

A Cultural Perspective for Understanding How Campus Environments Perpetuate Rape-Supportive Culture

Sarah J. Argiero, Jessica L. Dyrdaahl, Sarah S. Fernandez, Laura E. Whitney, Robert J. Woodring

This article explores the promotion of a rape-supportive culture in three distinct environments: a university residence hall common area, football tailgate event, and a bar. Key features of a rape-supportive culture are the acceptance of rape myths, promotion of hegemonic masculinity, and peer support. Our findings indicate the existence of rape-supportive culture through male controlled environments, use of women as entertainment, influence of interactions between men, and the desensitization of sex.

Sexual violence is a problem that affects most college and university campuses. Studies show there is a higher risk of sexual violence for college-going women than women in the general population (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004). Carr and VanDeusen (2004) found that 20% of all female students experience a sexual assault during college. Even more, in a study sampling college men, they found that roughly 30% of respondents stated they would commit rape if they were sure they had no chance of getting caught (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004). Another study found 1 in 12 college men committed rape according to the legal definition, but a large majority of them did not consider their actions to be rape or illegal (Ouimette & Riggs, 1998). This shows a lack of understanding among men of what constitutes sexual violence, and by stating they would commit sexual violence if there were no ramifications, it is clear some college men have little regard for their female counterparts.

The issue of sexual violence has been studied and documented over the last 30 years, and in that time colleges and universities across the country have acted on the need to develop sexual violence prevention programs. Many of these programs focus on changing the attitudes of students in regard to sexual violence,

including decreasing student acceptance of rape myths, increasing understanding of consent, and increasing empathy for survivors (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007; Foubert & Newberry, 2006). It is clear from previous research that sexual violence is a prevalent issue, particularly on a college campus, yet many misconceptions about the issue still remain.

Part of the issue may be due to the information students, staff, and faculty members receive about sexual violence. Every university is required by the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act), enacted in 1998, to report and distribute statistics on specific criminal offenses, including acts of sexual violence. Institutions are mandated to report crimes that involve students and have been reported to campus security or police. However, it has been found that most universities report no more than a few sexual assault incidents a year (Fischer, Hartman, Cullen, & Turner, 2002).

This discrepancy between research findings of the prevalence of sexual violence and numbers reported by institutions causes some to question whether sexual violence is still an issue on the college campus. For example, MacDonald (2008) argues a rape crisis on college campuses does not exist and believes research misrepresents what

students consider to be normal interactions. Further, MacDonald believes if sexual assault was occurring at high rates it would show in the number of incidents reported by students.

Others argue research findings are a more accurate depiction of what is happening on college campuses and the lack of reporting is due to rape-supportive values on campus (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2000). If students accept rape-supportive values they are more likely to believe experiences, which may be considered sexual assault, are not out of the ordinary (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2000). Students are then less likely to report, because they view these experiences as normal interactions (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2000).

From such a perspective, there are aspects of the general college environment that encourage the development of rape-supportive beliefs and values, but it is unclear how specific campus environments promote them. The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of rape-supportive culture and examine to what extent certain campus environments perpetuate rape-supportive beliefs and values. Our findings illustrate the varying degrees in which rape-supportive culture is perpetuated in these environments. Lastly, this study provides recommendations for institutions in regards to addressing the issue of sexual violence on their campuses.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Defining Sexual Violence

Consensus about what constitutes sexual violence has been elusive. Some limit sexual violence to situations involving physical force (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). Another approach considers sexual coercion, focusing on the use of power and control

through language rather than physical force (Kelly & Radford, 1998). Sexual violence is further defined as sex obtained without the other person's consent (rather than as sex obtained using force), which places responsibility for explicitly seeking sexual consent on the individual (Kelly & Radford, 1998). For the purpose of this study, we define sexual violence as an attempted or completed sexual act, in which one or more parties involved does not provide consent, which can involve sexual coercion and physical force. For the purpose of this study, a sexual act will be defined as any physical contact sexual in nature, including touching, fondling, kissing, oral sex, and/or intercourse (Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G., Lewis, I.A., Smith, C., 1990).

