‘IT SHOULDN’T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY:’
A FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS OF RAPE MYTHS
IN CLERY ACT TIMELY WARNINGS

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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I wish to acknowledge the staggering wisdom of the women on my committee. I had the great fortune to learn from most of my committee members in the classroom, on the magazine staff and in the newsroom. But I had the special pleasure of gleaming each of their hard-earned knowledge, passion and experience as members of my committee to make this thesis into something with a purpose. Thanks to all of them for not only offering guidance on this research, but also for shaping the culture of education on this campus and allowing me to reap the benefits. I am grateful to have the ability to look up to these women as examples of leaders, educators, researchers, bosses and editors who inspire others to get in formation.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the last several decades, there have been federal-level efforts to help eradicate rape-supportive cultures on college campuses across the country. Among those, the Clery Act and Title IX are heavy-hitters. However, when policy fails to account for the rape-supportive mechanisms, systems and procedures that permeate society, the very ways we attempt to empower victims and potential victims of sexual assault can become tools of further oppression. Under the Clery Act, universities are required to send out campus-wide timely warnings if a sexual assault occurs on or near campus wherein the perpetrator was unknown or not caught. This research, conducted as qualitative focus group analysis, shows how students identify, interpret and make meaning out of perceived rape myths embedded in the descriptions of the sexual assaults in the Clery releases (timely warnings). Further, the way those students interacted with those rape myths was shown to uphold and maintain a rape-supportive culture that denied, trivialized and justified sexual assaults. Through this research, it becomes clear that procedures such as timely warnings perpetuate and reaffirm students’ acceptance of rape myths in relation to sexual assaults on college campuses. It is necessary, then, that a public health approach to sexual assault prevention on college campuses is necessary to eradicate a rape-supportive culture by changing the dynamics of the culture, instead of focusing on bystander intervention or reducing risk.
Introduction

On Oct. 25, 2012, University of Missouri Police Department sent out two Clery releases (timely warnings under the federal Clery Act) about related instances of sexual assault that occurred on campus — cases of intimidating and touching victims that resulted in convictions of stalking and assault with a sentence of jail and probation. Turns out, the offender had been arrested previously for stalking several women.

Instead of focusing on the crimes or campus safety, campus-wide discussion was pinpointed on two words written into the first Clery release: “bear hug.” Those two words, which the release used to describe the way in which the perpetrator grabbed the victim, sparked a discourse of scorn, disbelief and exasperation. Almost overnight, MU’s notorious "Bearhugger” character was born. Social media users included a satirical #bearhugger to tweets and posts, and a novelty @BearHugBandit twitter account was created that remains active to this day. A popular local bar tweeted, “RT if you’ve been attacked by the Mizzou #BearHugger recently,” a post that 16 people indeed retweeted. One student tweeted, “#bearhugger good gosh, talk about overreaction.”

Around the same time this discussion swept campus, MU was dealing with several other high-profile sexual assault incidents, including those of former basketball star forward Michael Dixon. As MU was put in national headlines for the allegations against Dixon, and eventually for dismissing him from the team, the student body reacted initially with tweets, signs and cries of “Free Dixon.”

The commonality of these two moments of widespread attention, and other incidents like these, show how integrated sexual assault is into campus culture.
Discussion on social aggregate site Reddit in an /r/CollegeBasketball thread turned from talk of Michael Dixon’s actions to the Bearhugger. Although users began with praising the seemingly swift action of the MU athletic department against Dixon, they were less impressed with the bearhugger incident. One user wrote, “I might've read incorrectly but it seems to me like #1 was a case of mistaken identity. No harm, no foul especially considering it was a hug. #2 was even less of an incident and another case of mistaken identity. Were there other things that happened that caused the individual to be charged with anything?” Even after being presented with information of the perpetrator’s history of stalking and intimidation, another user suggested that, “Unwanted physical contact is not always something that can or should be avoided. My father doesn't like hugs, they make him uncomfortable and I do it to show him I love him, because it's fun to watch him squirm and because touching people is part of living.” Another user agreed that “It isn’t okay to bearhug someone you don’t know,” but also said, “It wouldn’t be called into the police.” The discussion on this site shows how much people not only pay attention to the Clery releases but also actively read between the lines to create meaning out of the events described and attempt to fit those incidents into their understanding of rape-supportive culture and how they see gender dynamics.

Feminist efforts to address and eradicate the rape-supportive culture that is present in modern society have been gaining steam through the decades. Media pay more attention to sexual assault; policies on federal, state and institutional levels have been hastily slapped into place to deter such a culture; and the law is under fire for not catching up to modern standards rejecting sexism in rape cases. But through all of these, one can still trace a thread of rape myths and antiquated gender-role dynamics. Rape myths have been
shown to have a large influence on both society and individuals in the way that people interpret instances of sexual assault. Rape myths often serve the function of victim-blaming or abjuring blame from the perpetrator, thus perpetuating a system of victim oppression. Rape myths and rape-supportive culture are factors that contribute to a society where 60 percent of rapes are not reported and 97 percent of rapists don’t spend a single day in jail (United States Justice Department), despite the troubling statistic that one in four women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.

The high-profile cases on campuses show that if nothing else positive is happening by exposing these events, at least there is a society-wide discussion taking place. The focus on UVA also shows a specific, huge concern for rape research: college campuses. At MU, there have been several highly publicized instances of rape and assault against women: Sasha Menu Courey’s statement of rape before she committed suicide; Mike Dixon’s repeated sexual attacks on women; Derrick Washington’s attacks; a man breaking into the East Campus homes of young female students to sexually assault them, going a little further each time. And then there are the urban legends at the university: Don’t go to Pike, they have a rape room. This bar is a great place for feeling girls up on the dance floor. That frat is where you’ll get drugged. Don’t walk through East Campus or downtown alone past 11 p.m.

There have been several attempts made to address this culture on a policy level, including Title IX laws and enforcers and the Clery Act, in which institutions are encouraged to become safer, fairer places for female students. However, as research shows, rape culture and the acceptance of rape myths can often be engrained in the very
policy, institutions and minds of the policy makers that are attempting to put a Band-Aid on the problem.

This research will look into how one of those policies, the timely warnings as required through the Clery Act, contributes to or detracts from rape-supportive culture on a college campus. Students in focus groups will be asked to interpret actual Clery releases involving sexual assault on or near MU’s campus. That will demonstrate what meaning they draw from the release, both as applied to the incident that occurred and to the culture of sexual assault on their campus. The researcher will learn more about why the participants think of instances of sexual assault in the way they do and what their motivations are for thinking that way. Using radical feminist theory as the theoretical framework, an analysis of the research will attempt to understand how students interpret meaning from Clery releases and how that applies to the way they see sexual assault on their campus.

For the purpose of this research, rape-supportive culture will be used in place of rape culture to mean the perpetuation of male sexual aggression and dominance versus female passivity through gender norms and a sexist status hierarchy, which can also be identified as the patriarchy (Chasteen, 2011; Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Sanday, 2003). Rape myths are defined as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994).
Literature Review

There are several areas of research that are of particular interest to this study. This section serves as a review of the pertinent research that has been done on the Clery Act and its effectiveness; timely warnings; rape myths; rape-supportive culture on college campuses; how institutions employ rape myths; and barriers to victim reporting.

Clery Act

Although the Clery Act has been law for almost a quarter of a century, its effects and successes are still relatively unknown. Part of that ambiguity is because the legislation’s goals and intentions have been transformed over several installments of amendments, so it is hard for researchers to measure its success. In addition, the legislation’s vague language leaves much room for interpretation on behalf of the universities and colleges that must comply with it, so it is also hard for researchers to determine how much impact the Act has had on campus safety.

The Act was first passed in 1990 as the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act. The original goals of the legislation were broad-sweeping; in fact, Fisher, Cullen, and Turner (2002) called the legislation “symbolic” rather than “substantive” — in other words, an empty law meant to establish goals rather than implement hard and fast change. The initial intent of the Act was to increase transparency on the safety of college campuses by providing publically available information on crime and safety to students and parents. The Act was especially intended to inform prospective students and families of crime data, safety procedures and programs of the universities the students were applying to (Fisher, 2002; Carter, 2002; Janosik, 2001). Further, by forcing
universities to publically report crime data, the Act was meant to put pressure on these institutions to create safer environments for their students (Griffaton, 1993; Janosik, 2001); it’s simply not good marketing to be known as an unsafe school (Fisher, et. all, 2002). Universities’ compliance with the standards set by the legislation were tied to federal funding provided by Title IX and enforced by the U.S. Department of Education.

The Clery Act was pushed forward by the parents and supporters of Jeanne Clery, a college student who was raped, beaten, sodomized and murdered in her dorm room in 1986. After Clery’s death, her parents found out that there was “a history of campus violence and security problems that students and parents had not been told,” according to Campus Violence Symposium (2002) by Daniel Carter, who worked for the Clery Center for Security on Campus until 2012. Soon, the Clerys formed the safety-advocacy group Security on Campus, which is still one of the foremost organizations in the arena of student safety.

According to Fisher (1995), Jeanne Clery’s death — and her parent’s subsequent advocacy and lobbying efforts for federal regulations — was just the tipping point in public awareness of campus crime, with a focus on sexual assault. Previously, as Fisher and her colleagues assert in several of their papers (1998; among others), colleges had been previously viewed as “ivory towers,” microcosms where young people were in a golden age of learning, experimenting and experiencing life without threat of danger. Clery’s death and several other factors helped change society’s perspective of campuses from rose-colored to a more realistic image of “hot spots” of frequent victimization (Fisher, 1995). Part of the progressive change was the feminism movement, which had been picking up speed for several decades. In the 1970s, the rape-law reform that was tied to
the feminist movement helped draw attention to the widespread problem of sexual assault (Spohn, Horney, 1992). During the reform, many states revisited statutes in order to more clearly define rape, sexual assault and consent and to give victims more credibility under the law (Spohn, Horney, 1992), which of course remains unsolved in today’s legal system.

In addition, Title IX was passed in 1972, in an effort to increase gender equality and protection in education. Soon, some researchers turned their eyes on sexual assault on college campuses in particular. In 1987, for the first time, a national study by Koss, Gidycz and Wisniewski demonstrated that the problem of sexual assault against college women was widespread. In another interesting social movement, higher education was undergoing a crisis of role and responsibility: Should universities exist as stand-in parents, babysitters or perhaps simply bystanders? The idea of in loco parentis for higher education began dying out in the 1960s as students fought the moral control institutions once pressed on them while the popularity of protests and the Civil Rights Movement compelled students to express individual voices and independence (Lee, 2011). This gave rise to what Kaplin and Lee (2007) refer to as the “bystander era” in higher education in which institutions were no longer held responsible for student actions. But beginning in the 1980s, the idea of institutions acting as handlers of student safety mixed with the feminist movement’s advocacy for the abolition of sexual assault and other dangers. This became known as the “duty era” as universities were found responsible in lawsuits involving such threats as sexual assault and hazing (Bickel, Lake, 1999). Fisher, et. all (2002), touch on this in their commentary of the social change leading up to the Clery Act, citing Smith and Fossey (1995) in their paper on campus crime that reads, “in a number of precedent-setting cases, courts ruled that institutions of higher education
(IHEs) have legal duties to take reasonable steps to prevent ‘foreseeable’ crime and to provide an adequate level of security” (Smith, Fossey, 1995). To further enforce the need for change, the media took to covering these high-profile cases and kept campus safety in the spotlight in the 1980s (Carter, 2002; Fisher, et. all, 2002). These societal forces led up to the implementation of the Clery Act at the beginning of the 1990s. It has since been amended seven times to reflect the needs and practical implications of universities, such as expanding crime-data collection to include stalking in 2013, and refining sexual assault policy requirements in 1992.

Although the Act might have started as a “symbolic” fix on the problem of campus crime, it has gotten more specific over time with amendments, attention and practice and has resulted in change in policy and programs for universities. Janosik and Gehring (2003) outlined seven specific goals for universities:

• To improve the comprehensibility in higher education crime reporting
• To inform prospective students and parents of the realistic security of the institution
• To increase or improve safety programs available to students
• To help students practice safer behavior
• To reduce crime
• To develop better practices and policies for campus police departments
• To increase transparency and limit the perception that universities are hiding or sweeping away instances of crime to benefit their public image

Obviously, many of these goals are dependent on many of the others to be accomplished, and many of these goals, such as “reducing crime,” would be hard to realistically achieve.
But in the name of safety, the Act outlined several requirements and recommendations, including keeping crime logs and sending out yearly safety reports. The full list is available in the Appendix section of this proposal (Figure 1), but the area of focus of this study is timely warnings, which specified as the following:

Distribute timely warnings if an ongoing or immediate threat is related to one of the index crimes. According to the statutes, “Such reports shall be provided to students and employees in a manner that is timely and that will aid in the prevention of similar occurrences” (20 U.S.C. § 1092).

This study will draw particular focus on the timely warning requirement, which the University of Missouri calls a “Clery release.” The limited research available on timely warnings will be explored in a later section. The Clery Act relies on the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports list of index crimes to qualify which types of crimes get attention by administration. They are: criminal homicide, sex offenses (both forcible and non-forcible), robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft and arson. Recently, hate crimes have been added to the list of index crimes.

