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## COLLEGE-AGED STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE VIA SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

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SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Emily Bautista and Marijane Garcia

May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

Sexual violence is of significant concern on college campuses. Concurrently, college aged students regularly use social media platforms as socializing agents. Little is known concerning the influence of social media usage on the way college students perceive sexual violence. Feminist theories were used to conceptualize ideas involving perceptions of sexual violence. This research used quantitative measures to examine the influence of social media usage on college-aged students' perspectives of sexual violence as measured by consent attitudes. Data was obtained from Reddit users. Correlation analysis found a relationship between hours spent per day on social media and positive attitudes toward establishing consent. Other findings indicated a correlation between gender and indirect behavioral approach to consent. Recommendation for future research is to examine significant correlation found among sexuality and ethnicity. Implications for social work identify areas of consideration in clinical practice such as assessments and treatment planning. Through this research, social workers obtained knowledge to understand the role social media plays on socialization of attitudes toward sexual consent and sexual violence.

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## DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the 463,634 survivors of sexual violence annually in the United States.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formulation

Sexual violence is one of the most common violent crimes occurring on college campuses today (Conley et al., 2017). Sexual violence is characterized as sexual behaviors or contact that occurs without the person's explicit consent (Basile et al., 2016). Twenty-two percent of college students have experienced sexual violence during their college careers (Conley et al., 2017). Another dominant trend on college campuses is social media usage. Members of generation z, aged 18-24, are among the first generation to have grown up with a lifelong media presence (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Seventy-one percent of people aged 18-24 are using social media sites multiple times a day (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Social media platforms are used to facilitate communication, education, and, unfortunately, violence (Patton et al., 2014).

With high social media usage rates, social media acts as a socializing agent for health and social behaviors (Egen et al., 2020). Significant media usage was associated with a negative impact on attitudes, thoughts, and physiological health (Brooks, 2015). Social media can influence a user's perceptions, including those on criteria that constitute sexual assault, perceived access to supports, and effective prevention methods (Egen et al., 2020). Fifty-one percent of persons aged 18-24 reported it would be difficult to refrain from the use of sites like YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook (Smith &

Anderson, 2018). The permanence of social media usage by college students can impact perceptions of sexual violence (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013).

Previous studies have found that social support acts as a protective measure for sexual violence (Conley et al., 2017). During the #metoo movement, social support via social media helped perpetuate support for sexual violence acknowledgment (Jaffe et al., 2021). Using news media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, the #MeToo movement was able to collectively shift perspectives of sexual assault by reducing the stigma of sexual assault, clarifying qualifications of sexual assault, and providing support to victims (Jaffe et al., 2021). Other popular strategies to reduce sexual assault have included increasing favorable attitudes towards women and decreasing negative bystander behaviors (Basile et al., 2016). Social media can facilitate a change in social norms to reduce the incidents of sexual assault.

Contradictory research suggests that social media has a negative impact on attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors regarding intimate partner violence. Interventions that include a brief overview to raise awareness of sexual violence are ineffective in prevention (Basile et al., 2016). Another study found that young adults minimize intimate partner violence experiences based on previous experiences, gender roles, and perceptions that psychological violence is less abusive (Dardis et al., 2017).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine the role of social media usage on perceptions of sexual violence among college aged students. This study's findings provide insight to the persistent high rates of sexual violence among college aged students. Despite various campus wide preventative services and interventions, 22% of college students aged 18-24 will be victimized (Conley et al., 2017). Emerging studies examine facets of college life that would provide insight to the continued social problem. Studies found preventative measures to include increasing awareness about sexual violence and perceived peer support when seeking help.

Social media is arguably the most widely used form of socialization among college aged students. Seventy-one percent of college-aged individuals are using various social media sites throughout their daily life (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Social media platforms are used for student socialization and to advertise campus resources. Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate the influence of social media on students age 18-24 and their perception of sexual violence. The research method utilized for this study was quantitative with a descriptive approach. A descriptive approach provided characteristics of the proposed population to improve the comprehension surrounding social media and perceptions sexual violence in social work practice.

## Significance for Social Work Practice

The current study contributed at the micro and macro level of social work by providing a greater understanding of the influence social media usage has on perceptions of sexual violence. At the macro level, the findings explore how social media usage frames sexual violence as essential to promoting social norms to protect against sexual violence (Egen et al., 2020). The establishment of factual, unbiased, and non-victim blaming online support endorses justice for victims (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017; Egan et al., 2020). At the micro-level, social workers need the knowledge and resources available to understand the role social media plays on a survivor's victimization. Furthermore, individuals who have experienced sexual violence or who know someone who has will be empowered by the ease of access to resources provided by a supportive social media platform aligning with various NASW ethical values and standards.

Social workers who understand the influence of social media on perceptions of sexual violence comprehend how to best serve victims. Social workers have the ability to establish a more supportive media platform that promotes new social norms that protect against sexual violence. This study's research question is as follows: What is the influence of social media usage on college-aged students' perspectives of sexual violence, especially consent.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

##### Social Media Usage and Perceptions of Sexual Violence

College aged students, 18-24 years old, use at least four of the eight major social media platforms (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Additionally, at least 86% of college students own a laptop and 97% own a smartphone (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2021). High rates of laptop and smartphone ownership suggest college students are in constant connection to social media sites (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). Sexual violence is one of the most common violent crimes occurring on college campuses (Conley et al., 2017). With the combined rates of social media usage and sexual violence, it became important to understand the influence social media has in shaping college aged student's perceptions of sexual violence. The role of social media in influencing attitudes and thoughts, criteria that constitutes sexual assault, and perceived social supports was essential in understanding college aged student's perceptions of sexual violence.