Culture

Culture is the collective pattern of "institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions" (Kuh & Hall, 1993, p. 2). Patterns influence both individual and group behavior. In an institutional culture, these behaviors are created from relationships built over time (e.g. friends, classmates and faculty) and form a shared understanding of a phenomenon that perpetuates and reflects an institution's individual characteristics (Kuh & Hall, 1993). The behaviors provide a frame to make meaning of cultural experiences of the individual and community (Kuh & Hall, 1993).

Cultural artifacts help us to better understand environments (Kuh & Hall, 1993). Artifacts are the tangible aspects of culture. These aspects encompass physical, behavioral and verbal artifacts. Physical artifacts surround people and provide immediate sensory stimuli in the environment. Artifacts on a college campus are structures (e.g. landscaping and clock

towers) and objects (e.g. t-shirts and course syllabi). Behavioral artifacts include rituals and ceremonies, such as induction and commencement ceremonies, homecoming parades, and athletic events (Kuh & Hall, 1993). These behaviors provide students with interactions unique to their culture that connect them to the institution and help build unity and tradition among the population. Language, stories, and myths are examples of verbal artifacts in a culture that are manifested in stories told of historical moments, information from older students about professors and courses, and terminology specific to the students and local community (Kuh & Hall, 1993). For the purpose of this study, artifacts are the tangible aspects that show evidence of a rape-supportive or non-rape-supportive culture within an environment. These artifacts can be expressed through, but not limited to, preventative programming, campus and community traditions, and literature available to the campus community.

Rape-Supportive Culture

A rape-supportive culture is an environment containing a set of beliefs and values that are conducive to and support rape (Boswell & Spade, 1996). Although it is believed there are environments in which sexual violence is most likely to occur (e.g. colleges and universities), this concept describes the surrounding belief system that promotes sexual violence (Boswell & Spade, 1996). It is important to recognize that although it is named a *rape* culture, it focuses on the promotion of all types of sexual violence. Within this type of environment there are a few key features that support rape and sexual violence. They include: a) acceptance of rape myths, b) promotion of hegemonic masculinity, and c) peer support (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Acceptance of Rape Myths.

The scholarly definition of rape myths has evolved over the past thirty years. Rape myths are defined as false attitudes and beliefs, generally based on stereotypes and prejudices that remove responsibility from men and encourage sexually aggressive behavior toward women (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Acceptance of these rape myths has been connected to the likelihood of an individual's inclination to use sexual force (Briere & Malamuth, 1983; Eyssel, Bohner & Siebler, 2006; Kimmel, 2008). Rape myths create a limited view of what constitutes rape. For example, one common myth is the notion that rape involves a stranger who violently assaults the victim (Schafran, n.d.; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). When a situation falls outside this view, the perpetrator justifies or rationalizes his or her actions because it is not viewed as rape. Rape myths allow perpetrators, victims and bystanders to believe there is nothing wrong with nonconsensual sex as long as it does not meet their personal definition of rape. This rationalization causes perpetrators to believe their actions deserve lesser sanctions because they do not believe they have done anything wrong (Carr & VanDuesen, 2004).

Promotion of Hegemonic Masculinity.

In addition to rape myths, gender scripts and roles such as hypermasculinity in men contribute to a false understanding of sexual violence (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). In exploring these effects further, scholars (e.g., Pappas, McKenry, & Catleet, 2004; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997) have discussed hegemonic masculinity, the dominant form of masculinity, which others aspire to obtain. In our society, hegemonic masculinity

represents aggression, homophobia, emotional detachment, and a desire for high status positions among men (Capraro, 2000; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). In the college environment, fraternal masculinity has been described as the hegemonic form of masculinity (Syrett, 2009). This concept of masculinity is essential to the understanding of a rape-supportive culture, because it dictates the actions of other men within the culture. Syrett (2009) argues this in his description of White male fraternities. Not only did students aspire to possess the masculine characteristics of fraternity men, but due to the historical exclusion of others (on the basis of gender, class, race, sexual orientation, etc.) by White fraternities, alienated students began to develop organizations that closely reflected the values of these fraternity men (Syrett, 2009).

Men have been found to be aggressive towards women in both intimate and non-intimate settings (Pappas, McKenry & Catlett, 2004). This aggression, when coupled with the desire to achieve high status or security in gender identity through sex, causes men to believe it is acceptable to “work a yes out of a woman” (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Kimmel (2008) explains “It’s a way that guys compete with each other, establish a pecking order of cool studliness, and attempt to move up in their rankings” (p. 207).