University compliance with the Act has not been unanimous or smooth. According to Carter (2002), “many schools have been reluctant to embrace the Act, viewing it as a burden rather than an opportunity” (pg. 7). Many schools have been hesitant to make negative information public knowledge (Carter, 2002). Higher education, after all, is a business, whether the institution is private or public. Some colleges worried that the transparency in campus crime could not only affect admissions, but also donations (Griffaton, 1993). In the beginning stages of the legislation’s implementation, some universities used the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act
(FERPA) as a reason to not comply with the Clery Act (Fisher, et. all, 2002). FERPA is intended to protect students’ identities and personal information. Some administrators argued the release of public information such as crime data or timely warnings could lead to the identification of victims, causing the university to lose funding under FERPA requirements. But those arguing for the side of transparency claimed universities were using FERPA to maintain the “wall of silence” that allowed institutions to keep their “dirty little secrets” of campus crime incidents (pg. 63, Fisher, et. all, 2002). Universities that don’t comply with the act are penalized with fines as proffered by the Department of Education, which can levy fees up to $35,000 per infringement. Kiss (2013) writes that it’s not only fines that can deal a heavy blow to universities that don’t comply, but institutions also tend to suffer potentially disastrous public relation nightmares, as well as civil suits from victims and victims' families. To highlight some of the most highly publicized recent cases of non-compliance, she points out Penn State’s Jerry Sandusky scandal; Yale University receiving $155,000 in fines for not reporting four sexual victimization instances from the early 2000s, and for not accurately defining the geographic campus limitations; and two similar cases with Swarthmore and Dartmouth colleges for also failing to report sexual victimization instances.

There are certainly shortcomings in the Act, and many universities are suffering from the inability or refusal to interpret the requirements adequately enough for compliance. In 2001, Kerr found in a doctoral dissertation that 122 Midwestern universities did not meet compliance standards and suggested the institutions’ necessary interpretations of the unclear language to be one of the major problems. The ambiguity of regulations and unrealistic expectations has resulted in the Clery Center for Security on
Campus organization to help higher learning institutions successfully implement and follow Clery Act procedures. Recently, the organization began offering a program called Clery Collaborative that helps train groups of administrators and security personnel work together across departments (Kiss, 2013). The Clery Center found four common mistakes many universities were making in their compliance efforts, including not properly identifying different geographic regions (fraternity houses as “off-campus” or “on-campus,” etc.), which could result in the university not reporting crimes that take place in areas that should be included in the crime statistics; not making the annual security report public; and not accurately reporting crime statistics or properly training those who are responsible to do so. The last common mistake identified by the Clery Center is of concern to this study: a deficiency in policy and properly outlined procedure in place for areas such as confidential reporting, prevention and education programs and, most importantly, timely warning systems (Kiss, 2013). This common ambiguity in timely warnings shows the system is not yet as close to perfect as it could be, leaving room for the perpetuation of rape culture and rape myths or creating other similar detriments to the Act’s main goals. McNeal (2007) surveyed members of the International Association of Campus Law Administrators (IACLEA) to see how the people at the frontlines of implementing the Clery Act on campuses view the Act’s effectiveness and feasibility. McNeal found data that would support Kiss’ (2013) later statement that vague language and ambiguity in the statutes make it hard for administrators to enact proper procedure. In terms of the geographic boundaries causing confusion that results in the types of fines Kiss outlines above, 86 percent of administrators said that section of the law was unclear (McNeal, 2007). Similarly, a majority believed overall ambiguity was one of the biggest
problems for compliance (McNeal, 2007). Sixty-six percent agreed there was also a “lack of institutional support,” 77 percent thought staff training practices were inadequate at their institution and a sizeable amount of respondents thought resistance within the institution were also barriers to compliance (McNeal, 2007).

So, even with the problems of ambiguous language and lack of institutional support, the question remains what kind of impact the Clery Act has had on campus crime. Janosik and his various colleagues have completed several studies focused on this area. They attempted to determine if students and parents consider the Clery Act crime data when making the choice of which university to attend, if students look at the data available to them once they’re at the school, what changes have been made in institutional procedure and policy, and, most importantly, if crime has actually been reduced on campuses. Overall, research has suggested that safety programs have increased on many campuses, and there were more strict procedures in place to respond to crime, but the amount of crime had remained at a steady rate when compared to data before the act’s passage.

In 2001, Janosik and Gehring found that most students remained unaware the Act existed, which means they were not reading the crime data. In 2003, they found students would read flyers or other distributed information, but that only women were more likely to change their behavior based on the information in order to protect themselves. They also found that when students saw this material, the students felt that campus officials took crime more seriously (Janosik, Gehring, 2003). Similarly, Janosik and Gregory, also in 2003, found that 53 percent thought students had more confidence in campus law enforcement, and, beyond that, 43 percent believed the Act resulted in more effective
policy for campus police, and many believed the safety programs offered to students were improved. Further, 57 percent of campus crime officials who were surveyed believed the Clery Act changes have improved how campus crime is reported, and 34 percent said students were more likely to report crime (Janosik, Gregory, 2003). Nevertheless, a majority of the surveyed stated they did not think the annual crime reports influenced students to change their behavior. To support that, Janosik and Gregory found that a staggering 85 percent of campus safety officials have not seen a change in overall crime committed on campus, and 90 percent “of respondents believe the Clery Act has had no impact on their crime rates at all” (Janosik, Gregory, 2003). However, in 2006, Janosik and Gregroy asked residential life and student housing administrators about the effects of the Clery Act on student behavior, and they found that about half of respondents thought students were improving the way they protected themselves and their property.

Still, the researchers were surprised at the lack of knowledge of Clery Act requirements and still limited dissemination to students of information (Janosik, Gregory, 2006). In terms of prospective students and parents using the Clery Act information to make decisions on college choices, Janosik and Gregroy (2003) found that only 4 percent of members of the Association for Student Judicial Affairs thought students might consult that information. In 2003, the Chronicle of Higher Education found that, out of 18 concerns students had in selecting a school for the 2002 school year, campus safety was the 11th most considered factor.

Beyond the ability of higher education administrators to make changes based on the Clery Act, several researchers assert there are problems inherent to the law itself — especially when it comes to reporting procedures and the law’s reliance on students
reporting. Again, studies suggest many people who work with students or on campuses believe there has been a positive effect on crime reporting procedures. Fisher, et. all (2002) hold that “the crime statistics published to satisfy the Clery Act mandate are incomplete, if not inaccurate” (pg. 78). The researchers explain further: “A key assumption to the validity and reliability of campus crime statistics is that crimes reported to these officials are an accurate measure of the true levels of crimes that actually occur. This is a troublesome assumption” (pg. 83, 2002). Doerner and Lab (1998) agree that the Clery Act data simply demonstrates “police — and not necessarily criminal — activity.” Fisher, et. all, (2002) point to difference in victims’ willingness to self-report crimes to highlight the inaccuracy of the statistics that are made public. For example, the researchers compare two of the index crimes: motor vehicle theft and sexual assault. The former is one of the most highly reported crimes while the latter is one of the most underreported crimes (Fisher, et. all, 2002), a point addressed further later in this paper.

A study entitled “Beyond Clery Act Statistics; A Closer Look at College Victimization based on Self-Report Data,” by Gardella, et. all (2015) found a severe disparity between the information on crimes made public by the university through the Clery Act and what students themselves say they are experiencing. For example, the university from which respondents were anonymously surveyed reported 10 instances of sexual assault, but students self-reported 66 instances, 13 of which were repeated offenses. Cases of other assault and property-related crimes also showed a difference in the publically available data and the student’s reporting of instances, but the sexual victimization numbers were the most drastic. Another key point of interest in the study was that the information made public in compliance with the Clery Act did not include
data on stalking or harassment, which were two crimes that the researchers found affected hundreds of participants in the study. The Act was recently amended to include stalking considerations, such as victim-support programs, but the study again shows the discrepancy between the reality of college campus crime and how the Clery Act attempts to fix it.

**Timely warnings**

This paper has already outlined several areas of the Clery Act that often causes confusion that results in noncompliance. Many of those instances are from ambiguity in the language of the law itself. As previously mentioned, the timely warning requirement, which will be the focus of this study, also suffers from vague language and limited instructions. As Kiss (2013) pointed out, universities’ failure to create correct timely warnings is one of the common breaches of compliance. In Tiffany Richardson’s analysis of Clery Act violations (2014), she found the failure to release accurate or prompt timely warnings was one of the main breaches of compliance with 10 instances; the most amount of violations was found in inaccurate reporting (46 violations), or problems with the annual report. In almost every case studied, timely warnings accounted for some of the violations. At MU, the notifications are referred to as “Clery releases” instead of timely warnings.

The most recent version of the Department of Education’s Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting was released in February 2011. The first and most basic instruction for timely warnings is found on page 5, “Issue a timely warning for any Clery Act crime that represents an ongoing threat to the safety of students or employees.” In other words, if the crime could be repeated or if a perpetrator was not apprehended and is
probably inclined to commit the crime again, a timely warning should be issued. Universities are required to create policy that identifies “circumstances for which a warning will be issued; individual or office responsible for issuing the warning; and manner in which the warning will be disseminated” (pg. 121). The handbook suggests that campus security authorities should be responsible for creating the timely warnings and subsequently submitting that information to the required time logs and that university administration should create the policy for those enforcement bodies to follow in conjunction with them. Timely warnings should be used to “alert the campus community to certain crimes in a manner that is timely and will aid in the prevention of similar crimes” (pg. 111). The handbook refuses to define the word “timely” but instead considers the first availability of “pertinent information” to be the indicator of when to send a timely warning (pg. 111): “This is critical; it’s expected that even if you don’t have all of the facts surrounding a criminal incident or incidents, you will issue a warning” (pg. 111). The situations that require timely warnings are based on geographic requirements, namely those that are: “Reported to campus security authorities or local police agencies; and (are) considered by the institution to represent a serious or continuing threat to students and employees” (pg. 111). The handbook suggests administration should consider creating policy to issue timely warnings for crimes other than Clery Act crimes, including date rape drugs or kidnapping, or in areas that are not necessarily required to be covered by the law (pg. 112).

According to the handbook, decisions about whether to issue a timely warning should be “decided on a case-by-case basis” (pg. 112) that is based on the policy the administration and campus security groups established. There are several factors
administrators should consider, including the nature of the crime (literally, “Did two students get drunk and attempt to steal a golf cart from the campus one night, or does it appear that professional car thieves are preying on your campus?” pg. 112) and an ongoing danger to campus (“If a rape is reported on campus and the alleged perpetrator has not been caught, the risk is there. If the alleged perpetrator was apprehended, there is no continuing risk” pg. 112). An important aspect of timely warnings is how they are distributed: “the warning must be reasonably likely to reach the entire campus community” (pg. 114). The handbook suggests email, fliers, text messages or a combination. MU uses email for Clery releases.

In determining the content of timely warnings, the handbook once again refused to define this information, stating, “Clery Act regulations do not specify what information should be included in a timely warning” (pg. 113), which is particularly troubling in cases of sexual assault that discuss the nature of the crime, when viewed in light of the theories and other research discussed in this paper that shows how rape myths and the continuation of a rape-supportive culture can be infused into institutions such as campus security groups or university administrations. The handbook instead gives a rather unhelpful, sweeping instruction that “the warning should include all information that would promote safety and that would aid in the prevention of similar crimes” (pg. 113). It goes on to say that “Issuing a warning that cautions the campus community to be careful or to avoid certain practices or places is not sufficient. You must include information about the crime that triggered the warning” (pg. 113). That information — that would potentially discuss the type of sexual assault, the victim’s state of mind or drug or alcohol use or a concerningly vague description of the perpetrator — is where rape myths might
easily be employed in the Clery releases. The handbook states the university should create policy that determines what type of information should always be included (pg. 113). In terms of the concerns over including FERPA information in the Clery crime logs and notifications, the handbook states that FERPA can be ignored “when needed to protect the health and safety of others” (pg. 114). There are three sample timely warnings (Figures 2-4) in the appendix of this report, as well as three examples of MU Clery releases involving sexual assault (Figures 5-7).