##### Attitudes and Thoughts

Social media influences user's attitudes and thoughts (Brooks, 2015; Jaffe et al., 2021). It is important to consider the influence social media has on attitudes and thoughts when addressing college student's interpretation and



understanding of sexual violence. Often, negative attitudes toward women, masculine thinking, and sexual violence are related (Basile et al., 2016). Conley et al. (2017) proposed to identify predictive factors contributing to sexual assault among college students. The results indicated past experiences and social forces formed men's perceptions of sexual assault and socialized women to fear and expect victimization (Conley et al., 2017). However, terms like sexual assault and peer deviance were broadly defined, thus leaving room for each respondent's individual interpretation (Conley et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate the influence of social media on college aged student's attitudes and thoughts.

#### Criteria that Constitutes Sexual Assault

Sixty percent of women who experience a violent sexual assault which meet the legal criteria for a punishable offense, do not label their sexual assault as such (Jaffe et al., 2021). In fact, women who experienced the legal definition of a violent sexual assault labeled the assault as a miscommunication (Jaffe et al., 2021). A recent examination on the influence of a large-scale social media movement involving sexual assault found that respondents increasingly acknowledged past experiences as sexual assault and shared their experiences through social media sites. Underreporting of sexual violence can be attributed to public ambiguity of criteria that constitutes sexual assault (Conley et al., 2017). The influence of social media in developing perceptions of sexual violence is

demonstrated by the increased public awareness of criteria that constitutes sexual assault through social media movements.

### Perceived Social Supports

Social media can foster social support through various forms of communication like posts, comments, direct messages, pictures, videos, and likes (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). Disclosures on social media sites that elicit supportive responses contribute to lowering stigma (Jaffe et al., 2021) and promote social relationships thus creating community (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). Witnessing survivors of sexual violence acknowledge their experience on social media platforms provokes encouragement and hope (Bogen et al., 2019). Encouragement and social support online is frequently received through validation, extending emotional support, and linkage to informative aid or resources (Bogen, et al., 2019).

Additionally, the disclosure and public outing of perpetrators by celebrity personalities during the #metoo movement contributed to the reduced stigma of reporting and encouraged public acknowledgment of past experiences of sexual violence via social media sites (Jaffe et al., 2021). Following the #metoo movement, online searches for reporting sexual assault increased. Increased support facilitated a sense of safety in numbers which encouraged the confrontation of perpetrators via public disclosures and reporting of past experiences of sexual violence on social media sites (Jaffe et al., 2021).

## Focusing on Social Media Usage and Sexual Violence Among College Aged Students

There is limited research available that exclusively examines the influence of social media on college aged student's perceptions of sexual violence. Consequently, this study reviewed research detailing the usage of social media sites among college aged students. Secondly, research regarding sexual violence and sexual assault among college aged students was evaluated. Sexual violence is an overlying term used to identify unwanted sexual behavior's or contact that occur without explicit consent (Basile et al., 2016).

Gaps in research were examined to understand the impact of social media sites on college students. Various forms of communication via social media like posts, comments, and direct messaging were used to measure level of social media usage (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). Well-being, social capital, identity development, and relationships with peers were among the factors being evaluated for social media impact. A limitation of the study was its exclusive use of secondary sources to form conclusions. Findings revealed the effects of social media on college student's behavior but omitted the effects on perception.

The identified gaps in the research corresponded with findings in other studies that were used in this review to examine the effects of social media on college students thus far. The following study analyzed the prevalence and predictors of sexual assault among college students. This study served to demonstrate another common occurrence among the college aged population; sexual assault.

Conley et al. (2017) explored the prevalence and predictors of sexual assault among college students. Briefly, findings revealed a similar incidence of sexual assault among the sample population as in nationwide reports. Key risk factors included exposure to peer deviance and acceptance of traditional gender norms while social support serves as a protective factor (Conley et al., 2017). Predictors and protective factors were measured using a broad description leaving room for respondent interpretation. Additionally, the study's authors revealed the potential for overlap in obtaining data from respondents (Conley et al., 2017).

The study provided an understanding of the occurrence and risk factors associated with high levels of sexual violence on college campuses. An account and description of the pervasiveness of sexual assault provided a limited understanding of sexual assault on college campuses. Furthermore, peer deviance, acceptance of traditional gender norms, and social support were measured without consideration of where such influences were received. This highlighted the importance of evaluating social media's influence on perceptions of sexual assault as social media is a prevalent socializing tool on college campuses.