Masculinity creates a difficult paradox for men. Men as a group are socially more powerful than women; however, as individuals the incongruence between one’s self and hegemonic masculinity causes them to feel powerless (Capraro, 2000). This incongruence occurs whether or not a man has conformed to hegemonic masculinity (Capraro, 2000). To combat this threat, men empower themselves by objectifying women (Edwards & Headrick, 2008; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Objectification is the process in which men view women as less significant, which in turn allows men to

remove themselves from femininity and further their male superiority (Bird, 1996; Edwards & Headrick, 2008; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Objectification of women is present both in language (e.g. music lyrics) and physical objects, both of which assist in the creation of rape-supportive culture (Edwards & Headrick, 2008).

Peer Support.

Along with the concepts of masculinity and objectification of women, a rape-supportive culture includes a sense of male peer support. It is argued that when men gather together in male dominated spaces, their interactions often position women as the weaker sex (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Studies have looked into the impact of male athletic teams and fraternities (Boeringer, 1999; Boswell & Spade, 1996; Pappas, McKenry, Catlett, 2004). Groups such as these reinforce the need for men to strive for hegemonic masculinity, because if their actions differ from the norm they are subject to ridicule and harassment (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). As a result, men do not confront other men who marginalize women because they do not want to be marginalized themselves (Kimmel, 2008). Additionally, men demean women as a way to establish intimacy with each other (Capraro, 2000; Quinn, 2002). Demeaning women as a means to connect with other men shows that peer support and the perceived need to conform are key factors in the perpetuation of a rape-supportive culture.

While research has shown male dominated spaces on campus (e.g. fraternity houses) perpetuate a rape-supportive culture (Boeringer, 1999; Boswell & Spade, 1996; Pappas, McKenry, Catlett, 2004), questions remain about whether and how environments where both genders are present perpetuate a rape-supportive

culture. In our study, we seek to answer the following questions: First, do three distinct campus environments perpetuate a rape-supportive culture? And second, what artifacts within those environments contribute to the perpetuation of a rape-supportive culture?

METHODS

Site Selection

The overall site of our research is a four-year public university with a total enrollment of over 40,000 students. The student population is evenly distributed between genders, 50.4% female and 49.6% male. The university's focus is to prepare students academically and provide a support network in the form of various programs and resources offered on campus. We interpret this as the university placing an emphasis on both curricular and co-curricular experiences. Many of these experiences revolve around traditions typically associated with university life, such as athletics and Greek life, which have a strong presence on campus.

Although a university-wide definition of sexual violence does not exist, there are many resources both on and off campus for students, staff, and faculty regarding the issue. The institution attempts to educate students about sexual violence in a variety of ways, including through publications and passive and active programming. Most of the educational efforts come from two separate offices on campus. These offices provide resources for survivors of sexual violence and provide educational programming to students focused on reversing students' belief of rape myths and furthering students' understanding of consent (personal communication, October 8, 2009).

We have selected three specific environments for our study: (a) a common area in a residence center; (b) a football tailgate event; and (c) a local bar. These sites were easily accessible for data collection and rapport had been previously established. Each environment was selected based on its association and proximity to the institution and impact on the student experience.

Freshmen are required to live in one of the university's residence centers during their first year. A total of 27% of the student body lives on campus (personal communication, November 3, 2009). The common area at a residence center was selected as an environment because the majority of students have been impacted by a residence center environment due to the live-in requirement. Of the three environments we observed, the residence center has the most direct connection to the university's mission. Residence centers are required to host educational programs, which are typically planned and implemented by resident assistants who gain approval from their supervisor, ensuring congruence with the university's educational mission.

The selected residence center houses over 1000 students and is almost evenly distributed among men and women (51% female). There are 5 buildings, which contain a total of 23 floors. Of these floors, 7 are female only, 6 are male only, and 10 are co-educational. The specific space we observed is located in the central building and is connected to the main entrance containing a theatre and game space. This is a co-educational space frequently used by residents (personal communication, November 2, 2009).

