

Sexual assault on college campuses: A behavioral approach

Ana Gantman & Betsy Levy Paluck
Women and Public Policy Research Seminar
Harvard Kennedy School
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Policy to address sexual assault in the #metoo moment

Rehearsal for this discussion was the campus sexual assault debates

- Prevalence (and legitimacy of survivor accounts)
- Punishment
- Intervention

On campuses, in media, culminating in the White House Report of 2014



NOT ALONE

The First Report of the White House Task Force to
Protect Students From Sexual Assault

April 2014



- Asserted prevalence
- Called for measurement and reporting
- Called for bystander intervention
 - “We are also providing schools with links and information about how they can implement their own bystander intervention programs on campus.”
 - “Among the most promising prevention strategies – and one we heard a lot about in our listening sessions – is bystander intervention.”

What is bystander intervention?

- Training to identify and respond to situations where sexual assault may happen or is happening
- Relies on students to intervene
- 93% of prevention programs include bystander training (cultureofrespect.org)
- There are a few evaluations, even fewer are experimental (but see Coker et al., 2011)
 - Most examine attitudes (e.g., agreement with items like “A lot of women lead a man on and then they claim rape”)
 - Or self-reported behavior (e.g., description of a situation, asked if they would/have intervened)

Where did bystander intervention come from?

- Initial theory: “everyone needs to participate to end assault” with training for men and other allies
- Now: propelled by David Lisak, a vocal proponent of the **serial rapist model**

Serial Rapist Model

- **Idea:** A small number of students are responsible for the vast majority of sexual assault on campus (Lisak, 2004; 2011)
- **Evidence:** One cross sectional self-report survey of males, **ages 18-71** (Lisak & Miller, 2002)
 - 6% of respondents acknowledged attempted or completed rape
 - The multiple acts committed by this 6% of the sample were estimated to account for 91% of all reported assaults in survey
- “Serial rapists” plan and premeditate their attacks (Lisak, 2011), have lower than normal levels of empathy (Lisak & Ivan, 1995), and greater hostility towards women (Lisak & Roth, 1988)

Serial Rapist Model

“Rather than focusing prevention efforts on the rapists, it would seem far more effective to focus those efforts on the far more numerous bystanders” – David Lisak, 2011

Serial Rapists? Critiques of Lisak & Miller study

- Cross-sectional study of community members (age 18-71) and students reporting on rapes from the time period before and during college
- Does not take into account whether multiple acts span multiple incidents
- Does not take into account whether the perpetrators assaulted one or many victims

Sexual Assault is a More Widespread Behavior

- Two recent large-sample longitudinal studies of male-identified college undergraduates find that twice as many men report rape but on fewer occasions each (Swartout, Koss, White, Thompson, Abbey, & Bellis, 2015)
- While a substantial number report more than one rape, their trajectories over time contradict the simplistic idea that they are “serial” perpetrators

Sexual Assault is a More Widespread Behavior

“Although the serial rapist assumption is widely taken as fact by politicians and the popular press, it appears to be premised on a single source”

“Exclusive emphasis on serial predation to guide risk identification, judicial response, and rape-prevention programs is misguided....[we caution] against a uniform approach to high school and college rape response and prevention”

–Swartout et al., 2015

Why does the serial rapist model appeal?



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Lecture by David Lisak

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Emerson Hall, Room 105
Wed., Feb. 11, 2015, 6 – 7:30 p.m.



David Lisak, a nationally recognized clinical psychologist, will be discussing his research at a community-wide meeting. His lecture will be focusing on how his research informs bystander intervention and how the peer group can help prevent sexual assault. All are welcome!

Gazette Classification: Lecture

Organization/Sponsor: H-OAP and Title IX Office

Speaker(s): David Lisak

Date:

Wednesday, February 11, 2015 - 18:00

Why determine the course of policy and

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Archive

Understanding Sexual Offender Dynamics and Our Role as a Community

Join Dr. David Lisak in a discussion on the motivation and characteristics of serial, non-stranger offenders and learn what Princeton's students, faculty and staff can do to prevent sexual assault on our campus.

