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Creepers, Druggers, and Predator Ambiguity: The Interactional Construction of Campus Victimization and the University Sex Predator

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Abstract

In response to the pervasive problem of sexual victimization on campus, many colleges in the United States have adopted bystander intervention programs which seek to educate students and provide them with the tools necessary to intervene in potentially risky situations. Research shows that how potential bystanders construct potential victims and perpetrators of campus victimization significantly impacts their progression to intervention. As an extension of Pugh, Ningard, Vander Ven and Butler's (*Deviant Behavior*, 2016) work on victim ambiguity, the present study drew from intensive interviews of 30 undergraduates from a large university in the American Midwest to examine how students construct perpetrators in situations that hold the potential for sexual assault. Findings suggest that common stereotypes about alcohol, sexual assault, and risk guided bystander constructions of potential perpetrators of sexual assault in the drinking scene, which influenced their self-reported intervention likelihood. Respondents referred to strangers, the transient type (i.e., those who suspiciously leave a party scene with a woman), Bdruggers,^ Bcreepers,^ and other social indicators when discussing typical predators and the informal strategies for recognizing them in the drinking scene. Program implications are discussed.

Keywords

Alcohol-related sexual assault, Bystander intervention, Predator, Ambiguity, College

Introduction

Recent research on the study of campus crime has revealed that sexual assault is a common social problem in the collegiate setting. A recent report from the Association of American Universities (AAU) found that 23.1% of undergraduate women from 27 universities had experienced "nonconsensual penetration or sexual touching involving physical force or incapacitation…since entering college" (Cantor, Fisher, & Chibnall, 2015, p. 57). Other studies have estimated similar rates of victimization (see Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2005; Sinozich & Langton, 2014; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Of particular importance to any discussion of sexual assault on college campuses is the high rate of alcohol-related sexual assault. An estimated 50–75% of sexual assaults on campus involve one party having consumed alcohol (either the victim, offender, or both) (Abbey, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002). The AAU study found "Among undergraduate females, about as many individuals reported penetration by incapacitation [using drugs or alcohol] (5.4%) as by physical force (5.7%)" (Cantor et al., 2015, p. ix).

In response to the prevalence of sexual victimization on campus, many universities have implemented bystander intervention programs. Bystander intervention programs attempt to reduce instances of victimization by educating students on how to intervene in situations in which they observe the potential for a sexual assault to occur. This form of education transfers responsibility from solely the victim and perpetrator to any potential witnesses, in hopes of increasing the likelihood of prevention (Banyard, 2008). Bystander intervention may be an effective framework to not only assist in prevention efforts, but also to dispel rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs that may inhibit a bystander's ability and desire to intervene (Banyard, 2008; Katz & Moore, 2013). Banyard, Moynihan, and Plante (2007) found that bystander programming was effective in decreasing rape myths and in elevating knowledge about sexual victimization and confidence in intervening in a threatening situation. The bystander program participants were also increasingly likely to engage in prosocial bystander behavior after training.

However, alcohol use and abuse on campus may shape the manner through which students perceive situations in which they observe a potential for a sexual assault to occur; and these implications may serve as barriers to bystander intervention. Of particular

concern to the present study is whether students' attitudes toward potential predators in the college drinking scene affect their evaluations of such potential predators and decisions whether or not to intervene when the opportunity arises. Thus, the present study analyzes intensive interviews of 30 undergraduates from a large university in the American Midwest to examine how students construct perpetrators in situations that hold the potential for sexual assault and how these constructions may serve as barriers to bystander intervention.

A Brief Review of the Literature on Barriers to Bystander Intervention

According to Burn (2009), the following obstacles may decrease the likelihood of bystander intervention: 1) Bystander's failure to notice a situation in which there was a potential for sexual victimization, 2) Bystander's failure to determine a situation necessitates intervention, 3) Bystander's failure to take responsibility for intervening, 4) Bystander's failure to intervene because the bystander does not know how to intervene, and 5) Bystander's failure to intervene because of their perception of the surrounding audience.

In the first three barriers listed above, Burn (2009) identifies the potential for situational ambiguity. Burn (2009) argues that bystander intervention is impeded by the attitudes students hold toward victims, particularly in the college drinking scene. Pugh, Ningard, Vander Ven, and Butler (2016) further examined the relationship between the construction of the sexual assault victim in the campus drinking scene and bystander intervention. Specifically, the authors sought to 1) Bidentify if and when students conceptualize alcohol-fueled sexual encounters as holding the potential for sexual assault;^ 2) Bunderstand what factors students use to determine whether or not they will intervene;^ 3) B[identify] if and when students actually intervene;^ and 4) understand how they intervene (p. 4). The study's findings suggest that beliefs and assumptions related to alcohol, sex, and sexual assault may influence bystander perceptions of potential victims and, in turn, affect their decision to intervene or not. For example, Pugh et al. (2016) found that students may choose not to intervene if they believe the victim is promiscuous and therefore not worthy of help. Furthermore, while bystanders were willing to help their female friends, this was dependent on the

perpetrator's relationship to the victim, as intervention likelihood appeared to be more likely if the female friend was with a male stranger (Pugh et al., 2016). This suggests that a bystander's construction of the sexual predator in the campus drinking scene may also influence whether or not and how a student intervenes when they observe a potential for sexual assault.