The handbook clarifies the difference between timely warnings and emergency notification alerts, which an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education by Eric Hoover and Sara Lipka (2007) call remarkably and confusingly similar systems. According to the handbook (pg. 118), timely warnings are only required for Clery crimes, or the several outlined Index crimes such as sexual assault or larceny. The handbook states, “Timely warnings are triggered by crimes that have already occurred but represent an ongoing threat. Issue a timely warning for any Clery crime committed on your Clery geography that is reported to your campus security authorities or a local law enforcement agency and is considered by the institution to represent a serious or continuing threat to students and employees” (pg. 118). The handbook gives example scenarios that could require both types of notifications, including one — a shooter in a campus building — that would initially require an emergency notification alert but soon change to instead require a timely warning. In that case, the shooter was apprehended before the emergency notification alert went out. Considering the confusing nature and ambiguous distinction between the two, it’s no wonder universities have trouble constructing policy to encompass Clery Act requirements.
In fact, Hoover and Lipka’s article, entitled "Under Pressure to Give Speedy Crime Alerts, Campus Officials Worry About the Information's Usefulness," states that “the sophisticated emergency-notification systems that many colleges adopted after the shootings at Virginia Tech may have conflated, in some people's minds, the meanings of timely warnings and near-instant alerts.” The article points out other areas of confusion besides the difference between timely warnings and emergency notifications, including when to send the warning based on what information is available. The article highlights the debate between useful information and speedy notification. Allison Kiss, from the Security on Campus group, is quoted in the article to say that the intent of the Clery Act would imply that timely warnings should be sent out as soon as possible, with as much or little information as is available. The article quotes Henry S. Webber, University of Chicago’s vice president for community and government affairs, "When you make these decisions, there are always judgment calls," which shows just how variable each situation can be. The article outlines a situation where the university waited hours to send out a timely warning about a murder case and finally sent out a detailed email about it. The article states, “Colleges must often weigh the speed of responses against the quality of information.” One university chief of police, James Overton, is interviewed in the article. “Without guidelines on how to issue timely warnings, Mr. Overton tries to quickly announce something basic and update it later. The ‘bare minimum,’ he said, is the date and time of the incident, what happened (as simple as ‘shooting’), and a tip (often to stay indoors).” There is relatively little further research, literature or attention specific to timely warnings available. Most other research is wrapped in with general Clery Act studies and has already been discussed in this paper.
Rape Myths

The idea of rape mythology was first put forth by Brownmiller in 1975, but several years before the term was coined, Weis and Borges (1973) identified the thought pattern: “denial followed by justification” (pg. 77). One of the biggest challenges with research in the area of rape culture has been to define what rape myths are because they are often ingrained in thought patterns and therefore hard to identify, different among every case and hard to prove if true or false. Before the phenomenon was widely accepted as defined (by Burt notably in her 1980 paper “Cultural myths and support for rape” for the first time), rape myths were shown to appear in the belief systems and thought processes of both everyday citizens and professionals who interact with victims and rapists (Barber, 1974; Burt, 1978; Feild, 1978). The first definition of rape myths came from Burt (1980) as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (pg. 217). Burt based her identification of this pattern on previous research into sex role stereotyping by Feild (1978) and Klemmack, Klemmack (1976), which shows the importance of socially established gender dynamics in creating a rape culture. Most of the research done in this area since that time was influenced by Burt’s definition, but that definition served only to put a name to the beliefs; it didn’t address how rape myths function in a society. Or at least, that’s what Lonsway and Fitzgerald claimed in 1994. The authors said Burt’s definition was too vague and caused inconsistencies in the studies that arose since then, especially in the way acceptance of rape myths was measured while studying participants, mainly in the various acceptance scales associated with quantitative research. Lonsway and Fitzgerald said many of those methods, based on Burt’s definition, were merely identifying the level of hostility participants held toward
women, not how easily they accepted rape myths. So Lonsway and Fitzgerald put forth another definition that has since been guiding the research in this field: “Attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify males sexual aggression against women” (1994). Here we begin to see more clearly the roots of societal implications built into rape myths — that they are not just instances of “false beliefs” but instead ideas that “deny and justify male sexual aggression against women.” Or as Lonsway and Fitzgerald said, it’s not about the “falsity of the rape myths that is the concern, but the way they are systematically applied to all cases.” From that point on, research focused more heavily on the function of rape myths, which will be addressed more in the following sections.

So, instead of identifying rape myths as specific beliefs associated with one case, research has shown that rape myths are a product of the society they are produced in. As Weis and Borges (1973) identified, “the process is grounded in the social structure and part of the socialization of victims and offenders” (pg. 79). The acceptance of rape myths is a socialized process that is inherent to the way many people interpret or justify a sexual assault. Many times, rape myths will be interpreted as deviances from the “classic rape” scenario as initially identified by Weis and Burges in 1973 wherein a stranger suddenly, forcibly attacks a woman by either breaking into her home or attacking her in an deserted public place. Women who are attacked in this manner are often viewed as more “legitimate victims,” as Weis and Borges (1973) put it, than women or men who know their perpetrator or were drinking or taking substances, for example. In accordance to the need to adhere to the random stranger attack scenario, rape myths that are accepted about
a sexual assault case that deviates from the “classic” case will usually either place blame on the victim or remove blame from the perpetrator.

Examples of the latter, which takes blame away from the perpetrator who might have known the victim, include, “Boys will be boys,” “Well, he was just drunk,” “She was teasing him,” “He bought her dinner,” “They’ve had sex before, he expected it again,” and “He’s used to women throwing themselves at him.” All of these perpetuate a system that both excuses men from the terrible act of rape but also sets them up for it, expecting them to commit rape. Later, this paper will examine ways in which the college campus environment encourages a rape-supportive culture among male peer groups.

Victim-blaming rape myths, which will be the focus of this study, serve several other purposes, including to take blame away from the male. Some of these myths include: “She was dressed slutty,” “She was acting slutty,” “She was drunk,” “She’s lying,” “She’s had lots of sex before,” “She was asking for it,” and “She could have stopped it if she really wanted to.”

Several studies address why men or women might be more willing to accept rape myths. Victim-blaming rape myths help women to accept the fate of the other woman and generate a sense of self-protection, creating the line of thinking that that a woman who was sexually assaulted did something wrong, so it can’t happen to just any woman (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994). Similarly, it also helps protect the men in their lives from blame: That woman who was sexually assaulted deserved it somehow, so the man, brother, husband, boyfriend, etc. shouldn’t be blamed for this terrible act. Of course, both men and women accept rape myths, as numerous studies have shown, but men have been shown to accept rape myths more than women.
suarez and gadalla (2010) examined 37 studies concerning rape myths and found men show a much higher acceptance of rape myths than women. the researchers also determined a link between hostility and violence toward woman, other types of discrimination such as racism and classism, and the acceptance of rape myths. the study found that, in particular, racism is tied to a higher acceptance of rape myths while a participant’s strong racial identity usually indicated a lower acceptance. the meta-analysis study supports the feminist theory view that sexual victimization of women and rape culture is deeply engrained in society — tied to ways of thinking of societal norms — and doesn’t just exist in isolated incidents. franiuk, seefelt and vandello (2008) examined how rape myths present in headlines surrounding the kobe bryant sexual assault case influenced the way people perceived how the assault occurred, much in a similar way that a clery release could tint the public’s view of an assault. the study showed that not only did 10 percent of headlines include a rape myth, but that male participants — much more so than female participants — who were exposed to those headlines displayed more perpetrator sympathy and displayed rape-supportive attitudes. the study showed how influential rape myths can be in a layperson’s understanding of an instance of sexual assault, especially when there is limited information available such as in a headline or clery release.

the alcohol-based rape myths are of particular interest when looking at campus crime, as drinking is often reported in cases of sexual assault on college campus. according to tuliao and mcchargue (2014), half of recorded instances of sexual assault on campuses involved alcohol use. later in this paper, the idea that alcohol control and distribution contributes to a rape-supportive culture on campuses in particular is explored.
But other research shows how intricately related the idea of drinking and sexual assault can be in young people’s minds. Understandably, “issues of blame and alcohol use are closely intertwined when discussing campus rape” (Campbell-Ruggaard & Ryswyk, 2001, p. 292). Cowley (2014) suggests that gender norms and alcohol consumption interact with each other to create dynamics that normalize, if not encourage, sexual victimization of women and male dominance. Her study, which analyzed interviews from men and women, found that many of the participants employed rape myths in the context of consuming alcohol and unwanted sexual contact, including that men are understood to be more aggressive when drunk and that women were more emotional and less inclined to be strict sexual gatekeepers while drinking (Cowley, 2014). Cowley found many participants attempted to fit anecdotes of sexual victimization while drinking into the existing structure of gender roles and sexual expectations, namely male aggression and female passivity. The study showed that victims who were drinking were perceived as “‘too sexual’ with the perpetrator, thus … inviting the victimization” (pg. 1272). Several male participants stated that a woman drinking indicated “sexual availability among women who typically wouldn’t be interested in casual sex” (pg. 1270). The study also showed participants didn’t trust women’s accounts of unwanted sexual contact because they were considered “emotional” and “manipulative” (pg. 1268). Other studies have indicated how the victims’ level of intoxication can influence a police officer’s interpretation of the events. These studies will be addressed in a later section.

**Victimization and Rape-Supportive Cultures on College Campuses**

Now that public and media attention has turned to safety on college campuses, much more research has been conducted to determine the kinds of victimization that tend
to take place. Many of this has been covered already in this paper in the section on the Clery Act, but there are a few other key points to be made in terms of crime and how campuses can be rape-supportive environments that encourage sexual assault, in particular.

Despite college campuses appearing to generally be safer places than the cities or towns they are in in terms of larceny, murder and assault, women are at an increased risk of sexual victimization on college campuses than elsewhere (Fisher, 1995; Belknap, Erez, 2007). And even with those heightened odds, the numbers of sexual assault cases are assumed to be lower than the reality because of the lack of reporting. The study by Gardella, et. all (2015) showed several factors of a student’s lifestyle that indicate higher risk of victimization: gender, grade point average and involvement in student organizations. Females are more likely to victims than males. Lower grade point averages resulted in an increased chance for victimization. And membership in student organizations, particularly the Greek system, resulted in a higher potential for victimization (Gardella, et. all, 2015). The study showed females were four times more likely to have been sexually victimized, in particular, and upperclassman students were also more likely to be sexually assaulted. The researchers found race to show an influence in only one area: Caucasian females were most at risk for sexual assault than other races (Gardella, et. all, 2015).

Research has supported the idea that the typical college setting is rape-supportive (Carr, VanDeusen, 2004) based on the established culture in peer groups such as Greek-letter organizations acting as expressions of hegemonic masculinity (Syrett, 2009), abundant drinking and drug use, (Abbey, 2002; Tuliao, McChargue, 2014) and low self
control for people of college age and in the settings of parties and the previous factors (Franklin, Bouffard, Pratt, 2012). In a study by Tuliao and McChargue (2014), more than half of the 148 male volunteer participants reported committing an act of sexual aggression. In almost three-quarters of those cases, the men reported they had been drinking before the act. Male peer support groups such as fraternities, sports teams and others found on college campuses provide several risk factors that lead men to being more likely to commit sexual assault, including peer pressure to have sex, objectification of women and group secrecy (Schwartz, DeKeseredy, 1997).

Further, Argiero, et. all, (2010) completed an ethnographic study that found explicit evidence of rape-supportive culture in college campus situations. They focused on three common settings and scenarios for a college lifestyle: a residence hall community gaming area, tailgates for football games and nearby bars. The researchers found that men controlled the environment at both tailgates and bars by claiming boundaries of space and allowing women to enter them, as well as determining the tone of the event by picking music and providing alcohol or food. In the residence hall common area, the researchers found that “male control promotes aggressive behavior” even in instances of sober social interaction. Women were used as a source of entertainment and status symbols to boost the males’ place in social circles. The researches also noted the overwhelming amount of sexually explicit messages present in these scenarios, such as on T-shirts, in lyrics to the most commonly played music and in the way men and women interacted with each other. Instances of Clery releases often might involve residence halls or patronizing bars or parties such as those examined in this study, though many of those details are kept from public information at the time of the
release due to pending investigations. In environments such as this, it becomes evident why college women are more at risk for becoming victims of sexual assault and college men are more at risk for committing sexual assault. According to Schwartz, DeKeseredy (1997), the presence of several factors greatly contribute to a rape-supportive culture, including a patriarchal system that supports male aggression, the existence of male peer support and, most importantly, the acceptance of rape myths. If Clery release information includes rape myths that consumers pick up on and utilize in their interpretation of a sexual assault, the research supports that this will further preserve a rape-supportive culture on campus. It could be that the administration itself — most likely a patriarchal system at most universities — is at least partly responsible for creating a rape-supportive environment on campus, according to Schwartz and DeKeserdy (1997). To put it bluntly, the researchers discovered that “many faculty and staff maintained attitudes that promote acquaintance and date rape” (pg. 7). The studied examined the difference in how campus administration handled sexual assault cases that were committed by students as compared to those committed by non-students. In the case of a non-student perpetrator, the university quickly took action and, interestingly, showed off that action through publicity. Predictably, when the perpetrators are students, the administrators demonstrated an opposing approach: rarely handing out punishments or even notifying police departments.