Dr. Lisak is a clinical psychologist who specializes in the study of the causes and consequences of interpersonal violence. His research focuses on the motives and behavior of rapists, the impact of childhood abuse on adult men, and the relationship between child abuse and later violence. He consults nationally with law enforcement prosecutors, judges and the U.S. Military, and he was the founding editor of the journal, *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*.

Dessert and refreshments will be available.

Event Location: Taylor Auditorium in Frick

Start Date:

Tuesday, 7 April 2015 -
8:00pm to 9:30pm

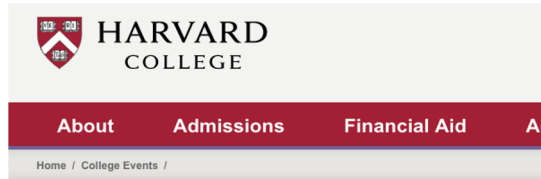
Related Signature Event : Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM)



217 McCosh Health Center
Washington Road, Princeton, NJ 08544

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The image shows a webpage for an event. On the left is a vertical purple sidebar with the word "Archive" at the top. The main content area has a blue header for the event title. Below the title is a paragraph of introductory text, followed by a paragraph about Dr. Lisak's research. Then, it states that dessert and refreshments will be available. The event location, start date, and time are listed, along with a related signature event. At the bottom of the page is a dark grey footer with the Princeton University logo, address, and a Facebook link.

Archive

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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What is the psychological appeal of the serial rapist model?

(Gantman & Paluck, 2018)

- Clearly defines good and bad people
- Provides simple story of justice, identifies who is a villain and whose behavior we should change
- Preserves faith in, perceived legitimacy of, the broader system
- Only impugns certain people who are perceived as “abnormal”
- Avoids problematizing human nature

Hypothesis

The greater desire to perceive neatness in the world (**need for closure**) and in other people (**essentialism**)...

The greater desire to perceive the world as just (**belief in a just world**), the system as fair (**system justification, general and specifically for gender roles**),, and social hierarchies as legitimate (**social dominance orientation**)...

...the greater the endorsement for the **serial rapist model** of sexual assault perpetration

Methods: Explanation of serial rapist model

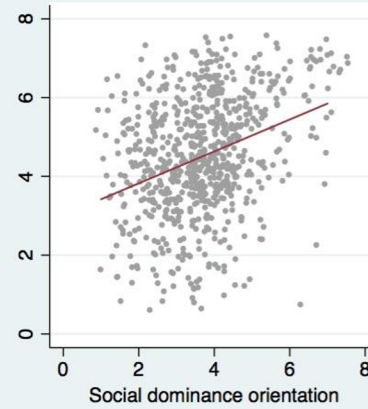
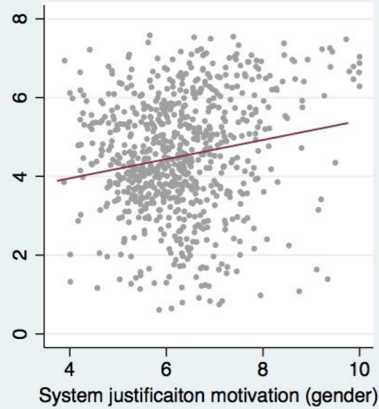
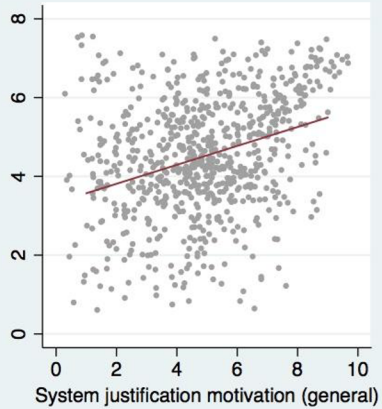
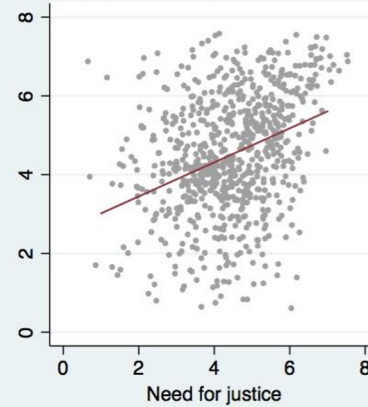
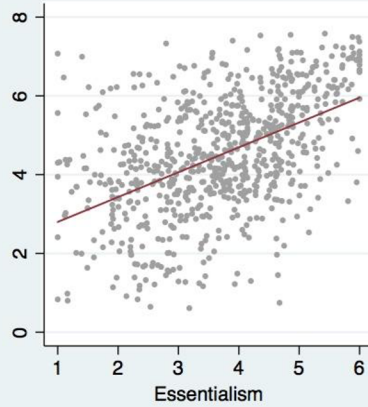
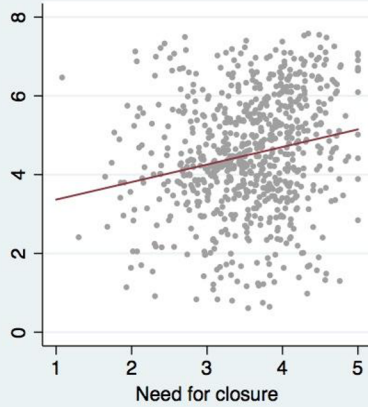
One explanation for the high rates of sexual assault on college campus is that the majority of assaults are perpetrated by a small group of “bad apples” or “predators” – young men who each commit multiple rapes each.