The second environment we observed was a football tailgate event. The football tailgate event is located in the parking lots and field adjacent to the university football and basketball stadiums. The tailgate area is typically separated into three sections

depending on where the participants decide to congregate. One of these areas is sponsored by the alumni association, and is known as the “ultimate tailgating destination.” Groups are able to reserve a tailgate spot in advance and the remaining spots are open to the public.

This environment was selected because the tailgate event takes place on university grounds with university support but is not exclusively controlled by the university. There are external influences affecting the tailgate environment including alumni and community members not affiliated with the university. The environment is loosely regulated by the university, but in general there are not restrictions on who can participate in the tailgate events.

The third environment we observed was a bar near campus. This environment is not officially affiliated with the university, but is predominantly populated by university students and exists to serve students. We recognize its physical location is not on campus, but the environment has an impact on the student experience.

Data Collection

For this study, data was collected through naturalistic observation; we did not interfere with any of the interactions that occurred during our observations. As our research examined the culture of the environments, there were no participants in our study. The reason for choosing naturalistic observation was so as a research team we would be able to truly observe and attempt to understand the cultural artifacts that are present in the environment. Using the literature on rape-culture and sexual violence as a guide, we established loose criteria for rape-supportive verbal, behavioral, and physical artifacts. In establishing loose criteria, researchers were

able to take more general field notes of the overall environment, in an effort to understand the cultural aspects of it. Examples include sexually suggestive music lyrics (verbal), fondling or touching (behavioral), and articles of clothing (physical). We observed each environment for a total of one hour on one occasion.

The residence center lounge was observed on a Thursday night between 10:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. The lounge is particularly active at this time with students coming and going, and others choosing to spend their evening socializing in the lounge. All five members of our team were stationed throughout the room to observe and take field notes.

Observations of the tailgate event took place during the morning of a home football game. The game began at noon, and observations took place between 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Observations were focused on a reserved area of the tailgate event. Four members of the team were present for this observation. The team members circulated throughout the area and made field notes of cultural artifacts in the environment.

The selected bar has a reputation for being the last stop on a night out on the town. Our observations took place between 12:30 a.m. and 1:30 a.m. on a Thursday night/ Friday morning, which is a high activity time for the bar. All five members of the team participated in this observation.

Data Analysis

Field notes of each environment were taken by the researchers present in accordance with our criteria of rape-supportive culture as established by the literature. Field notes were compiled into one document, and analyzed as a collective. Data were coded through an open coding method that allowed us to make meaning of the data. In this step we were not looking for

specifics, but for broad categories that were present across the data. Researchers identified codes that interacted across artifact types. We did not differentiate between trends that were occurring within specific artifacts, but instead identified codes that were seen across all artifact types. From this we moved toward focused coding, meaning we took the most significant of the previously established codes in an effort to pursue those more analytically. These interacting codes yielded themes. Themes reflective of a rape-supportive culture, as they relate to our literature review and our research questions, were then identified.

Validity/Trustworthiness

All members participated in the data analysis. This reduced the possibility that the results of our research represent only the idiosyncratic views of one individual researcher. Additionally, our instructor, project advisor, and classmates provided reflection and input on our work. This peer review and debriefing helped to limit the effect of our bias influencing our research.

Bias and Limitations

In order to clarify our individual bias as researchers, we reflected on our own subjectivity of the subject of sexual violence. Through our experiences we have been exposed to university sexual violence prevention programs and have worked with staff to expand educational initiatives. We know from the literature that sexual violence is a prevalent issue on college campuses (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007; Foubert & Newberry, 2006; Ouimette & Riggs, 1998). In addition, the study focused on heterosexist views of society and sexual violence. Part of our bias revolves around the fact that the majority of sexual assaults involve a man attacking a woman, which may influence our

perspective of the environments observed. Therefore, we assume that most perpetrators are men, and men have a role in perpetuating rape-supportive culture. This may also be influenced by the gender breakdown of our research team being four females and one male.

In this study, we only collected data from each location for a total of one hour on one occasion, which can be a limitation of our research. Additionally, the students in each of the environments could have been different, which means the impact of the environment could have been different. Although the students were not the focus of our study, they have an influence on the environment of which the students can internalize differently. The events and incidences that occurred during our observations could be situations that happened with the students in that particular environment in isolation. Further, the bar restricts entry of persons under the age of 21, which influences the demographics of the environment.

