likelihood of victimization does as well. The earlier a child can learn about self-control and sexual violence the lower their odds of becoming a victim or victimizing someone else. This is not to say that very young children should be exposed to such information unnecessarily, but a basic knowledge should be provided and expanded upon as they progress in age.

The “Forcible Sex Play Scale” yielded a strong relationship ( $p \leq .01$ ) with beliefs about rape. An individual with a more liberal stance on sexual violence is more likely to victimize others according to the “Beliefs About Rape” (Easteal, 1992) Scale. This could suggest that friends and family, as well as formal sex education sources produce more relaxed perspectives on sexual violence. Individuals who have not received formal sex education providing a thorough understanding of sexual violence are more likely to hold more liberal beliefs about sexual victimization. This, in turn, increases their chances of being a sex offender. This indicates a strong need for more effective sources of sexual education, to reduce both the number of offenders and victims.

### **Limitations**

The current study encountered several limitations. The lengthy survey instrument, while available online, may have deterred some students from participating or completing the entire survey. Additionally, there is no way to determine whether respondents answered all questions with complete honesty. Another possible limitation was the

inclusion of student participation from only one university. Incorporating more universities in future research could broaden results for a more accurate, broader assessment of attitudes towards sexual violence. While the findings may not be applicable to other parts of the country, they are considered descriptive for this particular university at this time.

### **Future Research**

The current study revealed that the types of sexual education an individual receives are relevant to his/her definition of sexual violence. Also, self-control is relevant to a person's chances of both perpetrating and being a victim of sexual violence. Non-heterosexuality was shown to increase a respondent's chances of perpetrating and being a victim of sexual violence as well. There is a direct and positive relationship between age and being a sex victimizer; i.e., as age increases, so does the chances of an individual becoming a perpetrator of sexual violence. This finding suggests that an avenue for future research.

Increasing sample size could improve results by expanding the study to include undergraduate students at universities in other regions of the country. Intuitively, this would provide a better overall picture of the definitions of sexual violence and ultimately grant researchers more complete information for improving sex education.

This research did not inquire as to whether the respondent's had any lasting effects as a result of their victimization. This could provide a promising possibility for future studies. There were student participants in this investigation who admitted having been victims of sexual violence. The extent of their victimization was not identified, nor was

any long lasting effects they may bear. It is important to understand not only that individuals are victims, but also how their victimization has changed their lives. Future research could delve into ways that victims feel they could be better assisted in returning to a normal routine and comfortable state of mind.

This research examined how sexual education plays a vital role in undergraduate students' definitions of sexual violence. Improving sources of sexual education could be helpful in reducing levels of victimization. Future research might include a more in-depth examination of how friends and family purvey sexual education to individuals and how that information source could be improved to expand the knowledge of sexual violence. Lowering rates of victimization would be an anticipated result.

“Scare tactics” (i.e. showing graphic pictures of sexually transmitted disease and live birth films) in school sex education programs could prove a viable research component. As students learn more about the nature of sexual violence they should be more effective in avoiding victimization. This study could include informing students about opportunities for contraception, rather than omitting the topic. Opening the door for a more straightforward discussion about sexuality and sexual violence should result in decreased victimization. Certainly that is a worthy goal.

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