These young men use strategies like:

- intentionally giving women too much to drink
- separating women from their friends
- identifying women who are too intoxicated to consent
- using sufficient force or threats to coerce victims into submission

This small group of serial rapists can be distinguished from the majority of men on campuses, who are not involved in sexual assault.

Endorsement of the serial rapist model of sexual assault perpetration



These models have **psychological appeal**

(Gantman & Paluck, in prep) but the data indicate that there

are **multiple types of perpetrators** (Brennan & Swartout, in

press), **and** **perpetration is much more**

widespread on college campuses (Swartout, et al, 2015)

Behavioral science approach (Gantman & Paluck, under review)

- Behavior is a product of a person's perception of their current context, driven less by personal characteristics, or by wholly external rewards
- No tradition of applying this perspective to sexual assault

Behavioral science approach (Gantman & Paluck, under review)

- Factors that affect people's perception of their current context:
 - Scripts, expectations, norms, goals, habits, values
- Contextual features that affect assault behavior:
 - Types of social spaces, historically male institutions, geographical configurations, info embedded into contexts

Example: Consent as a person x situation product

Person-level: What are your perceptions of consent? What are your existing schemas for consent and sex?

Situation-level: How are the people around you discussing, not mentioning consent? What do you perceive to be the opinions of those around you? Are any institutional practices reinforcing / raising / defining the idea of consent and when?

Consent in Context

We want students to **value** consent -- How does something become a **moral value**?

- Attitudes exist on a spectrum from preferences to moral values
- Social and psychological processes shape a preference into a value by making it seem:
 - more broadly shared, more central to one's identity,
 - its consequences more emotionally vivid
 - in need of action, legitimizing censure of deviators, and promoting institutional support
- Variation by **context**
 - Affects how receptive people are to messages about consent

Case Study: Princeton University Eating Clubs

- Very similar values across clubs -- part of the same “street” scene, share the same Princeton environment
- The clubs have weekly parties, 48% of all students reporting sexual assault report meeting their perpetrator there for the same time (not accounting for friends and dates)
- Worked with two clubs:

Testing a “consent pledge” (Gantman, Duker, Starck, & Paluck in prep)

Does the consent pledge constitute one process that moves students toward making consent a moral value?

We would know if:

- Make universal judgments about consent
- Perceive consent to be a shared idea
- Think in more black and white terms about consent
- Feel that consent requires action

Hypothesis

An **institutional practice**, driven by students who define the Princeton or eating club identity, should make students feel that **consent** is more of a **value** (vs. those who do not institute the practice).