Jaffe et al. (2021) began to capture the influence of social media usage on perceptions of sexual assault. The study used archival data collected over a span of three years prior to and following the 2017 social media-based movement, #metoo. The study sought to measure the acceptance and acknowledgment of

past experiences of sexual assault or harassment and identify whether experiences were accurately labeled by respondents based on a behavioral description of the experience. Following the start of the #metoo movement, Jaffe et al. (2021) found that behavioral descriptions of sexual assault corresponded with respondent's acknowledgment of the experience as sexual assault. Additionally, the study's authors concluded that public disclosures by celebrity personalities and supportive responses after disclosure on social media sites, resulted in reduced stigma and an increase in online searches for how to report a sexual assault.

A notable finding presented in the study is the increase in public awareness of behavior's that meet the criteria for sexual assault. Social media appeared to begin to influence public perceptions of the qualification for sexual assault. While the findings were limited due to the use of archival data, they demonstrated a growing trend in social media as a socializing agent. Furthermore, there is difficulty in examining the influence of social media on the study's findings due to the omission of a measure for social media usage. Time related changes pose a threat to the study's finding such that respondents chose when to participate in the study and selection was not randomized.

To accommodate the aforementioned limitation, further evaluations of the influence of social media on perceptions of sexual assault were conducted. An evaluation during the most current societal context would be conducive in applicability to prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses. Up to

27% of college students will experience some form of sexual violence per college semester (Jaffe et al., 2021). It is important to monitor the changing norms, values, and beliefs regarding perceptions of sexual violence especially in high-risk groups like college aged students, to maintain best practices.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Previous studies have utilized Gender Schema Theory to guide research. This study utilized feminist theories to conceptualize ideas about perceptions of sexual assault.

Dardis et al. (2017) utilized the Gender Schema Theory to guide their research. The Gender Schema theory posits that a cognitive framework used to organize our understanding of gender roles is developed early in life based on cultural norms. Further, gender schemas help to quickly interpret information related to gender. This results in the unconscious categorization of characteristics to one gender (Dardis et al., 2017). Categorization is highly influenced by a person's own gender. The study's findings were supported by the gender schema theory in that women perceived intimate partner violence (IPV) as more severe when perpetrated by men than men perceived IPV perpetrated by women (Dardis et al., 2017). The Gender Schema Theory is supportive in conceptualizing the theoretical framework of this study but is limited in its ability to attribute perceptions to external structural and societal social environments.

Feminist theories have a historical reputation for addressing the gender inequalities in structural and societal social contexts. Feminist theories provide a

framework for understanding socially constructed expectations, attitudes, and thought processes as they are categorized as feminine or masculine (Jaffe et al., 2021). Social life is organized based on a patriarchal structure where masculinity is valued as superior and authoritative, and femininity is viewed as inferior and submissive (Zastrow et al., 2019). Feminist theories propose men are socialized to dominate, behave aggressively, and maintain power over women. The theories assert that crimes against women, or populations viewed as minorities, are guided by the assumption that aggression and domination over women or minorities is natural (Zastrow et al., 2019). The feminist framework contends that sexual violence will continue to occur unless societal gender norms are made equal.

Feminist theories were helpful in guiding this study's understanding of societal influences on expectations, attitudes, and thought processes of college aged students as they perceive sexual violence. Sexual violence is characterized as a sexualized experience, act, or attempt to act that occurs without the person's explicit consent (Basile et al., 2016). Since social media is easily accessible and widely used among college aged students as a socializing agent, this study sought to evaluate the influence of social media on perceptions of sexual violence, especially consent.

### Summary

This section discussed two prominent trends occurring on college campuses: social media usage and sexual violence. Further knowledge

regarding social media usage is necessary to develop preventative measures, intervention methods, and to increase public knowledge for the purpose of addressing sexual violence on college campuses. The impact of social media consumption on individual's perception of sexual violence is further understood through the Gender Schema Theory and Feminist Theories.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This research project examined attitudes toward consent, and social media usage on college campuses. This project aimed to determine the connection between social media usage and perceptions of sexual violence among college-aged students, ages 18-24. This chapter contains details about how this study was conducted. The following sections discuss the study design, sampling, data collection, and instruments. A description of the study's procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis is provided.

#### Study Design

A descriptive study using quantitative research methods examined social media usage and perceptions of sexual violence among a population of participants ages 18-24. A cross-sectional survey was implemented to gather data regarding social media usage, perceptions of sexual violence, and respondent characteristics. It is known that social media is widely used on college campuses for many reasons. However, it was unknown how it correlated to participant's beliefs, interpretations, and understanding of sexual violence.

To measure participant's perceptions of sexual violence, participant's attitudes and perceived behaviors towards sexual consent were examined. Participant's perceptions of sexual violence on college campuses became

relevant when considering the continued prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses.

The existing research evaluating the relationship between social media influence and sexual assault on college campuses was minimal. This descriptive study provided an initial evaluation of social media usage rates and perceptions about sexual violence. A limitation of using descriptive research methods was that the results of this study would not provide a definite causal relationship between the two factors. Additionally, respondent feedback was limited to the questions provided by the survey without the opportunity to add additional information.

#### Sampling

A non-probability sample was obtained from Reddit users through the use of subreddits surrounding the topics of sexual violence, college students, and social media usage. Participants were required to be between the ages of 18-24. The total number of participants desired was 100 Reddit users who fit the age and college student status criteria. This specific sample population was chosen for utilization of an internet social media platform relevant to the study. The sample population age criteria was also chosen to address the average age of individuals enrolled in college. The hope was that participant demographics would be diverse to gain a well-versed perspective on all college-aged student's perceptions regarding sexual violence with correlation to social media usage.