**How Institutions, Including Police Departments, Employ Rape Myths**

On the topic of rape myths serving to “deny and justify” acts of sexual aggression against women, Lonsway and Fitzgerald joined several previous researchers in pointing out just how much rape myths are embedded into the systematic workings of our society — the way people, institutions and procedures respond to instances of sexual assault. The
consequences of both society’s acceptance of rape myths through rape-supportive culture and the institutional absorption of these rape myths are wide, varied and probably unknowable in their totality. If one of the reasons victims chose not to report sexual assault is because they believe they won’t be fairly treated or believed, research is on their side. To start with, Yamawaki (2007) showed that sexual assault victims’ recovery can be influenced greatly by how others perceive the event happening, and several other researchers have shown how the acceptance of rape myths results in negative treatment of female victims (Campbell, Johnson, 1997; Du Mont, Miller, Myhr, 2003). Much research has been done on the topic of how people functioning in official, institutional settings work under the influence of rape myths. Starkly, Temkin and Krahé (2008) describe a “justice gap” between how many sexual assault reports are made and how many actually result in convictions. Rape myths serving to denying justice, as Lonsway and Fitzgerald brought up, has been demonstrated in law enforcement, including in the way officers handle instances of sexual assault, how they treat the victim or perpetrator when reporting it and all the way through the legal process until convictions are carried through (or usually not carried through, as it were) in court (Campbell, Johnson, 1997; Comack, Peter, 2005; Du Mont, Miller, Myhr, 2003; Chen, Ullman, 2010). As Venema (2014) explains, “perceptions of credibility and legitimacy, as well as characteristics of the case, can influence report writing, which can then influence the detective’s work, and ultimately the decision of the prosecutor to take the case or not” (pg. 17). It starts all the way at the beginning of the process, with police officers and detectives who record and gather evidence, but there is even research that shows juries are influenced by rape myths (Tetreault, 1989; Torrey, 1991).
Detectives and police officers who work with the victims often work under the influence of rape myths (Campbell, Johnson, 1997; Feldman-Summers, Palmer, 1980; Jordan, 2001; Page, 2007; Page, 2008; Ullman, Townsend, 2007; Leigh, Aramburu, 1994). Venema (2014) found that in compiling initial reports on cases of sexual assault, officers often relied on previously conceived notions of what a sexual assault should look like — classic or true rape scenarios — in order to determine the legitimacy of the claim and the credibility of the victim. For example, some earlier studies (Feldman-Summers, Palmer, 1980; LeDoux, Hazelwood, 1985) found that many officers did not view acquaintance or non-stranger rape as true rape. Schwartz (2010) interviewed 49 detectives who have worked in many sexual assault cases. The detectives would often admit that they were aware of rape myths and considered them false indications of victimization, but Schwartz found that the detective’s behavior, attitudes and interaction with the victim instead complied with acceptance of rape myths. Similarly, Jordan (2004) found that alcohol use, delayed reporting and previous sexual history with the accused were three of the most influential factors that can affect an officer’s view of victim credibility. Several studies have demonstrated that officers often overestimate the amount of false reports of sexual assault (Ask, 2010; Lonsway, Archambault, Lisak, 2009; C. Spohn et al., 2014).

A victim’s drug or alcohol use is often an influential factor in his or her credibility in the legal system. Schuller and Stewart (2000) found the victims’ level of intoxication would often influence officers’ view of his or her credibility. A victim’s claim of sexual assault is often viewed as less severe if she has been drinking. The researchers found several disconcerting rape myths and justifications in the officer’s evaluation of the
victim’s credibility: “Specifically, the more intoxicated the officers perceived the complainant to be, the less credible she was viewed, the more interested she was in sexual intercourse, the more likely she was to have communicated that she was interested, the more responsible she was, and, given how far things had progressed, the more unreasonable it was for her to expect the assailant to stop” (pg. 547). All of those rape myths serve to victim blame, but the researchers showed that a case of sexual assault where a victim had been drinking also spurred officers to employ rape myths that justified the perpetrator’s action: “The more intoxicated the respondents perceived the victim to be, the less blame they attributed to the alleged perpetrator and the more likely they were to believe that the perpetrator honestly believed that the complainant was willing to engage in intercourse” (pg. 547). This is the same notion supported by research by Leigh and Aramburu (1994), which found that “intoxication serves to excuse the aggressor while increasing blame to the victim.” This jaded view of intoxication influencing a victim’s credibility can be traced all the way to juries and court cases (Schuller, Wall, 1998; Wegner, Bornstein, 2006).

The idea of rape myths that are engrained in the way the criminal justice system addresses sexual assault poses a huge problem because those ideas could carry all the way through charges, prosecution or convictions — and especially through Clery releases made public. In the legal system, the officer or detectives’ view of the victim’s credibility will prevent the case from moving forward by they won’t believe the case has enough evidence. Sometimes, officers’ and detectives’ unbelieving view of the assault will result in victims dropping the case, either through discouragement by the officer or the lost hope that something would come of further legal action (Jordan, 2004; Kerstetter, Van
Winkle 1990; Schuller, Stewart, 2000). As Venema (2014) states after speaking with detectives, “Perceptions of credibility and legitimacy, as well as characteristics of the case, can influence report writing, which can then influence the detective’s work, and ultimately the decision of the prosecutor to take the case or not (pg. 17).” It is safe to assume that the words and views taken by the detective can ultimately end up in Clery releases, as well.

The way universities make policy (including, presumably, in response to Clery Act regulations) and try to discipline cases of sexual assault has also been show to be influenced by rape myths (Boswell, Spade, 1996; Franklin, 2010). For this paper, law enforcement, legal proceedings and university policy are particular of concern, but there are many more institutions that create a systematically fraught path for sexual assault survivors. Of course, rape myths as played out and engrained in the media — journalistic or entertainment-based — have influenced the way rape culture (and the perpetuation of sex scripts in which men and women are expected to perform in a certain gender-defined dance revolving around intercourse) has become engrained, expected or even excused (Boswell, Spade, 1996; McManus, Dorfman, 2005; Frankiuk, Cepress, Vandello, 2008). Even those institutions and organizations that could provide comfort and guidance to sexual assault survivors has shown to be functioning under the influence of rape myths, including therapists (McKay, 2001; Moor, 2007; Shechory, Idisis, 2006) and the clergy (Sheldon, Parent, 2002).

**Barriers to Victim Reporting**

An important area of study in rape culture theory is reporting by the victim. According to the Justice Department, only 68 percent of sexual assaults are reported to
police. It is a safe bet that this number is much larger in reality because research suggests that even women are not sure what equates to rape or sexual assault, legally or otherwise. In Deming, Covan, Swan and Bilings’ (2013) study, the three anecdotes presented to the women in a focus group were legally considered instances of sexual assault, but many of the female students didn’t identify a legal cause for reporting or conviction. This idea of women not knowing what is legally rape or sexual assault has been documented in several studies (Deming, Covan, Swan, Billings, 2013; Harned, 2005; Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, Halvorsen, 2003; among others). If sexual assault victims do not see themselves as victims of a crime, they would be much less inclined to report the crime, as Weis and Borges (1973) pointed out. Other studies confirm this (Venema, 2014; Williams, 1984). There are many other reasons a victim might chose not to report a sexual assault that have been internalized in the victim, including self-acceptance of rape myths, denial of the rape, lack of injury or self-blame (Chen, Ullman, 2010; Koss, 1993; Koss, Bachar, Hopkins,, Carlson, 2004; Venema, 2014, Williams, 1984). Many times, a victim will make the decision to report based on how closely the assault aligns with the “blameless” classic rape scenario (Bachman, 1998; Finkelhor, Ormrod, 1999; Gartner, Macmillan, 1995; Pino, Meier, 1999; Williams, 1984). If some of the factors of the assault differ from this scenario are present — lack of weapon, lack of visible injuries or consumption of drugs or alcohol — the victim is much less likely to report for fear of not being believed or not believing it themselves. (Bachman, 1998; Chen, Ullman, 2010; Du Mont, Miller,, Myhr, 2003; Starzynski, Ullman, Townsend, Long,, Long, 2007; Weis, Borges, 1973; Venema, 2014; Williams, 1984). This is also especially true if the victim knew or had a previous relationship with the assailant (Gartner, Macmillan, 1995; Pino,
Meier, 1999; Williams, 1984; Ruback, Menard, Outlaw., Shaffer, 1999), which we now know to be the case of the majority of sexual assaults (Dunn and Gilchrist, 1993).

Of course, the act of reporting is imperative for the Clery Act procedure to be effective; the police have to be notified in order to spark a Clery release or the legal process. So when sexual assault cases are not being reported, universities are already fighting a losing battle to eradicate sexual assault. But there are many reasons based on public or private visibility that could influence a victim to choose not to report. For example, some earlier studies found that victims might not report from fear of retaliation by the assailant; to protect themselves or their family from the stigmas (Amir, 1971); to keep themselves, their families or even their rapists or those who know their rapist out of public eye (Weis, Borges, 1973); for fear of it changing their relationships with their family members or spouses in negative ways (Katz, Mazur, 1979); or because they are embarrassed the event happened and don’t want public knowledge of it (Macdonald, 1971). If past research is can be taken as true, the implication that a victim might be the subject of a public Clery release could affect his or her decision to report, especially if the above factors are present in the victim’s mindset. The fear of being blamed, villianized, dismissed or publically shamed is a compelling reason to not report the assault (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternice-Thames, Wasco., Sefl, 2007; Chen, Ullman, 2010; Konradi, Burger, 2000; Patterson, Greeson,, Campbell, 2009; Rennison, 2002; Venema, 2014).

Still others might chose not to report sexual assault because they do not believe the criminal justice system could offer help, acceptance or guidance. One quantitative study found that turning to friends or relatives would be more helpful to victims than police (Golding et al., 1989). In a study of college women who were victims of sexual
assault conducted by Fisher, et. all, (2003), “women… were reluctant to involve campus authorities. These authorities were notified in only 2.8% of all incidents of victimization and in 3.2% of all rapes.” The researchers suggested that victims of sexual assault “believed that proof beyond their testimony was needed to secure police action.” Another study (Ruback, et. all, 1999) on college students found a persuasive belief that incidents involving alcohol use, especially underage drinking, should not be reported to the police, but instead could be reported to other organizations. Deming, Covan, Swan, Billings (2013) conducted research based on focus groups of female college students in which they were presented anecdotes of instances of legal rape. When asked if the women would encourage a friend who was a victim of that instance to report it, many said they would not. “These women literally weighed the odds of reporting in relation to whether or not they would find fairness in the criminal justice system (Deming, Covan, Swan, Billings, 2013).” Fear of mistreatment by the justice system is often a factor in choosing to report or press charges (Winkel, Koppelaar, 1992).
Theoretical Framework

Price (2005) describes feminism as “a method of analysis, a standpoint, a way of looking at the world from the perspective of women” (pg. 6). This research will be based on the framework of feminist theory, specifically radical feminist theory involving rape myths and rape-supportive culture. Although there are currently many schools of feminist thought that can explain the motivation, threat and effect of sexual assault, Price (2005) writes that feminist efforts overall achieved the following: “The preeminent feminist contribution to our understanding of violence is that violence is gendered” and that, “the content of gender in the western culture equates masculinity with dominance and femininity with submission.” For example, in Susan Griffin’s early influential paper “Rape: The All-American Crime” (1971), she stressed the gender-specific nature of the crime and showed how male sexuality is often linked to violence. Chasteen (2010) writes, “The feminist antirape movement formulated several radical new ideas about rape, including three main tenets: Any woman can be a rape victim, any man can be a rapist, and rape itself occurs in many forms.” According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s entry on “Feminist perspectives on rape”(Whisnant, 2013), all feminist theories share these similar goals or themes when it comes to sexual assault: “breaking the silence” surrounding the crime, including eradicating victim stigma and raising awareness of what constitutes rape and how often it occurs; getting rid of the idea of the classic rape scenario of the stranger in the bushes; encouraging the view that sexual assault is a crime against the woman, not against her husband or family; and increasing
reporting and conviction rates.

Specifically, radical feminist theory posits that society actively suppresses women in favor of men on a systemic level of the patriarchy. Radical feminists view “the deprivation of women’s bodily sovereignty — in particular, male control over the sexual and reproductive uses of women’s bodies — as a central defining element of patriarchy” and that sexual violence against women “maintain(s) and reinforce(s) women’s oppression” (Whisnant, 2013). Radical feminists also helped expand the definition of rape to better empower women in a system that limits their sexual freedom (Whisnant, 2013). According to Hockett, et al., (2009), “(Feminist researchers) have suggested that rape and other forms of violence against women are tolerated to the point of institutionalization (in that rape prevalence is high whereas arrest, prosecution, and conviction rates for the crime are low) and that this is one of many means to maintain the status hierarchy.” In this way, the radical feminist viewpoint tends to focus on rape and sexual violence as a group-based oppression rather than an attack against one individual, thus supporting patriarchal control. Johnson (2005) defines the patriarchy as a social system where males inhabit positions of power and influence much more so than women, the commonly held norms and values are related to manliness or male power, where masculinity is associated with dominance and even violence, and where men are often the main focus of consideration. Beyond gender dynamics, radical feminists also explain the patriarchy as a system that lends itself to other broad, group-based oppression, such as colonialism and racism (Whisnant, 2013). Radical feminist researchers dealing specifically with rape see sexual violence not only as a way to demonstrate the patriarchy, but also as a “method of patriarchal maintenance” (Escholz, Vieraitis, 2004).
Martin (2006), summarizes that “radical and, to a lesser extent, liberal feminist theories focus on the structural position of women in recognizing the gendered nature of rape and may help to explain stranger rape, acquaintance rape, and date rape.” There are two working theories radical feminist use to predict what would happen if the patriarchy was dissolved in favor of gender equality. First, the ameliorative hypothesis suggests gender equality will lead to lower rape rates (Martin, 2006) because the systems in place to maintain the hierarchy would fall apart. The second theory is the backlash theory, which says that if there were progression toward gender equality, rape rates would rise out of anger, aggression and an effort to return to patriarchal values (Martin, 2006).