Other scholars have investigated the social forces that effect the intervention behaviors of bystanders. For example, Hoxmeier, Flay, and Acock (2015) found that students reported a greater intent to intervene with the potential or actual victim compared to the potential or actual perpetrator. In addition, Hoxmeier et al. (2015) discovered that the women in their sample had a greater intent to intervene with both the potential or actual victims and perpetrators compared to male informants. In a study of college undergraduates, Katz, Pazienza, Olin, and Rich (2015) reported that bystanders intended to offer more help to friends than to strangers and reported feeling greater personal responsibility to help when the potential victim was a friend rather than stranger. The men in Katz et al.'s (2015) sample reported more victim blame and less empathic concern for potential victims than did female bystanders. Furthermore, the authors found that bystander assignment of victim blame was not affected by observing a friend versus a stranger. In contrast to Katz et al. (2015), some researchers have found no differences in either intent or actual assistance extended to friends versus strangers (Banyard, 2008).

Finally, Palmer, Nicksa, and McMahon (2016) identified patterns in the factors that affect intervention intentions and intervention styles. Through an analysis of student reactions to vignettes, the researchers found that in situations involving potential sexual assault, students who knew the victim or perpetrator chose more direct forms of intervention. And men, compared to female respondents, had the highest probability of directly intervening in the sexual assault scenario.

While the aforementioned studies shed light on the factors that shape intentions to help, little is known about the social processes through which perceptions are constructed about potential predators, their intentions, and their behaviors. In this context, the present study is an extension of Pugh et al.'s (2016) work on the construction of the victim in potential sexual assault situations with the focus now turned to the construction of the

potential perpetrator. In keeping with the framework of the preceding study, the current study also adopts a social constructionist approach to understanding sexual victimization on college campuses. We examine the relationship between students' construction of the campus sexual predator and bystander intervention in the context of alcohol-related sexual assault. Ultimately, this study is intent on evaluating the process through which bystanders identify potential predators and if and how students intervene or intend to intervene in settings where there is a potential for alcohol-related sexual assault. To do so we employ a qualitative analysis of 30 interviews with college students to identify the characteristics students use to recognize campus sexual predators and to expand upon Burn (2009) and Pugh et al.'s (2016) work to describe how these perceptions are used in the process of bystander intervention.

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws upon Spector and Kitsuse's (1977) model of understanding social problems as a definitional process. In *Constructing Social Problems,* Spector and Kitsuse (1977) argued that a phenomenon becomes a social problem because it is defined as such by claims-makers. In the case of campus sexual victimization, claims-makers may include researchers, university officials, politicians, lobbyists, student organizations, or individual students. The claims-making activity is the effort by any of these groups or individuals to identify campus sexual victimization as a social problem and to establish policies and programs to address and reduce the scope of the problem.

Identifying the claims-makers for this condition and understanding how these groups of people construct campus sexual assault has important policy and program implications. Vander Ven (2011) found college students typically consume alcohol in social settings and the definitions they collectively attach to social drinking and its consequences are self-perpetuating. Therefore, as this study is concerned with alcohol-related sexual assault, it is vital to examine the ways in which students—the key social actors in campus alcohol use—assess sexual predators in their own words. In the context of Burn's (2009) findings of situational ambiguity as a significant barrier to intervention, it is particularly important to examine the claims students make about the characteristics of a campus sexual predator. This approach is necessary to identify the

variables related to a predator's behavior, appearance, or identity which facilitate or impede bystander intervention in reality.

In order to understand the social construction of the campus sexual predator, it is imperative to first establish the theoretical framework through which the present study views this process. Donileen Loseke (2003) described two people-types constructed in the claims-making process of defining a phenomenon as a social problem: the victim and the victimizer. Pugh et al. (2016) extended Burn's analysis of students' perceptions of *situations* to focus on the judgments students make about different categories of victim people-types. In the current study, we examine the judgments students make about categories of the victimizer person-type in the process of the social construction of the campus sexual predator. According to Loseke (2003), the victimizer person-type is understood to be someone who is immoral and is intentionally causing harm to the victim. This invokes negative emotions in those who identify the victimizer as such. Then, because "common sense reasoning links morality with expectable emotional and behavioral responses," these negative emotions lead to punitive behaviors directed at the victimizer (Loseke, 2003, p 123).