## Data Collection and Instruments

The dependent variable was participant's response to sexual violence through attitudes and perceived behaviors towards sexual consent. The instrument used to collect data was adapted from Humphreys & Brousseau's (2010) 39-item, Likert-type Sexual Consent Scale-Revised (SCS-R). The numerical value ascribed to each response is as follows: Strongly Agree (7), Agree (6), Somewhat Agree (5), Neither Agree nor Disagree (4), Somewhat Disagree (3) Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1).

This survey included 14 questions from the original scale and addressed five domains of attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual consent. The domains were selected based on high internal reliability reported by Humphreys & Brousseau (2010) with a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient as listed: perceived behavioral control ( $\alpha = .86$ ), positive attitude toward establishing consent ( $\alpha = .84$ ), indirect behavioral approach to consent ( $\alpha = .78$ ), sexual consent norms ( $\alpha = .67$ ), and awareness of consent ( $\alpha = .71$ ). A measurement of Construct Validity was conducted using comparison scales (Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness and Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale) and correlation associations were examined. In each domain, correlations were low with both external surveys, but the results did present significant associations between their similar aspects.

Items with the highest reliability rating were selected from each of the five domains to address sexual consent and provide insight into participant's perceptions of sexual violence. The following are examples of the items used in

each domain: I would have difficulty asking for consent because it would spoil the mood (lack of perceived behavioral control), I feel that sexual consent should always be obtained before the start of any sexual activity (positive attitude toward establishing consent), Typically I communicate sexual consent to my partner using nonverbal signals and body language (indirect behavioral approach to consent, I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a new relationship than in a committed relationship (sexual consent norms), and I have discussed sexual consent issues with a friend (awareness and discussion). To assess the internal consistency reliability of this adapted version of the SCS-R, Cronbach's Alpha was used.

The independent variable in this study was social media usage. Using three self-report questions, social media usage was measured based on the following: Hours spent on social media platforms per day, week, and which social media platforms are used. The level of measurement for the independent variable was ratio and was measured by self-reported frequency of hours spent on social media. Participant demographics were collected via self-report. Demographics including ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and relationship status contained an "other" option that allowed for a free response answer.

### Procedures

Data was collected through administration of a cross-sectional survey electronically via Qualtrics. Solicitation of Reddit user participation was done through the social sharing website and what are referred to as subreddits

relevant to the research topic (i.e. samplesize, takemysurvey, surveyexchange). In the Reddit post, participants were made aware of the age requirement for involvement in the study and that completion of the survey was voluntary (see Appendix \*\*). The Reddit post included a link to the Qualtrics survey. The survey protected anonymity as names were not required. The purpose of the study was stated within the Reddit text box as well as communication of possible benefits and risks that may arise from participation in the study (see Appendix \*\*). Re-posting of the original posts were published according to the Reddit page's guidelines. Resources were provided at the end of the survey to address any triggering verbiage. Both researchers shared responsibilities in data collection.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The cross-sectional survey via Qualtrics provided an overview regarding the purpose of the study, what participant involvement entailed, as well as a time approximation for completion of the survey. The overview provided to Reddit users emphasized participation is optional. The survey affirmed that no identifying information was needed and if individuals participated, it was completely anonymous to protect confidentiality. No information regarding name, address, or contact information was required. A debriefing statement as well as sexual violence resources were provided at the end of the survey. No one had access to the completed surveys aside from the researchers of this study. Researchers were only able to access data through secured password protected computers which assisted in protecting participant's confidentiality. Once all data

had been studied and reviewed for the purpose of this research project, all data was destroyed. The study protocol was approved by the CSUSB Institutional Review Board.

### Data Analysis

The independent variable was social media usage which was measured by the hours spent on social media sites per day and week. Supplementary questions regarding social media use included the types of social media platforms visited. The dependent variable was perceptions of sexual violence. The dependent variable was measured using an adapted version of the SCS-R Scale. Statistical testing using quantitative analysis was generated through use of a Correlation Analysis through SPSS software. Additional variables included for descriptive analysis included participant demographic information of age, gender, education level, relationship status, estimated income, and ethnicity. Findings from the sample were generalized to the population from which it was drawn using descriptive statistics.

### Summary

This descriptive study examined the association between social media usage and perceptions of sexual violence among college-aged students through use of quantitative data collection methods. Participant's ages 18-24 were sought after due to the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses. In addition, social media usage is highly reported among undergraduates ages 18-24. This study's interest was to evaluate if any correlation between the two phenomena

exists. Findings from this study added to existing research on sexual violence on college campuses and created a new avenue for research. The topic of this study is relevant to social work since it was concerned with a known public social issue: sexual violence on college campuses. Additionally, it could potentially guide new research to influence prevention and intervention strategies. Surveys were distributed via an electronic web-based survey system. A detailed informed consent and debriefing statement was provided to participants to understand their involvement and the purpose of the study. Limitations of the study design were evaluated and discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents results from the administered self-report survey. In addition to demographic characteristics, findings on the relationships between hours spent on social media and perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs will be presented. Additional information about the data collected will be used to develop a greater understanding of the sample population's involvement with social media usage and knowledge of sexual consent.