To help identify elements of patriarchal control, feminist and radical feminist researchers have studied several systematic functions that support widespread oppression, including rape-supportive culture, rape myths, gender norms, and sex scripts, among others. This research will focus specifically on rape-supportive culture and rape myths. Rape-supportive culture is defined by feminist author Emilie Buchwald (1994) as, “a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women.” A rape-supportive culture is widely upheld by society and normalizes the oppression of passive women, especially sexually (Chasteen, 2001), through social systems and learned behavior and attitudes (Hockett, et al., 2009) by men in the mainstream, not outsiders (Chasteen, 2001). Interrelated with rape-supportive culture, rape myths serve the function of generalizing, trivializing, encouraging or, alternatively, denying sexual assault (Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008). According to Maxwell, Scott (2013), there are four general categories of rape myths, though the forms and functions of the ideas vary considerably. The first version of rape myths blame the
victim. The second take blame away from the perpetrator. The third suggests that only some types of women are raped, while the fourth upholds that most claims of assault by the victim should not be believed because the woman is “crying rape.” Maxwell, Scott (2013) point out that thought many of these could be studied individually, most research has so far viewed rape myths as a single entity. Most of the body of knowledge on rape myths can be attributed to early radical feminist pioneers such as Burt and Brownmiller. Brownmiller (1975) suggested that rape myths serve as a way to maintain women’s secondary class to men in society. According to radical feminist theory, “a societal hatred towards women” and patriarchal values inspires rape myths (Maxwell, Scott, 2013). Hocket, et al., (2009) suggest rape myths both encourage and gain credibility from a patriarchal society, writing that, “More specifically, rape myths, which blame the victim, may be used as a means to intimidate women, and this intimidation and acceptance of rape myths may reinforce a social hierarchy in which men are dominant.” Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) later related the idea of hostility toward women as a signifier of the probability of the acceptance of rape myths. Later research, such as Chapleau and Oswald’s study (2010), demonstrates that rape myths are indeed learned from a belief system where power and sex are connected, such as in a rape-supportive culture. The media are often pointed to as a vehicle through which rape myths are spread and learned as behavior through society (Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008).

Predictably, the level of acceptance of rape myths has been shown by most research to be gendered, with more men endorsing them than women (Maxwell, Scott, 2013; White, Kurprian, 1999; Suarez, Gadalla, 2010) and that those who accept rape myths tend to hold other oppressive views, including homophobia, racism, ageism,
classism and religious intolerance (Aosved, Long, 2006), which further upholds the radical feminist framework of an actively suppressing patriarchy. When accepted or enforced, rape myths, though held in cultural ideals and belief systems, have a tangible effect on the way sexual assault is handled by social groups and the legal system. As Finch and Munro (2004) wrote, rape myth acceptance inspires more blame put on the victim, less conviction rates for accused offenders and, in mock jury trial settings, less severe sentences for those found guilty of sexual assault.

One of the critiques of radical feminist theory is that it often ignores other important factors involved in the widespread problem of sexual assault beyond simply gender — problems like male-victim sexual assault and factors that include race and class of the victim. More recent feminist theories such as postmodern feminism and intersectional feminism aim to account for many more factors in sexual and social interaction than simply gender. However, for this study, radical feminism is most appropriate viewpoint because the Clery releases being studied are 1) almost exclusively about female victims and 2) do not include information about the victim’s ethnicity or socio-economic class. Therefore, radical feminism, which is based mostly on the gendered patriarchy, will serve to best inform the researcher.

In addition to radical feminism as a basis of analysis, the researcher will apply the constant comparative analysis method to reach conclusions about the participants’ discussions. According to Barney and Strauss (1999), this method, under the umbrella of grounded theory, works well for qualitative analysis.
Research Questions

So, as we see through the research, one of the major problems as created by rape culture and the acceptance of rape myths on an institutional scale is serving to deny justice for sexual assault victims. This research will dig further into this idea and look specifically to timely warnings issued by the University of Missouri campus police department as required by the Clery Act as institutional processes to see if rape myths are employed in these notices and how that can affect the way college students perceive instances of sexual assault in their community. In an effort to address these ideas, this research will address the following questions:

• RQ1. Do participants detect any rape myths in Clery releases involving sexual assault at the University of Missouri? If so, which rape myths are identified?
• RQ2. How do participants interpret and make meaning about rape culture discourse in relation to sexual assault incidents described in Clery releases at the University of Missouri?
Methodology

In order to address how rape myths in Clery releases might influence the way students at the MU community perceive sexual assault on campus, this research was conducted as focus groups. This method best answered the research questions because focus groups allow researchers to analyze the “how” and “why” of an issue instead of simply addressing the “what” of gathered data (Munday, 2006). In other words, a focus group can identify not just a snapshot of society, but also the way that representation has been created, molded and negotiated (Millward, 1995). Focus groups accomplish this because they provide the “interaction element” (Morgan and Botterff, 2010) where several people offer experiences and views that create meaning within a social context. As such, Millward writes that “focus groups are communication events in which the interplay of the personal and the social can be systematically explored” (1995). Because focus groups can imitate candid conversation more so than other methods of study, it provides a way to see how people naturally interact with a topic or way of thinking by using jokes, stories and natural diction, thereby “revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques (Kitzinger, 1995, pg. 299-300).” Utilizing a focus group setting to answer the research questions for this study was appropriate because of the communicable nature and effects the Clery releases naturally have on campus; by legal regulations, the timely warnings must reach virtually every corner of campus. Therefore, Clery releases are often the topic of wide discussion and debate among students and peers on campus after they have been
disseminated, so a focus group will help the research to find the meaning created in a communal group setting of student. Further, a focus group that demonstrates how a community or group of people interpret the timely warnings also supports the theories being applied to this research because both feminist theory and system justification theory corroborate a community-wide patriarchal culture of female oppression. Kitzinger (1995) writes focus groups are particularly useful for “studying dominant cultural values” (pg. 300), which this study’s theoretical framework — radical feminist theory — identifies as influential factors in the way people perceive sexual assault. Therefore, focus groups allowed the researcher to explore the interaction of overlaying values such as sexism and adherence to patriarchal society and how people view the dynamics of victims and perpetrators in cases of sexual assault. So, the focus groups not only allowed the researcher to analyze how a community interprets Clery releases, but also how that community creates meaning, applies values and interprets topics of concern to this study in a social context such as rape culture or rape myths.

Furthermore, there are several researchers who assert that qualitative research — and focus groups in particular — are especially useful when conducting studies based in feminist theory, similar to what Kitzinger (1995) suggested. Most notably, Sue Wilkinson published “Focus Groups: A Feminist Method” in 1999. In the paper, Wilkinson identifies three problems feminist researchers have with quantitative and other researcher methods. Those concerns are artificiality, decontextualization and exploitation. In terms of artificiality, feminist researchers believe traditional research methods create a sense of inauthenticity and are not able to truly identify the nature of people’s daily lives due to their controlled, snapshot-like design. Wilkinson writes that feminist studies should aim
to capture the natural “modes of communication (Maynard, 1990)” and “everyday social processes (Graham, 1984),” something that can be accomplished with qualitative methods. She writes, “focus groups avoid the artificiality of many psychological methods because they draw on people’s normal, everyday experiences of talking and arguing with families, friends, and colleagues about events and issues in their everyday lives.

…Feminist researchers who have used focus groups have typically commented favorably on the extent to which they mirror everyday social interchange in a relatively naturalistic way.” Wilkinson noted several feminist studies that benefitted from the natural interactions created in focus groups, including a study by Press (1991) about abortion and TV viewing and a study by Kathryn Lovering (1995) about menstruation among young girls. Next, Wilkinson asserts that “feminist methods should be contextual” because feminist theory recognizes that social interaction influences and shapes an individual’s experience or identity. Therefore, studies should account for those factors and not presume to gather data within a vacuum. Focus groups are particularly good at establishing experience that is defined within a social framework because of the “emphasis on the person in context.” She explains, “feminist focus group researchers have shown how the social context of the focus group offers the opportunity to observe the construction of meaning and the elaboration of identities through interaction.”

Wilkinson gives examples of several feminist studies that show “the elaboration of meaning and identity through group interaction,” including a study by Macpherson and Fine (1995) that examined racial identity. The third concern of feminist scholars is that other researcher methods create an inherent power dynamic that exploits the subjects of the study. Participants can become “object-like subjects (Unger, 1983)” in other research
methods where the researcher controls most of the variables and expression of the subjects. This claim is not as compelling to account for because that is the exact purpose of many scientific inquiries. However, the idea that research design can inherently mirror societal pressures and values without the researcher realizing it is addressed when using a focus group such as the one for this study. Wilkinson writes that focus groups create a situation where “the balance of power shifts away from the researcher” because the focus of analysis becomes on the group’s interaction and the meaning that is created within that context.

A similar qualitative study that used focus group methodology was conducted by Deming, Covan, Swan and Billings (2013). The study was explored in the literature review section of this proposal. To quote the research goals, “This study has two exploratory aims: (a) to determine if women endorse common rape myths found within previous literature to interpret realistic, ambiguous rape scenarios (Johnson et al., 1997, pp. 696-697); and (b) to explore how 1st- and 4th-year college women as groups negotiate and discuss the content of these scenarios” (Deming, Covan, Swan and Billings, 2013). The researchers presented five groups of first and fourth-year college women three scenarios that could believably occur in the realm of college dating. The participants read the stories then answered several questions, including to describe what happened in the story, if something similar had happened to themselves or their friends, how they would advise a friend in that situation and if they considered what happened to be classified as rape. They were also asked if alcohol was an influencing factor, if they would report the incident and how consent played a role. Their study can serve as a basic model for the current research, where participants are asked to read written material and share opinions,
views and inferences that show how they create meaning out of the information.

Sample

Millward (1995) wrote that focus groups work best when the participants have something in common, such as age, socio-economic class, race, etc. In this case, the participants were male and female undergraduate students at the university. Students were recruited through a Sociology course, for which the professor offered students extra credit for participation in the focus group or for completing an alternative essay assignment. The four focus groups consisted of about six to eight students, which many researchers consider an ideal amount of participants (Krueger, Casey, 2000; Millward, 1995). There were 28 total participants, with 21 females and seven males. The majority of the participants were 18 (13 participants) and freshman (19 participants). There were also eight 19 year olds and seven 20 year olds. There were eight sophomores and one junior. Further, 24 participants were white while four were black. The majority of the participants (21 participants) identified as Christian, while three said they were Jewish and four did not specify their religious beliefs.

Procedure

The focus groups took between about one and a half to two hours (Millward, 1995). The researcher acted as moderator for the session. The groups took place in a small, comfortable conference rooms on campus as requested through the university so that all participants were be able to get there with minimum transportation or confusion. Participants will be able to sit in a circle (Kitzinger, 1995). Pizza, snacks and refreshments were provided to the participants. As is suggested by Millward (1995), the participants were asked to construct name tags prior to discussion.
The process is designed so that the researcher can understand how the participants build value and meaning on the Clery release and the incident itself. It is also designed so that the discussion will build in complexity, as suggested by Krueger and Casey (2000). In the study by Demings, Covan, Swan and Billings (2013), the participants were presented with stories written by the researchers in order to streamline discussion, but in this case, the participants of the focus group will be presented with at least past Clery releases from the MU Police Department. Clery releases from as far back as Sept. 17, 2008, are available for public viewing online at mupolice.missouri.edu/clery. The researcher will select up to five Clery releases from more recent years (2013 or later) so as to capture the most current policy or decision-making on behalf of the police department. Three examples of these Clery releases can be seen in the appendix (Figures 4-6). The researcher will select several releases that seem to have the most potential to interpret rape myths, such as alcohol consumption. For example, the researcher used the Clery release from Oct. 5, 2014, (Figure 4), which states, “The victim did not know which residence hall, and at this time, can only provide the following description of the suspect…” The researcher was able to anticipate possible rape myth interpretation in this language based on previous literature and studies concerning rape myths, campus safety concerns and Clery Act information.