Loseke's (2003) conception of people-types carry significant meaning for bystander intervention programs. Pugh et al. (2016) found that when bystanders felt sympathy for potential victims it often instigated an emotional and behavioral response. Therefore, in line with Pugh et al.'s (2016) findings and Loseke's (2003) theory, when bystanders believe a potential predator fits the victimizer person-type, this should trigger intervention. In order for bystanders to intervene, they must determine that the situation at hand necessitates intervention (Burn, 2009); part of this is determining that the potential offender in a given situation has the immoral attitudes and behaviors which may lead to victimization, the intent to inflict harm upon the potential victim, or both. The current study seeks to identify the words, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors bystanders associate with the campus sexual predator person-type. Ultimately, this can help to identify factors which facilitate or impede intervention.

Data and Methods

Intensive interviews were conducted over a 2-year period beginning in 2010 and

ending in 2012. The interview guide was created by Pugh and colleagues (2016) and was modeled after questions used in Burn's (2009) study with adjustments made to focus the questions on alcohol-related sexual assault. The researchers chose to conduct interviews, rather than surveys or observations, because this method allows participants to address preset questions as well as elaborate on topics that researchers did not include in their interview schedule (Pugh et al., 2016). All interview participants were recruited by and interviewed by Pugh and colleagues. The senior investigator led interview training exercises for the research team.

This semi-structured interview method allows participants to "describe their experiences," "give examples," and "explain their answers" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 2–3). The interview instrument including a variety of questions intended to capture intervention steps in Burn's (2009) model and with attention to the potential social factors that might shape intervention. For example, interviewers asked: "At a party or bar, do you feel that you are sometimes too busy or distracted to notice a risky situation?"; "When you determine the situation as risky, under what circumstances would you feel personally responsible for intervening?"; and "If a friend is known for promiscuous behavior, are you less inclined to step in and help?" While Pugh et al.'s (2016) focus was on the conceptualization of the potential victim, the interview participants also provided rich qualitative data about the conceptualization of the potential offender, which provided the basis for the present study. It should be noted that informants were asked to draw upon their personal experiences related to risk and intervention in the drinking scene as well as to expound upon their *likely* intervention behavior if confronted with a high-risk situation. Thus, the interview data includes self- reported actual intervention behavior as well as speculative intervention behavior given certain situations. As part of the agreement with the Institutional Review Board, the interviewers resolved to report acts of sexual victimization if they were revealed in the interviews; participants were made aware of this during the informed consent process. To further protect confidentiality of information, informants were asked to use refrain from using the names of people or places or to use pseudonyms.

The research informants were all Caucasian students at a large Midwestern university who had entered college between the ages 18–19. Informants ranged in

academic year from freshman to senior; no graduate students were included. All informants lived either on campus or in nearby student housing. There were 30 participants total—17 females and 13 males—with a mean age of 19.85 years. The data collection process required an informed consent form given to all participants and the approval of the University's institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Informants were not compensated for participation. The first round of interviewees was recruited by approaching students in classroom buildings or highly populated campus areas such as dining halls and the university library. When a student chose to participate in an interview, the interview was conducted immediately in a private setting for approximately forty-five to ninety minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All participant's names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Following the interview, participants were asked to encourage friends and class-mates to contact the researchers if they were interested in participating in the study. When potential informants contacted the research team, interviews were scheduled in a private setting in a university office building. This method of sampling, known as chain referral, was employed in order to account for constraints on the researchers' time and budget which precluded the use of a representative sampling method.

The present study applies of Loseke's (2003) perspective on the construction of people-types to an analysis of bystanders' descriptions of potential sexual predators. The following inductive codes relating to the campus sexual predator were identified: *strangers, bad reputation, sober predators, druggers, drink feeders, transients, touchers, messers, suspect body language, creepers, friends/acquaintances,* and *assumed guardians*. These were codes that emerged as recurrent themes during multiple readings of the interview transcripts. To organize the findings in terms of the theoretical framework, the codes are presented in the findings as they apply to the theoretical themes "intent to harm," "immorality," or to a third theme that emerged during the analysis: "predator ambiguity." In other words, the authors identified how each code reflected a term students use to attribute intent to harm, immorality, or ambiguity to a potential predator.

For example, the code *druggers* applied to the themes "intent to harm" and

“immorality” as it represented respondents’ expressions that putting drugs into a woman’s drink is a display of explicit intent to cause harm to that woman (which is in itself considered immoral). However, while “intent to harm” is virtually always associated with immorality, actions deemed immoral are not always deemed as intentionally harmful. For example, the code *creepy/shady/sleazy* typically applied only to the theme “immorality” as it represented respondents’ expressions that “creepy” behaviors spoke to the perceived immorality of the potential predator, but not necessarily the potential predators knowing intent to harm the victim. Other coding terms applied to neither Bimmorality^ nor Bintent to harm^ and instead reflected a respondent’s description of factors that result in ambiguity as to whether an individual is a potential predator of not. These codes were categorized under the theme Bpredator ambiguity.^

Findings

The trends in respondents’ construction of potential campus sexual predators are described in the following subsections. The inductive coding terms are organized into three sections: 1) terms used to attribute intent to harm to the potential predator, 2) terms used to attribute immorality to the potential predator, and 3) terms used to attribute ambiguity to the potential predator. The implications of each term on respondents’ decision to or willingness to intervene are discussed.