#### Demographics

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the sample population (n=74). Although the survey link was accessible to participants of any age group, data indicating participant's ages 25 and older were removed from the data set due to this study's primary focus on college-aged students. Most participants of the remaining data set, ages 18-24, 48 (64%) identified as women, 14 (18.7%) identified as men, and 9 (12%) identified as non-binary/ third gender. Two (2.7%) identified as other and one (1.3%) declined to answer. Most survey participants identified as white 32 (42.7%), Latin/ Hispanic American 21(28%), Asian American 9 (12%), Other 7 (9.3%), African American 5 (6.7%). The participant's education levels consisted of no college 7 (9.3%), some college 40 (53.3%),



undergraduate degree 20 (26.7%), some graduate 5 (6.7%), graduate degree 2 (2.7%).

Table 1  
*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants, N=74*

Demographics	N (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Woman	48 (64)
Man	14 (18.7)
Non-binary/ Third Gender	9 (12)
Other	2 (2.7)
Decline to Answer	1 (1.3)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White	32 (42.7)
Latin/ Hispanic American	21 (28)
Asian American	9 (12)
Other	7 (9.3)
African American	5 (6.7)
<b>Education Level</b>	
No College	7 (9.3)
Some College	40 (53.3)
Undergraduate Degree	20 (26.7)
Some Graduate	5 (6.7)
Graduate Degree	2 (2.7)

## Data Analysis

### Social Media Usage

This study collected data to examine participant's social media usage and two data points were collected to gather this information. The number of hours participants spent per day across all social media platforms. Participants were instructed to list a number between 0- 24 to correspond with the number of hours in a day. Respondents reported hours spent on social media via free response

one time and multiple participants reported the same number of hours.

Therefore, the frequencies at which the time spent on social media per day have been listed here. The self-report data for hours spent on social media per day are as follows (n= 74): 21 (28%) participants reported spending 4 hours per day on social media, 11 (14.7%) reported spending 2 or 3 hours per day, 8 (10.7%) reported 5 hours per day, 5 (6.7%) reported 6 or 8 hours per day, 4 (5.3%) reported spending 1 or 7 hours per day, 2 (2.7%) reported 10 hours per day, and 1 (1.3%) reported spending 30 minutes, 11, or 12 hours per day. The minimum number of hours reported per day was 30 minutes and the maximum was 12 (M= 4.385, SD= 2.4023).

Hours spent per week on social media across all platforms was collected to further examine social media usage. This data was intended to capture the overall time spent on social media across a seven-day period. Participants were instructed to list a number between 0- 168 to correspond with the number of hours in a week. Respondents reported hours spent on social media via free response one time and multiple participants reported the same number of hours. Therefore, the frequencies at which the time spent on social media per week are as follows (n= 73): 9 (12%) participants reported spending 30 hours per week, 7 (9.3%) reported spending 28 hours per week, 6 (8%) reported 14 hours per week, 5 (6.7%) reported spending 40 hours per week, 4 (5.3%) reported spending 35, 21, 20, or 15 hours per week, 2 (2.7%) reported spending 70, 60, 56, 42, 16, or 5 hours per week, and 1 (1.3%) reported either 85, 77, 64, 49, 45,

31, 25, 23, 19, 18, 12, 11, 10, 8, 7, 3.5, or 2 hours per week. The minimum number of hours reported per week was 2 minutes and the maximum was 85 (M= 29.377, SD= 17.9160).

### The Adapted SCS-R

The SCS-R is used to measure attitudes and perceived behaviors towards sexual consent. For this research, the SCS-R was adapted to reduce the length of the overall survey for the purpose of improving the likelihood of participant's completion of the survey. The adapted SCS-R questions were divided into their corresponding subscales as directed in the original scale's breakdown. This was to improve the internal consistency reliability of questions 8-21 in the survey.

Five subscales that address sexual consent to measure participant's perceptions of sexual violence. The subscales are as follows: subscale 1, lack of perceived behavioral control (M= 2.05, SD= 1.114), subscale 2, positive attitude toward establishing consent (M= 5.99, SD= .960), subscale 3, indirect behavioral approach to consent (M= 4.65, SD= 1.210), subscale 4, sexual consent norms (M= 4.65, SD= 1.870), and subscale 5, awareness and discussion (M= 5.06, SD= 1.325). Subscale 1 consisted of questions 8-10, subscale 2 comprised of questions 11-13, subscale 3 pertained to questions 14-16, subscale 4 consisted of questions 17-18, and subscale 5 comprised of questions 19-21 (See Appendix A). This study reverse coded questions 3,6,9, and 14 as specified in the SCS-R prior to data analysis.

### Correlation Analysis of Social Media Usage and Consent Attitudes

A Pearson Correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the statistical relationship between participant's social media usage and perceptions of sexual consent. Social media usage was measured by collecting hours spent per day and week across all social media platforms against the subscales derived from an adapted version of the SCS-R. Each of the five subscales were tested alongside both hours per day and week using correlation analysis illustrated in Table 4. Since most of the results indicated a weak correlation with predominantly no significance, further analysis was withheld.