First during the session, the participants were asked to fill out a short survey with basic information, including their names, ages, majors, etc. The researcher kept the identities of the participants anonymous in the analysis, but the participants’ names were sent to the professor to verify that they had earned extra credit. During the focus group discussion, once the surveys were collected, the researcher informed the participants that
the session was recorded beginning at that time. To read the focus group script, including an introduction and the suggested course of questioning, please see the appendix (Figure 8). The researcher began the discussion with what Krueger and Casey (2002) call “opening questions” designed to get the participants to feel more comfortable with each other. The researcher asked each participant to share their name, age, major, hometown and a fun fact about themselves, such as a favorite television show. After that, the researcher asked an “introductory question” (Krueger and Casey, 2000), asking each of the participants to describe their familiarity with the Clery releases and how often they read them. The researcher gave a brief summary of the history and purpose of the Clery Act timely warnings. Next, the participants were presented with a printed version of one of the actual Clery releases as released by the MU police department (the order in which the Clery releases are presented will be randomly assigned before the focus group begins, and the researcher will have printed out the releases to have on hand). After giving the participants a minute or two to read and think about the release, the researcher asked participants if they remember receiving that release in the past. The moderator initiated discussion on the release by asking an open-ended question such as, “Does anyone want to share what they think happened leading up the events described here?” The moderator let the discussion go freely and asked questions such as, “Does anyone see it differently?” if few participants offer explanations. This question not only helped to identify different rape myths the participants picked up on (for example, it’s possible to get a response of “Well, clearly she was drunk,” or something similar), but it also showed how the participants used the information in the Clery release to cast assumptions about what happened in a real-life event. The researcher also asked, to clarify, “Do you think there’s
a difference between what the release is implying happened and what probably actually happened?” The researcher then asked a variety of the following questions, depending on the discussion: “Do you think this release is probably a reasonable portrayal of the event? Why is it reasonable, or why is it unreasonable?” The researcher also asked if any participant remember talking about this release with anyone and what that discussion looked like. If no one in the group had discussed the release, the researcher will ask how they think those conversations might have gone. The researcher asked the following: “If your friend had been the one who reported the assault in this case, would that change how you view this release or the event? How would it change? Why wouldn’t it change?” Finally, the researcher will ask the group if anyone has other thoughts they’d like to share about that particular release.

Once the discussion on the first Clery release felt naturally complete, the researcher gave the group the second release and followed the same questioning as the first release. The same was be repeated for the last release. As the second and third releases were shown to the group, the researcher also asked the participants how they think the releases and incidents described in them compare to each other. For example, the researcher asked, “Do you think what happened here is much different than what was described as happening in the first (or previous) release(s)? What do you think those differences are? What makes you think that way?” and “If you talked about this you’re your friends or anyone else, was it different than how you discussed other releases? If you didn’t, do you think it would have gone differently?” These questions showed what factors the participants use to build meaning and context out of the language in the releases. If time allowed and depending on the previous discussion, the researcher asked
“closing questions” (Krueger and Casey, 2000) after showing all three releases to the group. Those closing questions included: “After reading and discussing these Clery releases, which one do you think is most fair to both the victim and perpetrator? Why?” followed by “Which one do you think is least fair?” The researcher might have asked, “If your friend were the subject of one of these Clery releases, which of these would you prefer to have written about him or her?” Depending on the flow of the previous discussion, the researcher continued with the following questions: “Do you think Clery releases make anyone act differently to avoid being a victim or perpetrator of sexual assault on campus?” “How do you think Clery releases influence the way people on campus view these instances of sexual assault” “Do you think Clery releases affect the way people on campus think about sexual assault that occurs on campus overall?” and, finally, “How do you think Clery releases affect the conversation about sexual assault on campus?” Finally, participants were asked if there is anything else they would like to share or comment on.

Following the focus groups, the researcher sent the recording to a transcription service. The researcher then coded the focus group discussion in several phases using a constant comparative analysis framework. According to Barney and Strauss (1999), this method, under the umbrella of grounded theory, works well for qualitative analysis because it “is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties and hypothesis about general problems” (pg. 104). Therefore, constant comparative analysis worked well to identify and relate tenants of radical feminism such as rape myths, gender norms and other functions of rape culture in the discussion of the focus groups. Fist, after several readings, the researcher pulled out
individual rape myths that were present in the discussion. Once the researcher felt comfortable knowing what rape myths were discussed, the researcher listed and categorized the rape myths into groups for analysis. The researcher then went back through the transcripts and filed discussion and comments into the appropriate category of rape myths. Throughout this process, the researcher restructured the groupings as needed. Then, the researcher went back through the transcripts to file some of the interpretation of rape myths that alluded to meaning-building under the various categories. Lastly, the researcher went through the transcripts again to make sure the broader impact of the Clery release and campus culture was represented in the analysis of the rape myths.
Findings

Analysis of Research Question 1

Participants wanted to supply a narrative to the Clery releases wherein the victim was randomly chosen based on circumstances that were completely beyond her control and her assailant was mentally ill or wired in a way that was different than the majority of men on campus. This image of the victim and her assault mirrors what Weis and Borges (1997) say make up the “legitimate victim.” When the events depicted in the Clery releases differed from that comforting narrative, participants found ways to minimize, justify or excuse the assault either through something the victim specifically did do or chose not to do, excusing the perpetrator and the perpetrator’s actions, or attributing outside forces beyond anyone’s control to the event.

Many of the victim-blaming rape myths identified by participants in the focus groups fell into three main categories: the victim’s failure to reduce risk or prevent assault; miscommunication of sexual cues; and victim-originating foundations for disbelief. Participants expressed these rape myths as thoughts or assumptions that would deny or justify the sexual assault against the victim (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994). Among the three categories of victim-blaming rape myths, there were several more specific rape myths participants identified that were centered on specific factors present in the Clery release. To construct a narrative of the events that were described in the Clery releases, participants would use clues such as the manner of the assault, the victim’s response to the assault, time reported, time of the assault, location of the assault,
likelihood of bystanders in the area of the assault, the victim’s intended destination, the victim’s previous location, the description of the perpetrator, and the amount and type of interaction between the victim and the perpetrator leading up to the assault. Participants would compound those factors into the context of preconceived ideas and experiences of sexual assaults, campus safety and the college environment to build meaning and apply value to the description of the incident in the Clery releases.

Participants would often use one factor to support multiple concepts about a victim’s experience, which would often lead the group through winding paths of discussion that helped them build more and more layers of meaning and assumptions on what they perceived to have happened. For example, participants might conclude that because the victim was described in the Clery release as having “left the downtown area,” she must have a) been at a bar, b) been drinking, c) participating in a party-like environment and therefore concluded that the victim had been making impaired or poor choices that would inhibit her safety or was actively encouraging the perpetrator in a sexual manner. If they made those conclusions, they might further believe that the victim was lying to cover up those behaviors in her report to the police. In this way, participants could use the single factor of “leaving the downtown area” to support multiple, compounding ideas of how the assault occurred that would justify the assault, deny that it happened in the way it was depicted, if at all, and otherwise create reasons to believe that assaults like this one wouldn’t be repeated, especially against themselves or against their loved ones (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994).

Similarly, participants might use several clues from the Clery releases to build a single idea about the victim’s experience. For example, participants would identify
several facts to justify a belief that the victim was drunk or impaired: that she had “left the downtown area,” the time of night of the incident and how that coincided with the time that bars shut down in Columbia, if she had seemingly made the decision to walk home alone or abandon her assumed safety net of friends, and a perceived ambiguity in the details of the Clery release that must have resulted from the victim’s drunkenly impaired memory. Participants could use several of those factors in concert to decide that the victim had been drunk, a conclusion they then used to justify the assault against her and to fuel other rape myths, such as that if she was drinking, she was indicating she was sexually available to the perpetrator or was more interested in sex with him than she would have been sober (Cowley, 2014). In this way, participants would often express rape myths that depended on the acceptance of other rape myths, and the rape myths would often work in concert with each other to create influential factors of the assault. So, even though the rape myths expressed by participants can be divided into categories and subcategories, the rape myths would rarely — if ever — act independently of one another.

There were several other important rape myths that came up with regularity in the discussion among participants, but those fell into categories of constructed senses of safety and perpetrator-excusing ideas rather than victim-blaming. These rape myths play a vital role in understanding how the participants view instances of sexual assault on their campus, so they will be discussed in the Future Research section.

For a chart of the categories of rape myths identified by participants in their interpretations of the Clery releases, please reference Table 1: Overview of Rape Myths Identified by Participants.
Table 1
*Overview of Rape Myths identified by Participants.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim-blaming rape myths</th>
<th>Perpetrator-excusing rape myths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Failure to reduce risk/prevent assault</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. Failure to use risk-reduction techniques or otherwise “inviting” assault</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. Drinking or making oneself vulnerable through substances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c. Failure to anticipate or expect assault</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Miscommunication of sexual cues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Projecting sexual availability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Conveying sexual invitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c. Failure to alert bystanders for the need to intervene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Victim-originating foundations for disbelief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. Inability to provide details in the report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. Impaired memory due to drinking or otherwise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c. Drinking that led to impaired inhibitions the victim now regrets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3d. Assumed benefits for the “victim” to lie or exaggerate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3e. Lying or exaggerating is common for “victims”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3f. Failure to adhere to pre-conceived image of a victim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3f. Time it took to report/decision to report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3f. Reaction to assault</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood sexual cues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyish misunderstanding of consent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapists must be mentally ill or “other”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Failure to reduce risk.** One of the most common rape myth group identified by the participants was a failure of the victim to reduce her risk of sexual assault or prevent it from happening. A few participants brought up that there was a lot of focus on what the victims did wrong instead of the perpetrators, but it was generally understood by participants that the responsibility was on the victims to reduce their risk of rape. A female participant stated, “There’s always just a little bit that they (victims) could’ve done (to not be sexually assaulted).” Participants expressed similar sentiments, that the onus was on the victim to stop the sexual assault from happening to her.

Participants spent a lot of time and discussion focused on the perceived safety of the area, time of night and actions of the victim. They discussed several ways the victim didn’t reduce her risk of sexual assault: not employing risk-reduction behavior, otherwise opening herself up to the possibility of sexual assault, drinking or putting herself in a situation with a heightened chance of sexual assault and not having the expectation that attempted sexual assault would occur.

For example, one of the main ways participants identified as a victim’s failure to engage in risk-reduction behavior was if the victim walked home alone. A female participant commented that it was “kind of weird she’s walking home alone … (trails off)” Other male and female participants in the group agreed. In another group, a male member said, “But even if you’re from a town of 1,800 people, I think you know well enough that you shouldn’t be walking at 2 in the morning alone.” To which a female group member responded by increasing the parameters, “Even walking alone anywhere after dark.” Another male participant in a different group said, “If this (victim) was one
of my friends, I’d be like, ‘Why are you going home alone at 2?’” Participants were concerned why the victim was alone and often blamed her friends for not keeping track of her. For example, a participant offered, “I just wonder, like, where were her friends?”

There was an assumed guideline of strength in numbers for women when going out to a party or the bars. Other times, participants went out of their way to look for a way not to blame the victim for leaving her friends. A female participant said:

“I think since it’s around 2 a.m., maybe she was just drunk walking home, like, by herself ‘cause, like, I know some people, like, don’t realize that they’re not with anybody … So probably she was walking home alone like probably drunk and not realizing that she was, like, by herself and it’s, like, super late. I don’t know.”

Still, it was understood by many participants that the victim participated in unsafe behavior by leaving the supervision of her friends. One female participant identified the victim’s solitary departure from the party or bars as the factor that allowed her to be sexually assaulted. She said:

“I’m thinking she was out like partying at the bars or something because-- or maybe at a house party or something. I’m just-- I’m even wondering if, if she was at a house party, if she felt like she could walk home, then she must have lived, like, just down the block, and a couple of guys were, like, walking home, too, and he thinks he can, like last minute, find somebody to, like, hang out with that night. That’s what I think about it. But who knows.”

To the participants, it was important that the victim was not reducing her risk when she walked home alone because anything that happened to her after that point in time was a direct result of her solitude.
Similar to the victim’s perceived failure to employ risk-reduction behaviors that would have kept her immune to a sexual assault such as walking home alone, participants also assumed the victim participated in behaviors that opened herself up to the possibility of sexual assault – mainly by not employing proper “stranger danger” techniques. Sometimes, a victim’s disregard for “stranger danger” was present in the details of the Clery release. Other times, however, participants would attribute perceived action and behavior to the victim that, if she had in fact perpetuated, would have presumably meant she had opened herself up to an attack. For example, in regards to the victim who reported that her breast was grabbed, participants speculated that there was an event left out of the Clery release and that she had stopped walking to engage with and talk to the perpetrator before the assault occurred. A female participant said: “But it’s a little bit odd, and I feel like maybe there’s something else in between that interaction. Maybe.” Other participants expressed similar doubt that the victim would have simply been assaulted by a passing stranger without the victim engaging with the perpetrator. For example, a participant expressed her view of the incident as the victim failing to practice “stranger danger” in her perceived interaction with the perpetrator:

“I would wanna know, like, what other-- Like, what happened to the point where he stopped, she-- I feel like she stopped. In my head, I feel like she stopped. And then, like, why did you stop? Like, keep walking if somebody talks to you at 2:00 in the morning.”

Participants expressed similar sentiments about a victim not adequately keeping herself away from the possibility of an attack in discussion of the 2015 Clery release. The victim was described in the release to have “left the downtown area with a male subject that she
had met…” From this, participants drew the conclusion that she had met the perpetrator that night. Participants framed this in several different rape myths at different points in the discussion, but one of the ways was that she was not reducing her risk of assault by engaging with a man “she had met” that evening. To the participants, the decision made by the victim to leave with the perpetrator was a decision that opposed proper “stranger danger” techniques. The participants concluded, therefore, that the victim was not reducing her risk of assault. One participant said, “’Cause I go, ‘Why are you...’ I mean, if you read that she just met him, ‘Why are you walking with the guy you just met?’” In response to the same report, other participants further identified the victim’s failed ability to protect herself from danger. Two participants discussed the following:

Female participant 1: “Like, it's not safe. Get his number and meet him later.”
Female participant 2: “Yeah.”
Female participant 1: “Yeah. In the daytime. Not drunk and… (trails off)”

The participants also applied this rape myth of a failure to reduce risk to the victim of the 2014 Clery release. The participants had already established an assumption that the victim was unsafely drunk, but they still believed she should have protected herself from the “stranger danger” of an “unknown male” despite her perceived inability to make sound decisions. A female participant said:

“Even if like, you're intoxicated, I feel like you're--- Like-- Like, ‘Oh, I don't know, why would I go with you?’ You know, like… you know. So, it doesn't make sense as to why it's, like, an ‘unknown male.’”