Students in a context where the consent pledge is practiced, should be more receptive to “moral appeals” than students in a context where it is not

Eating Club 1



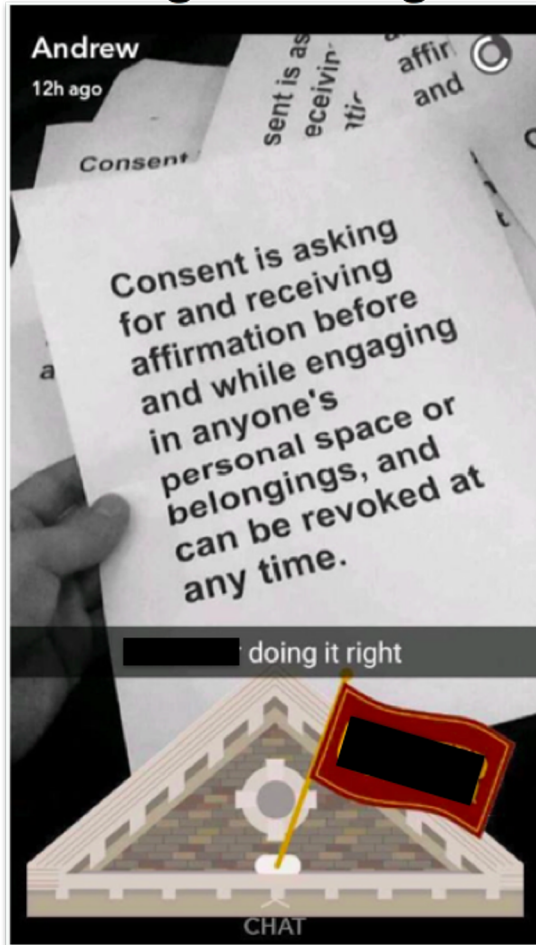
- Pledge originators
- Prior pledge use
- Mandatory pledge
- $N = 176$
- Dropout = 0

Eating Club 2



- Pledge first timers
- No prior pledge use
- Optional pledge
- $N = 328$
- Dropout = 12
 - moral pledge = 10

Original Pledge



Moral Pledge

Princeton students know: for sexual activity to be **right**, it must be consensual.

I **stand with** my fellow Princeton students: **non-consensual sex** is not sex; it's **violence**.

I am **responsible** for getting and receiving **consent**, which cannot be given when **incapacitated**, and can be **revoked** at any time.

Eating Club 1



Students enter party



Randomly assigned:
original vs. moral pledge



Party



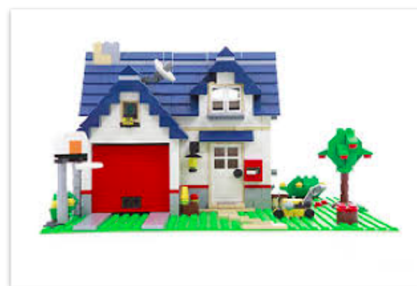
Exit



Measure moral status of
pledge and sexual assault



Eating Club 2



Students enter party



Randomly assigned:
original vs. moral pledge



Party



Exit



Measure moral status of
pledge and sexual assault



Evidence of consent as a value

- Make universal judgments about consent
- Perceive consent to be a shared idea
- Think in more black and white terms about consent
- Feel that consent requires action

Survey Question

Should everyone read the pledge?

What percent of your friends appreciate the pledge?

Is consent confusing?

How responsible are you for preventing assault?