FINDINGS

Male Controlled Environments

In all three environments we gained a sense that men were in control. Although both men and women were present, men were in the dominant position in all three environments. In some instances, women entered spaces that were established by men. Often men not only provided the space, but enticed women with alcohol and music. Men exerted their masculinity, particularly aggressive behavior, to establish their position within the environments.

At the tailgate event, many of the spots belonged to a group of men. Several of the groups were associated with a fraternity and could easily be identified by

organization. The men generally congregated around the vehicle parked at their tailgate spot, while the women traveled around the tailgate field. In addition, the men set the tone of the event by selecting and playing the music. If a grill or food was present at the tailgate site, the men had provided that also.

Nearly every tailgate spot had a sports utility vehicle (SUV) or truck, not a small car. Several groups brought large speaker systems in order to play music. We observed one man open the trunk of his SUV, which was filled to the top with cases of beer. Groups passed around half gallons of vodka, which the men and women drank directly from the bottle. Many of the groups had tables that were used to play drinking games. While we observed women moving through the tailgate area, larger congregations developed at spots with large SUVs, loud music, and large quantities of alcohol. These artifacts served as status symbols for men and attracted more women to their area. A parallel can be drawn to fraternity parties hosted by groups of men, with women traveling to and from the parties, which previous research has shown is conducive to a rape-supportive culture (Boreinger, 1999).

Male control and the need to express one's masculinity fostered an atmosphere of aggression. The volume of the music was loud enough that people had to shout to talk to one another. Furthermore, the lyrics and beat of the music played were often hostile in nature. While the men more often sat and watched the women dance, when a particularly aggressive song was played, the men in the area jumped up and danced, formed a circle, pushed each other around the space and shouted along to the lyrics, "ya'll gonna make me lose my cool", "I gotta get my dick sucked," and "don't be fuckin' with me, you ain't strong enough."

At the bar, the scene was not much different. In general, the men arrived before the women and secured a table or spot along

the bar. As the women arrived, they approached the bar to get a drink and then squeezed around tables already occupied by men. In addition to controlling the space, men also controlled the alcohol. While some women did purchase alcohol at the bar, men were frequently observed purchasing alcohol for women. In this scenario, it seems the manly thing to do is purchase alcohol for women.

Both disc jockeys at the bar were men, playing many of the same songs we heard at the tailgate event. Some songs were violent in nature and nearly all contained sexually suggestive lyrics. An example of the lyrics include, "baby when it's love, if it isn't rough it isn't fun."

Although the residence center game room was different from the previous environments in many ways, some aspects of the environment were similar to those in the tailgate and bar environments. We still observed a sense of male control in the game room. In this environment we witnessed how male control promotes aggressive behavior. Two men argued in the center of the room. We were unable to hear entirely what the argument was about, pieces overheard were about a situation that occurred recently between the two, which caused one to no longer trust the other. The fact that others were in the room and passing by did not seem to influence their conversation. Their argument became progressively louder before they finally walked away. Therefore, we see that even though some male control and aggressive behavior was exhibited in the residence center, it was less than in the other two environments.

Women as Entertainment

During our observations, there were several instances women were viewed as objects performing for the men present. As

we explained earlier, men were in control of the environments, and they were strategic in how they placed themselves in the environments in order to more easily be entertained by women. Furthermore, men did not only accept women as entertainment, but they celebrated their peers' accomplishments, giving high-fives and cheering each other on when they witnessed a friend dancing with or getting close to a woman. This supports the idea that men demean women as a means to create bonds with each other and conform to hegemonic masculinity (Capraro, 2000; Quinn, 2002). It is important to recognize that this peer support did not appear to be from strangers, but from friends or acquaintances.

At the tailgate event, we observed three men sitting on the top of a SUV talking to each other and drinking beer. It did not take long to realize, however, they were watching the women walking by and dancing near their vehicle. Although we could not hear what they were saying, we observed them pointing, leaning in to talk to one another, laughing, and cheering. This was not an isolated incident, but a common scene at the tailgate event. At many of the tailgate spaces, men were sitting at the highest point watching while women danced below. Women served as their entertainment.