Results indicated a weak, positive correlation between hours per day across all social media platforms and positive attitudes toward establishing consent (subscale 2)  $r=.236$ ,  $N=74$ ; however, the relationship was significant at the .05 level ( $p=.043$ ). In further investigation, results that indicated a close statistical significance between hours spent per week across all social media platforms and subscale 2,  $r=.167$ ,  $N=73$ ; still, the relationship was insignificant ( $p=.158$ ). Results indicated a weak, negative correlation between gender and indirect behavioral approach to consent (subscale 3)  $r=-.269$ ,  $N=74$ ; however, the relationship was significant at the .05 level ( $p=.020$ ).

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables*

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Hours per DAY on social media	74	4.39	0.49	—							
2. Hours per WEEK on social media	73	29.38	0.62	.873**	—						
3. Gender	74	1.61	0.27	-.076	.006	—					
4. Sub scale 1	74	2.05	1.114	-.124	-.113	.137	—				
5. Sub scale 2	74	5.99	.960	.236*	.167	-.040	-.512**	—			
6. Sub scale 3	74	4.65	1.210	.008	-.014	-.269*	.359**	—			
7. Sub scale 4	74	4.65	1.870	-.075	-.042	.083	.082	-.302**	—		
8. Sub scale 5	74	5.06	1.325	.122	.066	.053	-.039	.192	.078	-.316*	—

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

T-Test Comparison of Gender Differences

Researchers conducted a t-test for paired samples in response to the significance found between the gender and subscale 3 (indirect behavioral approach to consent) variables. The t-test was used to assess for a significant difference in gender, specifically women and men. Although data for genders like non-binary/third gender and other was collected, it was determined that too few

cases would be unable to detect group differences. This study hypothesized that based on participants gender identity, woman or man, responses to indirect behavioral approach to sexual consent would differ. There was a significant difference in the scores for gender ( $M=1.23$ ,  $SD=.422$ ) and subscale 3 ( $M=4.79$ ,  $SD=1.085$ ) conditions;  $t(61) = -22.675$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Feminist theories were used in this study to comprehend societal influences on expectations, attitudes, and thought processes of college aged students as they perceive sexual violence. As such, a Pearson's Correlation coefficient was employed to examine the statical relationship between gender and each of the five subscales. A negative and weak association between gender and indirect behavioral approach to consent (subscale 3) was present;  $r = -.269$ ,  $N=74$ , the relationship was significant at the .05 level ( $p=.020$ ). Table 4, variable 3 illustrates additional results for gender data.

### Summary

The survey was created using an adapted version of the SCS-R. Demographics were collected based on information deemed vital for understanding the sample population's characteristics by these researchers. Participants were recruited through Reddit by frequent reposting on the subreddit pages of samplesize, takemysurvey, and surveyexchange. Reddit posts included a brief description of the survey with a URL link to complete the survey on Qualtrics. Although this study received 136 responses, only 74 cases were

examined. Participants who did not complete the survey and did not meet the age requirement were removed from the study.

Overall, findings suggested a mixed association between attitudes and perceived behaviors towards sexual consent and social media usage. The association between hours spent per day across social media platforms and subscale 2 (positive attitude toward establishing consent) were found to be significant. Further correlation analysis indicated a significant finding between gender and subscale 3 (indirect behavioral approach to consent). Since this study was conceptualized using feminist theories, these researchers found it appropriate to assess if significant differences existed among the variables; gender and indirect behavioral approach to sexual consent using t-test for paired samples. Significant differences were found between gender and subscale 3.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter will provide an interpretation and discussion of the study's findings. Researchers will provide an overview of this study's limitations and implication for future social work clinicians and students. Recommendations for clinical practice and future research will be offered with the intention of improving field practice and our understanding of sexual consent norms and practices.

#### Discussion

Sexual violence is a prominent social issue affecting college aged student's today. Likewise, social media has become a popular socializing agent for people ages 18-24. The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of social media on college aged student's understanding of sexual violence and consent attitudes. To reduce participant's possibility of reexperiencing trauma, attitudes and perceived behaviors towards sexual consent were examined in its place.

The surveys questions were aimed at collecting data specifically to measure time spent on social media in an attempt to determine participant's level of immersion in social media. The questions selected for this research from the SCS-R were chosen based on highest factor loadings within each subscale. The intention of the adapted SCS-R was to measure participant's perceived



behaviors and attitudes towards sexual consent. Overall, data analysis determined that hours per day and week spent on social media had no association with perceptions of sexual consent. However, one significant finding was identified in hours spent per day on social media and subscale 2. Further analysis revealed gender had a significant difference in subscale 3.

Initially it was hypothesized that social media functioned as a socializing agent for people ages 18-24. As such the adapted SCS-R was meant to capture an association between the sample populations attitudes toward sexual consent. The significant finding between hours spent per day across all social media and positive attitudes toward sexual consent suggests that there is some relationship between how the sample population's attitude is influenced by their peers on social media. Non-significant findings among hours spent per day on social media and subscales 1, 3, 4, and 5 were found. Additionally, hours spent per week on social media with subscales 1 through 5 indicated a lack of relationship in peer influence from social media in attitudes, perceptions of behavior, and norms for sexual consent. These findings did not fulfill the initial study's hypothesis.