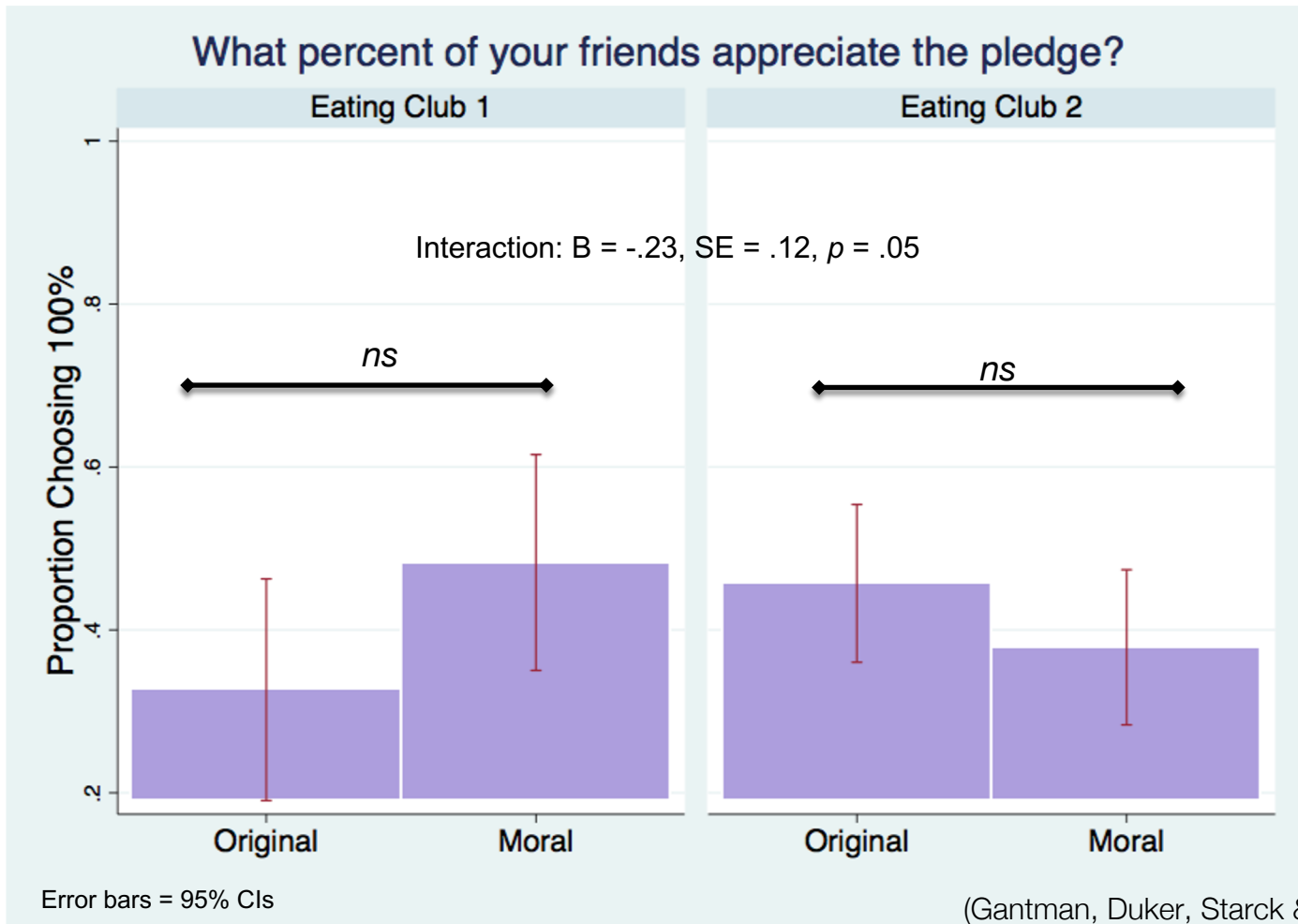
Effects of Original vs. Moral Pledge in Two Contexts