The bar had a similar scene. We observed men watching women both on and off the dance floor. In one instance, a woman was dancing and as the man she was dancing with began to move closer, his three friends at the table next to him watched with interest. Soon the pair began to dance very closely, and the man began touching the woman while his friends watched. When this happened, his friends began to point, cheer, and high-five each other. The three men at the table were not interacting with anyone else.

Additionally, women were portrayed as entertainment in the music played at both

the tailgate event and the bar. Most of the songs played were sung by men about women, encouraging women to perform for them. One example of a song played includes a man singing lyrics about women, asking her to "take off that polka dot bikini, girl". Furthermore, none of the songs played during our observations referred to women as such; women were called "girls," "bitches," or "hoes." Although these songs are not limited to being listened to by college students, these were the songs selected and heard by the students in these environments.

Interactions Between Men

It is apparent that peer support is influential in the actions and behaviors of men (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). However, it does not seem as though the peer support comes from just anyone; instead this transaction comes from those in the environment who are closest to that individual and in their social circles. At the same time, men are in competition with other men, which also provides an avenue of support. By competing with each other they are justifying their actions and behaviors.

In the residence center environment a man and a woman were sitting together on a couch, with her legs draped over his. Two men playing ping-pong in the room did not seem to notice the pair sitting a few feet away. This same situation between a man and a woman was seen as an accomplishment in other scenarios, but only when the man's friends were present. Men appeared to support each other when they were friends or acquaintances, but did not when they did not know each other. When men received encouragement for their interactions with women, it was not from strangers, but from their friends. This reflects the rape-supportive characteristic of peer support, but uncovers a different element. Previous studies have shown the impact of peer

support in establishing male intimacy (Capraro, 2000; Quinn, 2002). However, this is not occurring between those men who do not know each other, but primarily between those with already established friendships.

This is not the case for women, lines between social circles appeared to be blurred among the women. We observed sorority members spread out among the tailgate field, as well as interacting with women from other sororities. The interactions between women of different social circles were more fluid than with the men, and it appeared to be more acceptable for women to interact with those they did not know. However, while it appeared acceptable for men to interact with women they did not know, it was less acceptable to interact with men they did not know.

Social circles at the bar were more difficult to distinguish, but men seemed to still attract women by providing alcohol. Interacting with women gave men a higher status. It was an accomplishment for men to dance with different women, especially when they received positive feedback from their peers. Competition reinforced the need for high status within hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel, 2008). Competition provides support from peers within social groups and validation from those outside their group, because this drives the competition. Further, it promotes status among groups, which further promotes characteristics of rape-supportive culture. The need for men to achieve high status is part of hegemonic masculinity. There was an underlying sense of competition, and it was clear that some groups were more popular than others at the tailgate event.

Desensitization of Sex

In our observations, we saw a culture desensitized to sex and sexual violence. In all three environments, our observations

revealed that students are desensitized to sex and sexually aggressive behaviors, which may impact how sexual violence is viewed. This was seen in the student responses to an educational board on sexual assault in the residence center, which will be explained in further detail later. In all three environments, students willingly engaged in language and actions that were not out of the ordinary, demonstrating a desensitization to sex.

At the tailgate event we observed many students wearing shirts specifically made for tailgate and athletic events. Many of the tailgate participants wore shirts with messages such as “Everyone Scores on Game Day” and “Make a Pass.” Both of these shirts used common sports language to allude to sexual acts. It was clear these shirts were a common part of the tailgate environment and no one suggested they were inappropriate. This was one example of the desensitization to sex in the tailgate environment.

As stated earlier, loud music was played during the tailgate event and many of the songs included sexually suggestive or aggressive lyrics. Many of the songs involved a man telling a woman to perform specific sexual acts, making them not just suggestive but sexually aggressive. Not only were these songs played in the background, but the students, both men and women, sang and danced along to the music.

At the bar we observed three women wearing shirts that said, “Blow Me, It’s My Birthday.” This shirt was distributed by the bar to patrons on their birthday. We observed one man receive the shirt, but he did not wear it; he carried it over his shoulder instead. This was interesting, because the phrase on the shirt has a male orientation, but we only observed it worn by women. This suggests the students recognized the shirt was sexually suggestive. However, it appeared to be more acceptable for women to wear it. This is further example

of the objectification of women. We did not observe anyone question the appropriateness of the shirt.