Intent to Harm

The two major components that Loseke (2003) identifies (i.e., intent to harm and immorality) in the victimizer person-type category are not mutually exclusive. It can be argued that any time a bystander deemed a potential sexual predator as intending to cause harm, they are inherently deeming that person’s behavior as immoral. These instances reflect the bystander’s recognition and emotional response to behaviors they consider predatory. Some respondents reflected unique emotional responses when intent to harm was apparent and, in turn, unique behavioral responses to the condition. The codes placed into this category included 1.) *Strangers/Bad reputation*, 2.) *Sober predators/Druggers/Drink feeders*, and 3.) *Transients.*

Strangers and Bad Reputation Many respondents relied on their previous

knowledge of the potential predator as an indicator of intent to harm. In some cases, the individual represented danger because they were unknown to bystanders and other cases the person in question signaled risk because they were known to have a reputation for risk (bad reputation). The majority of respondents said they would intervene to help a friend when a stranger or a person with a bad reputation was the potential predator. The most prevalent theme throughout the interviews was distrust of strangers (those for whom they had no prior knowledge). Several respondents reported that seeing a stranger talking to or flirting with a woman was a strong enough indicator of a potential predator to trigger intervention. For example, Kelly, a 20-year-old female, described intervening with a woman being pursued by a group of men. She reported telling the woman, “That’s not a safe after-party for you! You have no friends—you’ve never met these people before.” Chris, a 20-year-old male, also identified strangers as predators: “I feel that the bar scene in itself is…a lot more dangerous, I feel because…there’s a lot more strangers.”

Similarly, some respondents voiced that they felt more comfortable intervening when they knew of the man’s reputation as someone who had committed sexual assault in the past, had sex with a lot of women, used drugs himself, or had drugged women in the past. Some respondents identified specific groups with bad reputations. For example, Annie, a 19-year-old female, told interviewers, “There’s another fraternity on campus that like a few years ago really did have a bad reputation…I was petrified when I had heard that…then an older woman in my sorority had told me about like, ‘you should watch out for them.’” In this case, an entire campus organization had a reputation for sexual assault and therefore was identified by the respondent’s friend as intending to harm.

Additionally, some respondents stated that if they knew the potential predator and the potential victim had a tumultuous history together the bystander saw the potential for sexual assault. Andrew, a 20-year-old male, stated, Bif they are exes then obviously I’m going to jump in and be like wooo stop the train.^ Similarly, Helen, a 21-year old female, said, B[if] I knew ‘oh my gosh she totally hated him,’ or he had done something to her in the past, like he cheated on her or he hit her…then something is wrong.^ In both of these cases, the respondents expressed a belief that their prior knowledge of a man’s

bad reputation was a reliable indicator of his future intent to cause some form of harm to the potential victim.

Furthermore, some respondents who saw a man with a bad reputation making advances on a woman deemed it indicative of intent to cause harm and cause for intervention. This compulsion to intervene was reflected in Andrew's statement above, and in Chase's (20-year-old male), who said if someone Bis expressing interest and has a bad reputation and you've heard about that reputation…then you step in and inform your friend and let them know of what the risks are and hope they heed your word.B For Chase, prior knowledge of a potential offender's bad reputation was reason to intervene when that person was interacting with a friend. However, in many cases, when deciding whether to intervene in the cases of potential predators who were strangers or who had a bad reputation, respondents relied both on their prior knowledge of the potential predator *and* some of the other indicators of intent to harm or immorality discussed below.

Sober Predators, Druggers, and Drink Feeders Three indicators students used to identify potential predators were specifically related to alcohol and drugs—sober predators, druggers, and drink feeders. Some respondents identified sober predators as intending to harm because the potential predator was knowingly attempting to engage in sexual conduct with someone who could not consent. Andrew indicated that a sober male in the drinking scene stood out as a potential threat when asked how he decides "if [a] person is okay to flirt with your friend or if they are a creeper?^ He responded, BI would look basically at…their speech, at do they seem drunk? Do they seem sober? It'd be weird if they were at a bar and they were really sober and talking to girls." While sober predators were mentioned in multiple interviews, respondents more frequently referred specifically to predators who used substances to incapacitate their victims than they did to predators who were simply suspicious because they themselves were not intoxicated.