In this way, they participants identified and applied a rape myth of the victim’s inability to close herself off to an assault by either engaging with the perpetrator beforehand or by
failing to limit herself as a target. The participants expressed that the victim had the ability to and actively should have prevented her assault, which created a justification for the sexual assault happening to her.

Another way participants expressed that the victim was not reducing her risk of assault was that she had placed herself in a situation that was dangerous, including simply being intoxicated or impaired while walking home with or engaging with an unknown male. Sometimes, the participants assumed the victim knowingly understood the dangers she was placing herself in and disregarded those dangers, such as by participating in drinking at bars. Other times, the participants thought the victim was either unaware of the danger or was too impaired to keep herself safe, such as when she drunkenly decided to walk home.

Alcohol use was a consistent factor in the discussion of the Clery releases, as it is a consistent factor in sexual assaults on college campuses (Tuliao, McChargue, 2014). This was anticipated, as “issues of blame and alcohol use are closely intertwined when discussing campus rape” (Campbell-Ruggaard, Ryswyk, 2001, p. 292). It was important to the participants to determine if the victim was impaired by substance use, and, if she was determined to be intoxicated, the participants spent time determining her level of intoxication and how she might have gotten that way. It was important for the participants to identify if the victim was drinking in their construction of the event. Other researchers have already established that alcohol use is fuel for rape myths because “intoxication serves to excuse the aggressor while increasing blame to the victim” (Cowley, 2014; Leigh, Aramburu; 1994). In discussion of the 2014 release, for example, a female participant identified that the release made it seem that the victim was drunk in
that instance, which then made it appear that “she’s, like, not responsible” and that “she does this (parties) a lot.” Participants often used cues from the Clery releases to believe the victim had been “partying,” such as time of night the event is reported to have occurred, the area in which the victim was leaving, the area in which the event is reported to have occurred, the ambiguity or lack of details in the release and any information about how the victim had interacted with the perpetrator leading up to the assault. For example, one participant drew the following conclusion from the 2015 release that was dependent on the day of the week of the assault:

Female participant: “And it also says, like, that it might have occurred around like 1:50 a.m., which is usually when people start leaving, like, the bars and clubs and stuff, and so, like, maybe it was, like, one of those Wednesday nights.”

Participants went through a similar reasoning process for the 2014 release:

Female participant 1: “Well for me, I think that when I had read this. I think that maybe, um, I don't know, I think October 3rd was like-- I think that happened to be, like, a Friday or something.”

Researcher: “Uh-hmm.”

Female participant 1: “So I could picture her going after Thirsty Thursday. [laughter] And maybe that's--- That was the fir--- When I was reading this, I'm like, ‘OK, she probably went out for Thirsty Thursday.’ Because I'm, like, one of those sma--- When they say early morning hours, I actually did think, like, 1 a.m. [speaking simultaneously] So when I was--- I've--- I don't know. I was just thinking maybe she got, like, flat out drunk.”
It also made a difference to the participants if they knew which day of the week the assault occurred on — as was seen by the “Thirsty Thursday” comment above. In one discussion, the participants’ perception of the victim’s activities leading up to the assault depended on the day of the week the assault occurred on.

Male participant: “Yeah, she could have been studying for (inaudible) or something and walking back.”

Female participant 1: “Yeah.”

Female participant 2: “It depends what day of the week in November it was.”

Thus, it was considered more justifiable for the participants if the victim was assaulted on a weekday compared to a weekend because she was probably studying instead of drinking.

Another participant used the time of day of the attack as a factor that helped frame the narrative for her understanding of the events in the 2014 release in a similar way other participants used the day of the week. She said: “I definitely think that the early morning hours play a huge role. Like, because it cou--- Exactly, like, if it's midnight, if it's 1 a.m.-- - ... Then, you'd think of a whole different story. Whereas if you think about it as, like, 8 a.m., then that's a totally... If you know what I mean…” Two participants described a similar way of thinking for victim of the 2015 release, saying:

Male participant: “It's 2:30 a.m.”

Female Participant 1: “Then she probably left the bar with some guy, thought he was nice.”

Researcher: “Yeah.”

Female Participant 1: “That he was gonna walk her home or something.”
These conclusions show how the participants used factors such as day of the week, time of the attack and the areas that are associated with the assault to apply a common rape myth that the victim placed herself in a dangerous situation to begin with. By participating in a party, going out to the bars or otherwise drinking, the victim was not reducing her risk for assault.

Another way participants would often express a rape myth that would serve to minimize the assault against the victim was to hold her accountable for not expecting that she was at risk for assault or that assault would probably happen to her in those specific circumstances. Often, the expression of this rape myth centered around the belief that sexual assault was a common occurrence, especially in a bar, at a party or when in the early morning hours on a college campus. Therefore, the victim should have been aware of her risk of assault. Sometimes, this served to lessen the sympathy the participants had for the victim. This way of thinking – that women were more expected to be more at risk and more encouraging of sexual assault around a drinking environment – was explored by Cowley in 2014. Participants expressed this view of expecting assault to occur despite also suggesting that sexual assault was completely preventable if only the victim had engaged in risk-reduction techniques.

Discussion often arose about the potential of the victim being drugged, especially surrounding the 2014 release. However, this was usually dismissed more often than not in the discussion; as one participant said, “You don’t really think about being roofied that much.” Even though participants thought that the victim would come across as less guilty if she had been drugged instead of simply drunk, participants still expressed skepticism about her justification in being victimized based on her inability to protect herself from
being drugged. For example, participants thought potential victims should know to protect their drinks at fraternity parties or at bars and that it was their responsibility to reduce their risk of being drugged at fraternity parties.

Beyond the risk factors participants associated with parties and bars that victims were responsible for minimizing, the clues of the victim being at a party also shaped the way participants understood the victim’s relationship to the perpetrator. The circumstances of the victim being in a party environment and meeting the perpetrator in that environment often shaped the participant’s understanding of the incident.

Female participant 1: “It happened at like a bar, maybe that night.”
Female participant 2: “It happens on, like, a regular street. Yeah. Like a house party or something.”
Researcher: “So does anyone have a different idea than, like, they met that night?”

[speaks together]
Female participant 3: “That's how I'm reading it. That's what it sounds like that they met that night.”

The participants used the perceived presence of party-like circumstances to reach a conclusion about the victim’s failure to reduce her risk. By going to a party or bar, the victim should have expected to be assaulted and should have made efforts to reduce her risk accordingly.

In the next category of rape myths, a victims’ presence in a bar or party atmosphere or failure to shut herself off from communication or engagement with the perpetrator were also used as cues to identify and apply rape myths to the narrative of the
incidents in the Clery releases. In the next category, however, instead of failing to engage in “stranger danger,” the victim was perpetuating sexual communications to the perpetrator.

**Miscommunication of sexual cues.** Participants identified several rape myths involving the miscommunication of sexual cues. Similar to the risk-reduction category of rape myths identified previously in the discussion, the participants would often apply responsibility to the victim. In these mechanisms, though, it was her responsibility to give off correct, clear cues of her sexual availability or unavailability to the perpetrator. The participants often identified this rape myth under the context of established gender norm theory that men have the role of being perpetual sexual aggressors and that women have the role of being a gatekeeper of sexual activity (Chasteen, 2001), a dynamic that is especially present in party-like situations (Cowley, 2014). To the participants, it was also the victim’s responsibility to make sure the perpetrator had no room for doubt or error her inclination or disinclination for sexual activity; if the perpetrator did misinterpret those sexual cues, then it was assumed to be because of something the victim did or did not do instead of the perpetrator’s failure to receive affirmative consent.

The participants often applied the rape myth that certain behaviors indicate that a woman is sexually available. The participants also discussed certain factors that contributed to the idea that the victims might have given sexual invitations to the perpetrator, or at least that the victim’s behavior could have been interpreted as a sexual invitation by the perpetrator. Finally, participants also would use the perceived lack of intervention from bystanders as evidence that the victim was willingly engaging in the sexual activity at the time of the assault. These rape myths are not easily separated from
the risk-reduction rape myths, as a lot of behaviors that the participants discussed were also the ones that they viewed put the victim in harm’s way. In particular, being out at a bar or house party or engaging in drinking or partying was often a noted sign of sexual availability. If the victim had engaged in those behaviors, not only were they not reducing the risk they placed themselves in by making themselves more vulnerable to attack, but they also were responsible for sending a message to others that they were interested in sexual activities.

Many times, participants identified factors that would create an appearance of the victim being sexually available. Of course, participants wouldn’t use the term “sexual availability” to describe the victim’s behavior, but they would think of the victim’s perceived sexual availability in terms of the victim’s openness to engage in sexual activity ranging from intercourse to flirtation. Often, participants used factors such as being “downtown,” presumably to drink at bars and meeting and leaving with the perpetrator on the night of the assault, as indicators of her sexual availability. These factors exist within a pre-constructed context of sexual interaction and gender dynamics that have been explored by many researchers on college campuses (Cowley, 2014; Carr, VanDeusen, 2004; Syrett, 2009) that imitate gender norms in culture (Burt, 1980; Chasteen, 2001; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994). Here are several examples of how the participants inferred a victim’s sexual availability from her decisions and behaviors:

Of the 2015 release:

Male participant: “And I-- I don’t-- I don't disagree with you, but-- I hate to generalize but most people who leave at 1:50 in couples from downtown with
another person that they just met, usually you're gonna end up doing things with them.”

Of the 2014 release:

Female participant: “My idea would be a guy and a girl met at a party. She's either, like, uh, visiting, or she's older and she's doesn’t know the dorms.”

Researcher: “Uh-hmm.”

Female participant: “Um, and he's like, ‘Do you want to come back to my place?’ She says yeah. And I just feel like like-- like, going back to, there are certain things that, like, some people might be willing to do. And then there's a line that gets crossed…”

Of the 2015 release:

Male participant: “Exactly. Well, yeah I, I think it's more of a misunderstanding-- well, not misunderstanding, it's like the female believes that she's having this guy walk her home, and he believes he's going home with this girl and sleeping with her.”

In the last example, participants thought it was reasonable that the victim was indicating she was sexually available to the perpetrator, even if she wasn’t intending to do so. This shows that the rape myth of sexual availability is applied to outside interpretation of the victims’ actions regardless of the victim’s intentions. This attribute is often given to women on college campuses (Cowley, 2014).

The rape myth of the perceived sexual availability of the victim often depended on several other factors of the participants’ perception and was interwoven into the narrative of other rape myths. For example, in the case below, a participant included
“going home with” the perpetrator was a justification for why the assault occurred, along with the victim drinking:

Researcher: “What assumptions are you scared that people would make about your friend?”

Female group member: “From this, I honestly think people would, like-- I mean, when this first came out people believed that she was drunk or that she was intoxicated or like, ‘Well, maybe she shouldn’t have gone home with him.’”

The victim being perceived as drunk in this case compounded with her seeming to make an impaired decision to “go home with” the perpetrator. Thus, sexual availability was enhanced in the presence of the victim’s assumed intoxication, which is, again, an established factor in a rape-supportive culture on college campuses (Argiero, et. all, 2010; Cowley, 2014; Deming, Covan, Swan and Billings, 2013).

Participants would sometimes assume the victim’s actions were conveying a sexual invitation to that perpetrator, which would go a step further than implying the victim was indicating she was sexually available. This rape myth and the one associated with sexual availability are sometimes called “inviting the man in for tea,” wherein a woman was indicating her sexual intentions with a man if she asks him to her apartment under a presumably false guise (Burt, 1980). For the participants reading the Clery releases, the cup of tea was representative of the victim’s willingness to walk home with the perpetrator or go with the perpetrator at the end of the night. Participants interpreted a sexual invitation in the victim’s actions and behaviors in some of these examples:

Female participant: “I mean, there’s always those cases where they get, a girl or a boy, it doesn’t matter, but, like, they’re at a party or at a bar or something, and
they’re, like, making out and it can go so much farther than that, especially if someone’s, like, intoxicated, sometimes it happens and, like, the other person just takes you in, and even though you’re not comfortable, they kinda just force it upon you.”

In this ideation, the victim had invited at least some sexual activity, which put her at risk for being forced to engage in sexual activity that she wasn’t interested in. Another participant put it more clearly when she said, “You could definitely see there being an assumption that she had intentions at some point of going home with this guy or something that's flirtatious there to that extent.” The participant in this case interpreted that the victim had invited the sexual activity by going home with him or previously flirting with him, both of which were perceived by the participant to be an indication that she wanted to engage in sexual activity with the perpetrator.