In addition to the use of sexual innuendos seen on clothing and in song lyrics at both the bar and tailgate event, there was evidence of the desensitization of sex in the interactions between men and women. Men and women did not appear to have a problem touching each other both on and off the dance floor. In one instance at the bar, when a man walked in, a woman ran over and wrapped her arms and legs around him. The man placed his hands on her rear end and held her. In both the bar and tailgate environments men and women danced in a sexually suggestive manner. Even in casual conversation it was common to observe men place their hand on the women's lower back as they were speaking.

In the residence center there was an educational board on the topic of sexual assault. The board was a temporary fixture that was coincidentally present during our observations. The board encouraged student interaction by asking them to define consent and determine whether or not the two given scenarios were consensual. The students that responded to the board were able to define consent, but were not always able to transfer the definition to the scenarios or understand why the scenarios involved sexual assault. One student stated, "Let's just toss the word rape around loosely," and another claimed women lie about rape to "cover up something that looks bad on their part." To the students, the situations about an individual forcing sex onto another (one involved a man and woman, the other involved two men) were not sexual assault in their eyes, but just sex. From this we conclude that desensitization to aggressive and forceful sex (as described previously) perpetuates desensitization to sexual violence. Although not all of the student

comments were of this nature, the majority of them were.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to current literature by examining how environments where both genders are present exhibit characteristics of a rape-supportive culture in the same manner as homosocial spaces. Our research identifies rape-supportive characteristics in each of the three environments we observed to varying degrees and shows these specific environments perpetuate artifacts of sexual violence within a collegiate setting. However, this study expands on the previous research showing how even environments consisting of both men and women perpetuate the characteristics of a rape-supportive culture. Our observations reinforced the existence of these rape-supportive characteristics: a) acceptance of rape myths, b) promotion of hegemonic masculinity, and c) peer support in campus environments (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). As stated earlier, a rape-supportive culture describes the surrounding belief system that promotes sexual violence (Boswell & Spade, 1996). Although the university does not actively support sexual violence, the environment is conducive to and supportive of beliefs and behaviors that are consistent with the concept of rape-supportive culture. We recognize the affiliation of all three environments to the institution is not direct, but each environment affects the student experience. The promotion of hegemonic masculinity and peer support were most prominent in our findings. This was seen through student interactions, in combination with an institutional culture (i.e. tailgate event), containing messages and responses coinciding with sexually aggressive behaviors. For example, despite the tailgate

event occurring at 10:00am, the tradition is so engrained in the student experience that there appeared to be little hesitation for students to engage in the tailgate. The tailgate was an outlet for men to exhibit their masculinity while receiving validation from their peers.

Student acceptance of rape myths was observed. Student responses to the educational board in the residence hall indicated to us students have a narrow definition of rape and were unable to identify the given scenarios as sexual assaults. Because the student responses were left on display passersby were exposed to the rape myths, thus giving the impression that sexual violence is normal, the woman's fault, and a part of life on a college campus. Research shows those who accept rape myths are more likely to have a limited definition of sexual assault, which increases the likelihood of sexual violence (Briere & Malamuth, 1983, Eyssel, Bohner & Siebler, 2006; Kimmel, 2008). Our observations were consistent with this research. If students' understanding of sexual assault does not include acquaintance rape, students will not have any hesitation continuing to behave in the manner we observed.

Our observations showed students behaving differently in different environments based on what is socially acceptable, which is related to the level of monitoring and restrictions within the environment. This was observed in the bar and at the tailgate; in these two environments there were few regulations that inhibited students' behavior. From this we interpret that environments with less authoritative control allow students to more freely express their rape supportive ideologies, whereas those with more administrative control repress these ideologies. In the residence center we saw similar rape-supportive artifacts, but to a much lesser degree. This is seen in the instance of the two men arguing in the

residence hall who eventually walked away. Had this same interaction happened in the other environments we may have observed other behaviors, because of the different expectations of behavior. Residence halls have more policies and restrictions than the other two environments. These policies clearly communicate a standard of behavior, which is why we assume students often left the residence hall for other environments. In environments outside of the residence hall students received more validation for their actions, both direct and indirect, from peers and strangers of both genders.