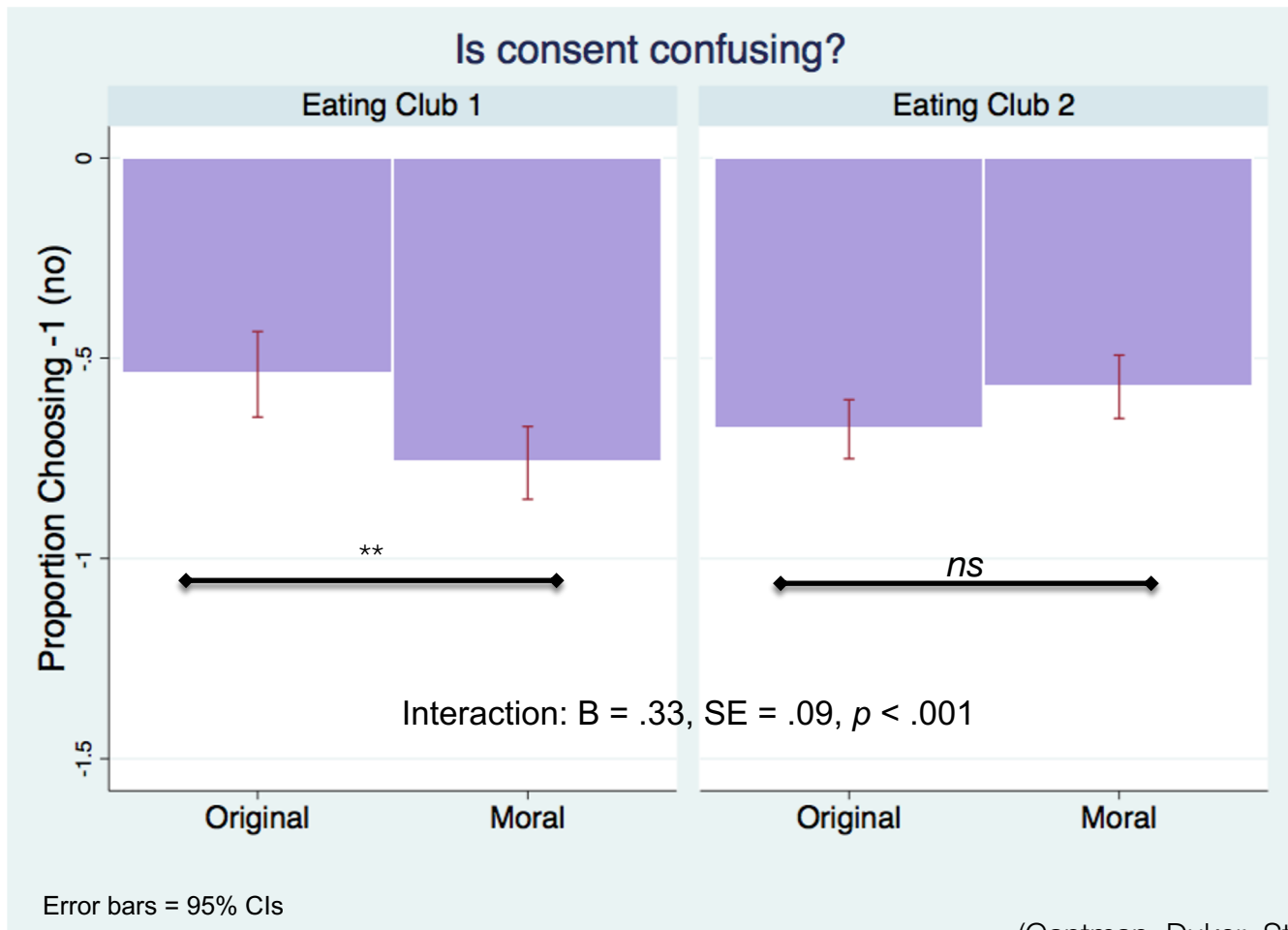
Error bars = 95% CIs

(Gantman, Duker, Starck & Paluck, in prep)

Effects of Original vs. Moral Pledge in Two Contexts



Effects of Original vs. Moral Pledge in Two Contexts



Effects of Original vs. Moral Pledge in Two Contexts



Social and psychological processes linked to local context make individuals more or less receptive to moral appeals, and more receptive to turning a new idea into a value

Insights for sexual assault prevention

- Do not pathologize individuals—think “banality of evil” as it belongs to the person and the situation, rather than “evil people”
- Think locally--examine the immediate situations in which behavior occurs
- Diagnose what are the perceptions and the features of the physical environment that might trigger the behavior
- Similar “trainings” or appeals may not be received the same among subgroups in the same (tight-knit, common-identity) community

Behavioral science model of sexual assault (Gantman & Paluck, under review)

Features of a person to consider	Features of situation to consider
<p>Perceived social norms and schemas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ideas about what is “real” rape -perceptions of commonality and frequency of sex on campus 	<p>Geographical configurations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student residences have little social space that isnt a bedroom -Parties are not allowed at sororities or women’s home turf
<p>Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -have “the right kind” of college experience -politeness goal -myopic goals 	<p>Situation-based power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Person part of the numeric majority in the room -Person who has the “list” for the party -Person who controls who gets into social club
<p>Person perception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -expectations and stereotypes of partners of different races, ethnicities, class -humanizing and objectifying perceptions 	<p>Situational labels and frames</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hotel room labeled as hotel vs. work space -Themed parties (e.g., stoplight parties)
<p>Moral reasoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -moral licensing from chivalrous behavior -unknown peers may fall outside the “moral circle” of who deserves care 	<p>Information cues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prominent signage for resources (sexual assault hotline, health center, shuttle home) -Smart phone app with prompts for descriptive reporting