Respondents identified dosing an unknowing victim with some kind of drug as victimization in and of itself, as an indicator of intent to commit further sexual victimization, and as an act that necessitated intervention. For example, Chris told the story of when his friend was drugged: "We knew something happened, so we got her out of there…her drink was open. She probably turned around and didn't see it… somebody maybe dropped something in there." In this case, though Chris did not see the predator

who drugged his friend, he did see the aftermath of the drugging as cause for immediate intervention. This suggests that bystanders see drugging as serious, and in turn, may feel more responsible for intervening when they can identify a potential predator as a "drugger."

Respondents also claimed that certain groups of men were the type of people who would use drugs to commit sexual assault. For example, Kelly recalled, "When I was in Greek Life, the fraternity would put doses of Adderall, crush doses of Adderall, in our drink." Allen, a 21-year-old male, echoed this, "whenever you say you're going to a frat house or whatever it's like, don't drink the punch or like keep watch over your beer." As students identify certain groups, particularly fraternities, as associated with the drugger-type, they are likely to include this stereotype in their construction of the campus sexual predator.

According to several respondents, drink-feeders, similar to druggers and sober predators, indicated through their behavior that they intend to engage in sexual conduct with a woman who is too intoxicated to be able to consent. Lily, a 19-year-old female, said "they're like using the alcohol to their advantage. They keep feeding that person alcohol." Lily went on to say that "They [drink feeders] know what they're doing," indicating the predator's knowing intent to harm. In some cases, the identification of a drink feeder triggered intervention. For example, Kelly told interviewers that when one of her friends was "talking to a guy, who does not have a very good track record, and, would not stop buying her shots" another friend approached the potential predator and said "'you need to leave, don't mess with her anymore.'" In the above examples, respondents' statements show that for these three types of predators (sober predators, druggers, and drink feeders), bystanders relied on the predator's behavioral cues related to alcohol use or drugging to identify intent to harm.

Transients Another behavior that respondents identified as an indicator of potential sexual assault was when a couple disappeared from the bystander's sight, suggesting that the potential predator was strategically moving the potential victim to an unsafe space. On the risk of drinking scene transience, Helen warns, "Girls watch out for your girlfriends, guys watch out for your guy friends, you know, make sure no one goes disappearing, notice who the oddball couple is to be disappearing off." Respondents

identified a potential predator's physical removal of the potential victim from the location of their encounter (i.e., luring, leading, or carrying the potential victim away) as an indicator that the male could be a sexual predator and that a bystander should intervene. For example, Jenna, an 18-year-old female, stated that intervention is the norm when a friend is trying to leave with someone she does not know ("We don't just let our friends go off with some random guy"). Allen considered potential sexual victimization as "if a guy was carrying a girl over his shoulders, like I guess down an alley way." As is evident in the above statements, the respondent's prior knowledge of the potential predator shaped how dangerous they perceived party transience to be.

Immorality

While "intent to harm" indicated that the potential sexual predator intended to knowingly commit sexual assault, "immorality" did not necessarily indicate a known potential to harm. Respondents who identified the potential sexual predator's immorality often framed the potential sexual predator's behavior as wrong but not knowingly having the intention to be criminal. Potential sexual predators that are deemed "immoral" but not necessarily intending to harm can generally be categorized as the type of male who is using immoral behaviors and operating under immoral attitudes to obtain sex without defining the obtainment of sex as inflicting harm upon the victim. Essentially, these predators are the type of men who are just trying to "get laid." It is important to distinguish this type of predator from the predator who knowingly intends to harm his victim because the immoral predator evokes a different type of emotional response and, in turn, a different behavioral response from bystanders. The codes which can most closely be applied to the theme of immorality were *touchers*, *messers*, *creepers,* and *suspect body language*.

Touchers and Messers Respondents often saw the invasion of the potential victim's personal space as indicating lack of respect for the potential victim's ownership of her own body. This included predators who were excessively touchy with the potential victim and "messers"—the type of person who uses physical or verbal contact to antagonize, isolate, joke with, or make a flirtatious advance on a potential victim. When asked what behaviors deviate from normative interaction, Emma, a 19-year-old female,

responded “if they’re trying to just like grab your butt or feeling all over you or are they keeping their hands off…the bubble, the personal bubble is huge.” For Emma, whether or not a man was touching the potential victim was a major sign of the potential for sexual assault to occur.

However, most respondents who used the messer person-type as an indicator of a sexual predator saw the behaviors as immoral but stated that they perceived the predator as believing his behavior to be funny or flirtatious, not harmful. Kelly describes the perceived humor of “messing,”

> In a bar, they see ‘oh, the drunkest girl, let’s see if we can mess with her,’ just messing with her and maybe telling her the bathroom is the men’s door…I think they think it’s funny, and someone in the group takes it a step further, and then takes it a step further, that just leads to some problems.