Research conducted by Conley et al. (2017) determined that social forces, such as social media, influenced participant's attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge. Unlike the aforementioned research, this study was unable to draw a connection between social media as a social force that influences perceived behaviors, indirect behavioral approach, norms, and awareness and discussion. However,

this study shared with research conducted by Conley et al. (2017) that social media usage correlated with participant's attitudes toward sexual consent.

Two subscales were used to measure participant's perceived behavioral control and behavioral approach to sexual consent. In each case, social media usage did not indicate a relation. These findings did not align with the findings produced by Mastrodicasa & Metellus in a 2013 study. In their study, social media was found to have an influence in participant's socializing behaviors. This study used social media to measure an association with behaviors related to sexual consent, but findings were futile. Although the behaviors measured in the previous study differed from the behaviors in this study, it was expected that some relationship between social media usage and behaviors would be found.

Jaffe et al. (2021) conducted research following the #metoo movement to measure shifting public perceptions, reporting knowledge, and social supports. Findings revealed a reduction in stigma of sexual assault, an increase in seeking reporting knowledge, and an increase in the use of social supports via social media (Jaffe et al., 2021). Subscale 4 intended to examine sexual consent norms based on social media usage. Subscale 5 sought to assess awareness and discussion of sexual consent. Although findings were insignificant, researchers concluded that more in-depth analysis of social media usage would have altered outcomes.

These researchers thought it necessary to include gender in the data analysis due to the use of feminist theory and gender schema theory as guiding

concepts. Tests revealed that gender was negatively correlated to subscale 3, indirect behavioral approach to consent. To further interpret these findings, a paired samples t-test was used. The t-test used the independent variables for gender, women and men, to test with subscale 3 for the purpose of identifying significant differences between women and men. Those findings revealed that women and men were significantly different in their use of non-verbal and body language cues for acquiring sexual consent. It is important to consider that more women completed this survey than men. These findings align with the feminist and gender schema theories in that women tend to hold more qualms about interpreting sexual consent than men. This is likely due to early establishment of cultural norms indicating women are most likely be victimized and the use of schemas quickly interpret gender information (Dardis et al., 2017).

#### Limitations of the Study Design

An evident limitation in this study is its sample size. Initially, 136 participants completed this survey. Participant's that did not meet the age requirement, had no filled in the hours per day and, did not complete one or more of the adapted SCS-R questionnaire was removed. This left a remaining 74 cases for analysis. Another important limitation was issues with finding a compatible internal consistency reliability rating with the complete adapted SCS-R. To adjust for the issue, researchers used subscales with appropriate reliability ratings to test data.

Another limitation was that there were more women than men participants, thus establishing a greater female perspective in the data results. Additionally, there was a limitation in our data collection of social media usage. Collected data focused on hours per day and week and did not include specific social media content viewed. Furthermore, level of interaction on social media was not measured.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice and Research

The purpose of this research study was to examine the role of social media usage on perceptions of sexual violence among college aged students. Findings indicated a relationship between hours spent per day on social media and subscale 2, positive attitudes toward establishing consent. These researchers encourage future social workers to consider the association among positive attitudes surrounding consent and time spent on social media. To establish a more supportive platform that promotes social norms to protect against sexual violence and consent attitudes, social workers should include questions about social media usage in assessments and treatment planning. A client's social media content usage would provide insight to the level of influence it has on their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about sexual violence and consent. This information is applicable for survivors of sexual violence and to better understand offender's thinking in the hopes of establishing preventative measures.

Based off this finding, researchers recommend further studies that assess specific content viewed and interactions with said content on social media. An example of this is participant's interaction with pornography. Pornography is becoming more interactive with specific social media sites through opportunities to post sexually explicit content. Furthermore, social media websites publicize unelicited content that individuals would not have otherwise engaged with through mutual follower's liking and reposting. This would provide a more thorough understanding of how social media influences perceptions of sexual consent. It would be beneficial to include a scale that better measures perceptions and experiences of sexual violence as it pertains to social media. Lastly, a questionnaire that measures knowledge of sexual assault criteria would further develop understanding of sexual violence on college campuses.

Unintentionally, significant findings revealed a relationship between sexuality (i.e: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, other, etc) and subscale 5, awareness and discussion. Conclusions can be drawn that there are some connection that needs to be further examined between sexuality and sexual consent. These researcher's interpretation of these findings suggest that the resistance to accepting non-heterosexuals limits social support seeking behaviors. Social supports were a protective factor to sexual assault. Further research is imperative to improve the amount of resources regarding sexual education that normalizes non-heterosexual intimacy.

Secondly, a significant result was found among ethnicity (i.e: African American, Asian American, European American, Native North American/ Hawaiian native, Latin/Hispanic American, other) and subscale 2, positive attitudes toward establishing consent. This finding implies that participant's attitudes vary based on ethnicity, thus highlighting the importance of cultural diversity in research and cultural competence in clinical practice.