Implications and Future Research

Our observations illustrate rape myth acceptance by both men and women, which means all students will benefit from programs that debunk rape myths and widen students' view of sexual violence. The educational board we observed was a good initial step, but the need for follow up to the student responses is necessary. In addition to reversing rape myths, the program should emphasize a wider understanding of sexual assault. Future research includes identifying to what extent specific campus environments affect students' rape myth acceptance. We know that students have these beliefs, but exploring whether different environments further or lessen acceptance of these myths may be beneficial.

It is also recommended the university reevaluate policies and procedures where applicable. For example, there are few regulations during the tailgate event, which allows students to feel as though their behaviors are acceptable. Although security and police officials were present, there was very little accountability of the students to the Student Code of Conduct. For example, a large majority of the students were consuming alcohol, but we assume many of them were not of legal age. Yet, nobody was

inquiring to ensure that those under the legal age were not consuming alcohol. In addition, we recommend the university consider no longer allowing student groups to reserve spaces at the tailgate event. This in turn can lessen or remove some of the rape-supportive characteristics including competition between groups and male control over the environment. Although we recognize the university has little control over the bar's policies, it would benefit the institution to create a partnership with the city and local establishment owners to address the issue of sexual violence.

We also recommend examining more environments on campus, particularly those that are racially diverse, to see if our findings are consistent across the overall campus environment. We are cognizant that we were only able to study three locations, and encourage more research to be done in environments that differ from the three we observed. Studying more environments will further justify the ability to generalize the findings across campus.

Furthermore, we selected this institution as our site because of a recent increase in educational efforts to prevent sexual violence and define sexual consent. At the same time, the number of reported sexual assaults on campus has increased (personal communication, October 8, 2009). Although the increase in reports of sexual assaults may be an indicator of successful programming, the study examined a cultural aspect of sexual violence. This study focused on one institution in particular, it is our hope the findings will encourage other institutions to look more closely at the perpetuation of sexual violence in their campus environments. Through these examinations, institutions will have a better understanding of the rape-supportive ideologies held by their students. This will help with developing educational programs that cater to the specific needs of their students.

CONCLUSION

Progress in combating sexual violence requires collaboration across campus. Administrators have a responsibility to assess high risk environments on their campus to identify any existing characteristics of a rape-supportive culture. Despite beliefs that a campus rape crisis does not exist, our observations of student interactions in three distinct environments confirmed the existence of rape-supportive culture on campus. This study provides further insight into the idea that student acceptance of rape myths contributes to their lack of understanding of what constitutes sexual violence, resulting in low reporting of sexual violence incidents. Student affairs professionals can use the four characteristics identified as promoting rape-supportive culture as a framework to assess their institutions' sexual violence climate. Through such assessment, institutions can identify the rape-supportive aspects of their campus in order to implement the appropriate educational and cultural changes necessary to become a non-rape supportive environment.

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- Sarah Argiero graduated from the HESA master's program in 2010. She received a B.S. in Dietetics from Michigan State University in 2008. At IUB, Sarah was the Graduate Assistant for Leadership Development in Residential Programs and Services.*
- Jessica Dyrdaahl graduated from the Indiana University Bloomington HESA program in 2010. She received a B.A. in Political Science and Spanish from Colorado State University in 2007. At IUB, Jessica served as the Student Organizations and Funding Board Advisor in the Student Activities Office.*

Sarah Fernandez graduated from the Indiana University Bloomington HESA program in 2010. She received a B.A. in Communicative Disorders from University of Redlands in 2008. At IUB, Sarah was a Graduate Supervisor for Residential Programs and Services in Collins Living-Learning Center.

Laura Whitney graduated from the HESA master's program in 2010. She received a B.A. in Communications from Missouri State University in 2008. At IUB, Laura served as the Student Organization Ethics Board Advisor in the Student Activities Office.

R.J. Woodring graduated from the HESA master's program in 2010. He received a B.G.S. in Communication Studies from the University of Kansas in 2005. At IUB, R.J. serves as the Leadership Coordinator in the Student Activities Office.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sarah Fernandez at ssfernan@indiana.edu.