Without the clear intent to harm under the condition in which this people-type operates, bystanders did not consistently identify this as an indicator which necessitated intervention unless they were able to identify cues from the victim that the victim is uncomfortable or is requesting bystander intervention. For example, Allen responded, “Like if a girl was unable to walk and like a guy was practically carrying her then I’d probably say something.” Jenna said, “If there’s confrontation it’s because something has gone terribly wrong. Like someone was inappropriately touched, someone was feeling extremely uncomfortable, and is screaming.” Therefore, bystanders may fail to intervene when someone is messing with or excessively touching a potential victim but the victim does not give signs that she is being harmed.

Suspect Body Language and Creepers While many respondents reported paying close attention to the potential victim’s body language, others reported that the potential sexual predator’s body language was a sign of his immorality. In fact, physical conduct was commonly relied upon as an indicator of a potential sexual predator. Multiple respondents stated that they pay attention to body language to make judgments on the potential threat of a sexual predator. When asked “how do you decide if that person’s okay to flirt with your friend or if they’re a creeper to be avoided?” Chase, a 20-year- old male said, “I would say, for looking at things, I mean, really kind of watch his eyes, you know, see where he’s looking and if he’s looking at her face, then fine. If he’s

clearly looking elsewhere, then I mean, just keep your eyes on him is all." In this case the predator's body language would serve as a signal to watch for other signs of immorality or intent to harm before deciding to intervene.

Potential sexual predators who were deemed immoral due to the presence of creepy, shady, or sleazy body language were not necessarily perceived to be knowingly causing harm to the potential victim. For example, Liz described the nature of a creepy person in terms of his inability or unwillingness to recognize that their behavior is unwanted; she says, "I think some people are just kinda that way…they're you know, a creepy person. But I think that if the guy's also very drunk that becomes worse because they may not know if someone says "no" they may not stop." As is clear in Liz's statement, immoral behavior can still fit the victimizer profile even if the potential predator does not know he is being immoral or causing harm.

Despite the lack of apparent intent to harm, inappropriate body language was found to serve as a trigger for intervention for some respondents. When asked, "what factors would you evaluate that would help you decide whether or not to intervene?" Melanie responded, "Probably the biggest I guess is body language, which can show you if that person is drunk or unhappy…and if that guy or girl is being forceful." Other respondents echoed this sentiment that forcefulness was a clear sign that intervention was necessary, some stating their friends would give tell them a man was being "creepy." Chris said, "they're my friends, I'm going to get their back and help them out obviously. But yeah, they usually tell me…when somebody is creeping them out." Andrew recalled a specific incidence of intervention: "I've had a girl tell me that a guy was being, quote, creepy and I told that guy to stop being creepy…like 'Hey, you're scaring this girl, you're making her uncomfortable, you need to stop.'" In both Chris' hypothetical statement, and Andrew's anecdote, these respondents relied on the victim telling them they were "creeped out." As was true for other indicators of both intent to harm and immorality, bystanders may require the presence of multiple indicators to trigger their intervention when they recognize creepy behavior or body language.

Predator Ambiguity

As discussed above, many respondents identified situations in which they would

intervene because they identified the potential sexual predator as intending to cause harm or as immoral. However, respondents also identified situations in which they did not/would not intervene because the potential offender could not be deemed either intending to harm or immoral. This theme is especially important because it illuminates a significant barrier to intervention. This theme not only refers to situations in which the aforementioned codes were not present, but rather in situations in which the aforementioned codes may be present but some other factor mitigated the threat these codes indicated. There were two codes which respondents consistently reported as factors that indicated the potential offender could not be defined as a predator and therefore intervention was not appropriate: *friends/acquaintances* and *assumed guardians*.

Friends/Acquaintances Multiple respondents' statements revealed hesitation to intervene in a situation in which the potential predator was a friend or acquaintance. Their statements reflected a sense of inherent trust in an individual in the case that the bystander knew the potential predator or was able to place the potential predator in relation to another friend or acquaintance. Kelly's statement, "If I don't know them, if my group of friends doesn't know them, or somebody doesn't know someone that knows that person, then we gotta move; we gotta get out of there," depicts a process by which a bystander attempts to establish the morality or trustworthiness of an individual and, the subsequent intervention when the bystander is not able to establish such trust. This draws the question—if trust or morality can be established, does the bystander conclude that intervention is not necessary? Chris told a story that described this process and the conclusion he reported reaching when the potential predator is a friend or acquaintance, he said, "if it's a guy I met maybe, like an acquaintance I met once, it's hard to say…but if they themselves are friends with one of my friends, then I feel like that they deserve some amount of trust, just because my friends are willing to consider them, him, a friend."