### Conclusion

This research study assessed perceptions of sexual violence among college aged students and the role of social media usage for the purpose of improving clinical practice and research. The sample population included Reddit users age 18-24 with some college background. Significant results indicated some association between hours spent on social media per day and attitudes toward sexual consent. Additional findings revealed gender correlated to indirect behavioral approach to consent. Implications of this study expose the importance of including social media in clinical practice, such as in intakes and treatment plans. Furthermore, this study indicates the growing importance in developing a better understanding of causes of sexual violence. Previous studies indicated gender differences which paralleled the findings in the study. Previous studies examine social media usage in depth which would have shown insight into the relationship between social media usage and sexual violence. Future research

needs to continue to explore social media as a socializing agent and the role it has in influencing attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge regarding sexual violence.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY

DEVELOPED BY EMILY BAUTISTA AND MARIJANE GARCIA



1. What is your age group?
  - a. 18-24
  - b. 25-31
  - c. 32-38
  - d. 39 +
2. What Ethnicity best describe you?
  - a. African American
  - b. Asian American
  - c. European American
  - d. Native North American/ Hawaiian Native
  - e. Latin/ Hispanic American
  - f. Other (Specify)
3. What gender best describes you?
  - a. Woman
  - b. Man
  - c. Transgender
  - d. Non-binary/ Third gender
  - e. Other (Specify)
4. Do you consider yourself to be?
  - a. Heterosexual or straight
  - b. Homosexual
  - c. Bisexual
  - d. Other
  - e. I prefer not to answer
5. To the best of your ability, specify which social media platforms you use (Check all that apply)
  - a. Twitter
  - b. Facebook
  - c. Instagram
  - d. Tiktok
  - e. Snapchat
  - f. Reddit
6. How many hours a **day** do you spend on social media, across all social media platforms used? (Enter a number from 0 to 24)
  - a. Free response
7. How many hours a **week** do you spend on social media, across all social media platforms used? (Enter a number from 0 to 168)
  - a. Free response

The following questions are intended to measure an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding how sexual consent should be and is negotiated between sexual partners.

		Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewh at Agree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewh at Disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly Disagree (7)
8.	I would have difficulty asking for consent because it would spoil the mood							
9.	I am worried that my partner might think I'm weird or strange if I asked for sexual consent before starting any sexual activity							
10.	I feel confident that I could ask for consent from a new sexual partner [R]							
11.	I feel that sexual consent should always be obtained							

	before the start of any sexual activity							
12.	I believe that asking for sexual consent is in my best interest because it reduces any misinterpretations that might arise							
13.	Not asking for sexual consent some of the time is okay [R]							
14.	Typically, I communicate sexual consent to my partner using nonverbal signals and body language							
15.	It is easy to accurately read my current (or most recent)							

	partner's nonverbal signals as indicating consent or non-consent to sexual activity							
16.	I always verbally ask for consent before I initiate a sexual encounter [R]							
17.	I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a new relationship than in a committed relationship							
18.	I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a casual sexual encounter than in a							

	committed relationship							
19.	I have discussed sexual consent issues with a friend							
20.	I have heard sexual consent issues being discussed by other students on campus							
21.	I have not given much thought to the topic of sexual consent [R]							

22. Participant's estimated income

- a. 0-10K
- b. 11- 21k
- c. 22-30k
- d. 31K +

23. Relationship Status

- a. Single
- b. Dating
- c. Partnered
- d. Married
- e. Other/ I prefer not to answer

24. Education level

- a. No college
- b. Some College
- c. Undergraduate Degree
- d. Graduate Degree

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the use of the social media use among college students aged 18-24 and their perceptions of sexual violence. The study is being conducted by graduate students, Emily Bautista and Marijane Garcia, under the supervision of Dr. Laurie Smith, Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine the use of social media among college students aged 18-24 and their perceptions of sexual violence.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked of a few questions on the current use of social media, perceptions of sexual violence, and demographics.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will remain confidential, and data will be reported anonymously in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey.

**RISKS:** Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research. Participants will be provided with resources at the end of the survey.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Smith at (909) 537-3837.



**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 20XX.

\*\*\*\*\*

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEF

Thank you for your participation. If you or anyone you know has been a survivor of sexual violence or would like to receive information and support please save and use the resources below:

**National Resources:**

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE AVAILABLE 24/7 1(800)656- 4673

SAFE (DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE) (800) 799-SAFE (7233)

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES VISIT RAINN.ORG OR CLICK THE LINK

BELOW:

[HTTPS://WWW.RAINN.ORG/NATIONAL-RESOURCES-SEXUAL-ASSAULT-SURVIVORS-AND-THEIR-LOVED-ONES](https://www.rainn.org/national-resources-sexual-assault-survivors-and-their-loved-ones)

DIAL 211 FOR INFORMATION AND NON-EMERGENCY REFERRALS TO

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND OTHER SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA.

APPENDIX D  
REDDIT POST STATEMENT

Hello,

Our names are Emily and Marijane and we are social work graduate students conducting a research study to explore the use of social media and perceptions of sexual violence. Participation in this survey requires you to be 18 and older. We would greatly appreciate your participation in this anonymous electronic survey. Participation is completely voluntary and it should only take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

Thank you!

Emily and Marijane

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

Both researchers were responsible for collecting, processing, and analyzing data. Researchers continuously participated in the revision and submission of the IRB application until its completion. Researchers divided the responsibility of developing the survey via Qualtrics. Researchers produced the Reddit post for participant's involvement in the survey. Both researchers combined efforts to complete the remainder of the research project and produce a poster for exhibition at the research symposium.