A barrier to intervening when the perpetrator was a friend or acquaintance that multiple male respondents mentioned was the fear of "ruining the mood" or being a "cock-block" (a negative term for someone who prevents two other individuals from having sex). For example, Kevin, a 19-year-old male, said he would not intervene unless he was "100% certain [a sexual assault was going to occur]." He explained, most

of the people in my hallway, they're my friends…and if it isn't a complete certainty, I won't you know walk in and ruin what could just be you know them, a friend of theirs, or their girlfriend, their boyfriend.^ Additionally, he said he would not intervene if he knew the potential victim and potential offender knew each other because he would not "wanna possibly ruin the mood." Similarly, Allen said he would not mind intervening if the potential predator was a stranger, but, he said, "if it was like a friend, I wouldn't, I don't know if I'd intervene. Like say one of my buddies was trying to like um get a chick to go home with him…I would be less inclined to intervene because he's my friend." This response does not necessarily indicate that the respondent is willing to knowingly allow a friend to cause harm to another, but rather that if a friend is the potential predator, the bystander may not take the step to consider if he has the potential to cause harm. The intervention process may be terminated at the second step, determining that intervention is necessary (Burn, 2009), when the potential predator is the by- stander's friend or acquaintance.

Assumed Guardians The third step of the bystander intervention process—for the bystander to take responsibility for intervening (Burn, 2009)—was, in some cases, impeded by the bystander's assumption that someone else, another "guardian," would intervene. Moreover, some potential bystanders struggled to determine if another social actor was a guardian or if they were a potential predator. Determining the intentions of someone seeming to take a guardianship role was no easy task for some informants.

Several respondents believed that friends, acquaintances, and, in some cases, even strangers, were present to protect a potential victim in the case of a potential sexual victimization. Some female respondents indicated that they trusted their male friends to look out for them in dangerous situations. For example, Kelly stated, "a lot of my really good guy friends, that I've had for 3 years, say that they see a shady guy walk up to you they let it go for a little bit but if it gets to a point where… [he] doesn't really trust them, they'll come over and intervene." Echoing Kelly's claim, Chris contended that it is common for men to intervene when they see a potential for sexual victimization; he described what he believes is a normative situation: "if male A, across the room, sees male B imposing himself on a clearly intoxicated, clearly unaware female, the male A…will either come over, physically separate them, verbally separate them." Other

respondents assumed that a potential victim likely had friends who were capable of and responsible for intervening. For example, Allen told interviewers that while "watching drunk people" in bars, he has observed that, "friends usually look out for like their friends and sometimes even when they're not, they might not even know the person—they'll try to help out." This idea that friends look out for their friends, though it may in part be true, may serve as a barrier to a bystander's decision to take responsibility for intervening.

Possibly an even more dangerous assumption is that a potential sexual predator *is* the guardian of a potential victim. For example, Allen said if he does not know the potential offender or the potential victim he may recognize "Oh this girl needs help," but may not intervene because he may think "Well, maybe she knows this guy—like who am I to like be a dick and say something to him?" In this case, Allen expressed discomfort intervening because he thought he might insult a man who was attempting to help an intoxicated woman. Thus, the barrier to intervention here was an inability to distinguish guardian from potential predator. Similarly, Natalie reported that she would try to determine if the potential predator was a friend or acquaintance of the potential victim, thus implying guardianship. She said, "if she can barely walk and someone, some guy is helping her, the first thing I do pick up is like, what's going on here?…You know, who's to say what their relationship is?" Natalie's inability to determine risk in this situation captures the most problematic crux of predator ambiguity. That is, determining whether or not a potential victim is in the hands of a well-meaning guardian or a harm-intending predator is often not possible given the few relational cues transmitted between social actors passing one another in the drinking scene.

Discussion

The interview data presented in this analysis provides insights into the construction of the campus sexual predator. This analysis allowed the authors to establish some of the indicators bystanders use to identify a potential sexual predator on campus. In framing the study with Loseke's (2003) people-type perspective, these indicators could be placed into more concise and concrete categories. Loseke's (2003) theory that a victimizer is both "intending to harm" and "immoral" provides a guide for

understanding why bystanders complete or do not complete the five steps of the intervention process (Burn, 2009). This analysis also allowed the author to identify the barriers to intervention that arise when bystanders do not construct the campus sexual predator as meeting the components of Loseke's (2003) perspective.

Previous research on campus sexual predators has been primarily focused on identifying risk factors or individual characteristics that increase a person's likelihood to become a campus sexual predator. These factors include the individual's attitudes regarding sex, endorsement of rape-supportive beliefs, and social support for the preceding factors or for committed sexual assaults. It is important to note that most of the risk factors for perpetration may not be readily identifiable to bystanders. For example, a bystander may not be able to determine if a potential offender endorses rape myths, is committed to traditional masculine norms related to conquest and dominance, or holds callous sexual attitudes (Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Edwards, Bradshaw, & Hinsz, 2014). And so while knowledge of these factors may be useful in efforts to change the beliefs of students or to move for changes in cultural values they may not serve as useful criteria for bystanders to look to as they decide whether or not to intervene. We see this barrier to intervention reflected in the findings of the present study. With the exception of the *bad reputation* code, respondents typically did not express knowledge of specific personality characteristics of the potential perpetrator. This was especially true considering that respondents were most likely to identify strangers as potential predators.

Another common barrier was the acceptance of rape myths. Some respondents even explicitly stated that they were aware of rape myths, but that these myths still shaped their intervention behaviors. For example, Amber, a 22-year-old female, acknowledged the reality that most sexual assault occurs between acquaintances or friends, and explains the element of trust which she believes contributes to this aspect of the problem. She says,

> I'm sure sexual assault happens like, more like with acquaintances rather than stranger that is the general stereotype. So, I think it happens because there's like this trust sometimes with your friends, 'Oh hey, I'll walk you home,' 'Okay, well I know you. That's cool,' you know, and then it gets to that point where they just

don’t know.

Like Amber, Lily also recognized the commonality of acquaintance rape, but her tendencies in evaluating situations with the potential for sexual victimization contradicted this. She said, “I’d watch my friends more carefully in probably the random house, although I know that most rapes occur by people you know. So, that’s kind of counterintuitive.” This suggests that although bystanders may be aware that sexual assault is more common among acquaintances, they may be more likely to rely upon the constructed profile that tells them the campus sexual predator is a stranger.

Most importantly, this analysis suggests that in addition to victim ambiguity (Pugh et al., 2016), bystanders may also choose not to intervene due to their inability to identify the potential predator as “intending to harm” or “immoral.” This barrier, *predator ambiguity* most clearly contributes to the bystander’s failure to determine a situation necessitating intervention (step two of Burn’s (2009) model of bystander intervention) and the bystander’s failure to take responsibility for intervention (step three of Burn’s (2009) model). Therefore, just as some respondents in the Pugh et al. (2016) study failed to intervene for victims for whom they felt sympathy but did not see them as assault victims, respondents failed (or said they would fail) to intervene when potential predators did not fit Loseke’s (2003) categories for the offender person-type. The third component of the construction of the campus sexual predator, *predator ambiguity*, raises important questions for bystander intervention programs that seek to effectively prevent alcohol-related sexual assault.

Limitations, Suggestions for Future Research, and Programming Implications

Despite the modest successes of bystander programs, the availability of programs to students is limited. While the 2013 Sexual Assault Violence Elimination Act (SaVE) requires colleges and universities to provide all students with information on bystander intervention programs that are available either at their school or elsewhere, Griffin, Pelletier, Griffin, and Sloan (2016) found that only 33% percent of the 435 universities that they investigated provided bystander intervention information. Cantor and col- leagues found a large percentage of students were reported doing nothing to intervene when “they [had] witnessed a drunk person heading for a sexual encounter’

(77%) or when “they had witnessed someone acting in a sexually violent or harassing manner (54.5%) and many students said they did not intervene because they “weren’t sure what to do.” (2015, p. xxiii). While we do not know whether the respondents had bystander intervention training or not, these findings suggest bystander intervention training is either not available, or not being administered effectively. Furthermore, some respondents in the present study expressed a belief in rape myths, and these beliefs guided their intervention behaviors. While bystander intervention programs may be effective in changing beliefs in rape myths, the may need to pay closer attention to teaching students to acknowledge how their acceptance of rape myths may serve as barriers to intervention. Thus, the findings of this study are important in that they contribute to a better understanding of what hinders the efficacy of bystander intervention training.

The presence of *predator ambiguity* as a barrier to bystander intervention raises many questions. These questions include, but are not limited to: When does predator ambiguity occur? In what circumstances does predator ambiguity impede intervention? What factors of a given circumstance override the barrier of predator ambiguity? And, what changes to bystander intervention programs can address the obstacle of predator ambiguity? Future research should seek to address these questions. Additionally, future research could benefit from expanding the conditions of sexual victimization addressed to include male victimization, female victimizers, same-sex sexual assault, and other conditions not explored in the present study. Furthermore, limitations to our study and data might be addressed by future investigators. These limitations include the lack of racial/ethnic diversity in the sample, exclusion of same-sex victim/perpetrator conditions, exclusion of female perpetrators and male victims, and the absence of interview questions regarding male bystanders stopping male friends from sexually victimizing a female. Future researchers might attend to our limitations by including these factors in research designs and analysis.

These findings, in conjunction with Pugh et al.’s (2016) finding of victim ambiguity, suggest that the efficacy of bystander intervention programs may be limited by bystanders’ struggle to frame potential victims and predators they see in the college drinking scene within their corresponding people types. The variables that influence a

bystander's decision to intervene may be an interaction between their knowledge of, or relationship to, the potential victim *and* the potential predator and such ambiguity may be compounded by ambiguity within the social context of the college drinking scene (Burn, 2009). Therefore, programs that attempt to teach students how to overcome barriers to bystander intervention may benefit from addressing ambiguity on all fronts—situational ambiguity (Burn, 2009), victim ambiguity (Pugh et al., 2016), and predator ambiguity.

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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