The participants not only simply assigned responsibility to the victim for the indication of sexual availability and sexual invitation the perpetrator might interpret, but the participants also would assign responsibility to the victim to alert others to her discomfort. Participants would often use a perceived vacancy of bystander intervention to deny the severity or occurrence of the assault. The reasoning the participants used was that if the victim hadn’t resisted enough for strangers or bystanders to have noticed and come to her aid, then she must have been a willing participant in the sexual activity.

Female participant: “Probably. If she was, like, if-- I mean, maybe that sounds bad, but if you were-- like, it’s gonna be really-- and I know a lot of the times now they’re starting to be like, ‘Do something about.’ Like, ‘If you see something, do something about it.’ But I mean, I’ve been downtown before, and everybody
kinda watches out for each other. Like, when you’re down there, for the most part, like, people are watching out for you. That’s the way it is. So if you are, like, completely drugged, like, unconsciousness, like, out, and then you make it back, then, like, somebody I feel would notice, like, if somebody was carrying some of the others or, like, carrying to the dorm…”

In other instances, participants believed that the victim must have willingly let the male into her dorm or home because it would be hard for the perpetrator to gain access to those areas without her help and without others noticing a struggle. Other participants contradicted this idea by saying that people often let strangers into resident halls. Still, the participants expressed an idea that if there was not enough resistance for bystanders to know to intervene, then the victim must have been willingly engaging with the perpetrator and/or sexual activity.

**Victim-originating foundations for disbelief.** Participants would often find reasons to not believe the victim’s account as represented by the Clery release based on details that were either included or conspicuously not included. Sometimes, those details would form a basis for participants to make inferences about the events that happened that would build distrust for either the victim or the way her story was represented. This was expressed in a victim-blaming rape myth if the participants were able to use something the victim either did (drank to intoxication) or didn’t do (remember or provide more details) to create foundations of distrust. Some of the factors that created a justification for not trusting either the victim or the way she was presumably representing her experience included:

- the lack of details in the Clery release and/or her impaired memory;
• the presumption that she drank prior to the assault;
• an assumption that victims have motives to either lie or exaggerate the assault and participants’ previous experience with women who have seemingly lied about their assault; and
• a failure of the victim to adhere to the participant’s pre-conceived image of victimhood, especially concerning the time it took to make the decision to report the assault and her reactions to the assault.

Even though it is the personal belief of the researcher that many, if not all, victim-blaming rape myths are spurred from differences between how the victim behaved and how she was expected to behave (Weis, Borges, 1973), these particular rape myths can be filtered into this category because the doubt that is created in these instances comes directly from a victim’s actions and behaviors. Therefore, the rape myths expressed by the participants in this area can be specified into the category of victim-originating foundations.

An important part of the participants’ justification of the victimhood of the woman who was the subject of the assault was based in the tangible details. Participants were often concerned with facts of the setting that were established in the releases. They spent much time discussing not only the amount of details in each release, but also how substantial those details were in the context of identifying and apprehending the perpetrator. Participants in multiple groups wondered aloud what the policies were for including certain details and if MUPD had purposefully left out details that had been provided to them by the victim, which took the burden of credibility off the victim for some participants. Other times, participants thought the victim might have been
purposely holding back details that she knew would have made her account less believable. One participant said of the 2014 Clery release victim: “I feel like this could be an instance where, like, she wanted to report it but, like, she also didn’t want to give out the information, so it’s like she wanted to report, but she didn’t want everyone to know what happened or something.” Usually, the quantity of details such as time, place and description of the perpetrator included in the report correlated with how credible the participants viewed the victim. For example, the 2014 Clery release almost universally had participants expressing frustration and skepticism about the facts of the incident. Participants shared an impression that the victim wasn’t trustworthy or credible due to the victim’s lack of memory of the details of her assault. For example, female participants questioned that if she didn’t know where the assault occurred, how could she be sure that it had even been an assault?

Female participant 1: “Uh, maybe if she didn't know the residence hall, like, maybe someone can say, ‘Well, if you don't know the residence hall, then how do you remember your suspect?’

Researcher: “Hmm.”

Female participant 1: “And how do you remember if he really, like---“

Female participant 2: “Raped you or not?”

Female participant 1: “--had raped you?”

In another instance about the same victim, a female participant said, “I feel like she really makes it look bad enough that she doesn’t remember anything.” Thus, a lack of details allowed participants to find ways to doubt or discredit the victim and her account.
Sometimes, participants assumed that the victim’s lack of memory was because she had been drinking, which again played into the risk-reduction rape myth. A female participant said of the 2015 Clery release: “Since, kind of-- Why don’t you notice more (details about the assault/perpetrator)? I don’t know. She has been really out of it. Maybe even drunk, I guess.” In other discussion about the 2014 Clery release, a female participant said, “Well, I think she's drunk.” Another female participant confirmed this by saying, “She can't remember anything.” Of the same victim, a male participant said, “It sounds like she was either drugged or intoxicated or something.” In this way, a lack of details would often lead participants to believe that the victim had been drinking, which opens up the possibilities for other victim-blaming rape myths about the victims. This has been established as a functioning rape myth in many systems, including police departments (Schuller, Stewart; 2000).

If the participants attributed the victim’s hazy memory or inability to provide details to her being intoxicated, they would often also suggest she had either willingly engaged in the sexual activity at the time, drunkenly led the perpetrator on or had lacked the will power to stop him from going further than she would have sober, which was still considered her fault. Not only was her memory impaired, but so were her inhibitions. The idea of alcohol serving to loosen up the rigid gender norms that many women would seemingly otherwise adhere to in college environments has been established and explored by researchers (Cowley, 2014; Tuliao, McChargue, 2014). In the Clery releases, victims who were perceived to be drunk were assumed to be less reliable in their account of the assault due to both their memory impairment and their assumedly regrettable sexual discretions. As one participant said:
Female participant: “I think it’s just hard to say anything really from this because if she was drunk. I mean I heard stories from people I know; they wake up somewhere they don’t know where they are, like, she could have been going along with it the whole night and then just woke up freaked out because that happened but…”

Researcher: “What do you mean by ‘going along?’”

Female Participant: “Like, maybe he wasn’t the only one trying to, like, to do stuff with her, like, she could have been, like, drunkenly just doing the same stuff and then woke up, like [inaudible].”

In another instance, a female participant said of the same victim, “I think people just think that she got way too drunk and just went home with someone, didn’t-- wasn’t really thinking.” So not only was it creating doubt that the victim was telling the truth if the victim couldn’t remember details adequately, but it also created a belief that the victim had engaged willingly with the perpetrator.

If participants thought the victim had something she now regretted doing, then it was an easy conclusion to make that the victim was lying about what had happened during the incident described in the Clery release. But that was just one reason why participants assumed victims would lie about the circumstances. Participants found reasons in the release — or in what the release was lacking — that supported an idea that the victim was not being truthful about the assault because it was in her benefit to cover or make up some aspects. This is an established rape myth in feminist theory, that women have compelling reasons to “cry wolf” about rape (Maxwell, Scott, 2013). In some cases during focus group discussion, participants believed some sort of sexual activity or
interaction might have occurred with the perpetrator; in other cases, participants thought the girl made up stories of sexual interaction. Participants came up with several motivations a victim might have for lying or exaggerating about her assault, including that she had engaged in activity she now regretted because she was drunk; she engaged in activity she now regrets because of the partner; she is embarrassed about the activity she willingly did because of what people might think of her for it; or she is trying to get revenge on the person she is accusing. A male participant described the reasons why people would think the victim lied about the assault because “girls tend to over exaggerate or just, like, want attention.”

A participant posited the following about the victim of the 2013 Clery release, suggesting that the victim was avoiding reporting details that would have but blame on her:

“What is the truth? Like, she could just be saying, like-- She might not have wanted to admit that she, like, was walking home with him or something, like, it could be a lot of different things.”

Another participant expressed that women might lie to cover up her willing engagement in sexual activity: “Because there's girls that are like, ‘Oh my goodness, I had sex with this guy. I don't want anybody to know that, like, I did it.’”

Sometimes, an assumption that the victim was drunk also contributed to a conclusion that the victim was making up the assault. The following dialogue shows this line of thinking:

Leader: “So we are accepting here that the reports make the victims look pretty drunk. Does that kind of change the way you think about the victim?”
Female participant: “That makes us think that she isn’t telling the real story to the police. And she’s looking to grab attention or something.”

As pointed out previously in the analysis and literature review, the victim’s substance use often created a layer of doubt for her story. In this case, a participant thought that simply because the victim was drinking, it increased the chances that she would make up the assault.

To support the rape myth that a particular victim’s story is not credible, many participants brought up previous examples they had encountered through their peers, campus gossip or media of women lying about their assault. The participants expressed that this was a common occurrence, engaging with the rape myth that victims will frequently lie or exaggerate about sexual assault, which is an established function to deny sexual assault against women in feminist theory (Ask, 2010; Lonsway, Archambault, Lisak, 2009; C. Spohn et al., 2014). A female participant said:

“You hear it a lot so it’s like, ‘Oh, yeah.’ You also hear the downside where they’re drunk and then they lied about it later on or, you know, just-- You hear it way too often, so kind of after a while you don’t trust it as much, you just go-- stuff like that.”

Another participant said:

“But, like, I get what you're saying, though, too, because it's like there are stories of people that, like, say that they got raped, and they really didn't, which was, like, so scary because it's like you obviously want to help a victim, but then it's not cool if, like, a girl's pissed off at you and says like, ‘Oh yeah, he raped me.’ So, like, I don't know.”
In one discussion about the 2014 Clery release, participants brought up a belief that women will create elaborate schemes of engaging in sexual assault just to be able to frame the “perpetrator.” They related this to the movie *Gone Girl.*

Female participant 1: “There's like psycho ex-girlfriends that are willing to, like, go to that level.”

Female participant 2: “Yeah.”

Male participant: “Yeah.”

Female participant 1: “To be like, ‘Yeah, I will pretend like I'm okay with doing it with you just so I can, like, report you.’ There’s like there's crazy evil.”

Female participant 3: “*Gone Girl.*”

In the discussion following the reference to the movie, which is about a woman who frames both her husband and later another man for killing and raping her, the participants used the events in the movie to apply them to women who would go to those lengths.

In another discussion, a female participant brought up a media report about a woman who said she was raped at a fraternity. A male participant then related that to an instance with his friend, who he says was framed.

Female Participant 1: “I heard about a story, like, about some fraternity that it was, like, this year … and there was on the official news thing, but it said there's--like, this girl claimed that she was raped because she didn’t want to admit to her boyfriend that she cheated on him or something. I was, like-- And that’s one of the things, like, you never really know, like, is that the truth, or did she actually get raped?”

Male participant: “I had a friend accused of it he had nothing to do with it.”
Researcher: “Really?”

Male participant: “Yeah. He was under investigation, and the truth finally said he was not, ‘I was drunk and did something with someone.’ And then she had a problem with it or something in the past that’s uh— (cuts off).”

In these cases, the participants were able to justify victims lying about the assault because they had previous experience or knowledge of women who lied about similar situations — fictional or otherwise. The participants applied the motivations of the victims in the often sensational cases to cases that happen in their community, justifying that women lie about sexual assault.

In addition to participants assuming that women will and frequently do lie about sexual assaults, the participants also assumed certain things about how victims should behave in response to instances of sexual assault. Participants often expressed ideas of either how they expected a person in the victim’s situation to act or how they thought they would act in the victim’s situation. If the victim’s behavior was perceived as a deviation from those expectations, the participants would question the validity of the victim’s experience. This, again, shows a common function of rape myths serving as a deviation from the “classic rape scenario” (Weis, Burges, 1973).

In focus group discussion, the deviation in victims’ responses due to the traumatic event of a sexual assault from how they were expected to respond was most often expressed in relation to the Clery releases through the amount of time it took and the process by which the participant decided to report the incident and her reaction to the assault. The rape myth of a victim’s delayed or unexpected response was one identified as one of the three most commonly employed rape myths police detectives use in
determining the credibility of victims, as well (Jordan, 2004). The expectation participants had for victims can be summed up in this dialogue:

Male participant “I feel like you should call (the police) right away.”

All: “Yeah.”

In discussion of how long it took the victim to report the incident, the male and female participants expressed the expectations of the victim differently. Male victims expressed skepticism if a victim didn’t immediately report the assault, but women compared the victim’s actions to what they would do in the situation. A female participant said: “I mean just if I was her, I would wanna call right away. So just putting myself in that situation, um, I don't know, I guess she was probably scared, so I can't really speak for her.” A female participant in a different group answered a question about if she would feel comfortable going to the police if she had been the victim in the Clery release:

“Yeah. I mean, yeah. Hell yeah, because my personality, I’m like if anybody did anything to me, I’m the type of person that would be like, ‘Nope. I want the full nine yard slip. I want to do everything. I don’t care about the process, I don’t care if I have to tell my story a hundred million times. Let’s do it.’ But that’s just the type of person I am. So sometimes I forget that other people aren’t like that. And then if you don’t like remember that, afterwards you’re like, ‘Well, why the hell wouldn’t you want to do that?’ Like, it doesn’t make sense to you. And then you think about ‘Well, yeah. Not everybody is like that.’ But you do have that little tiny thought in your head.”

This participant expressed the complicated way many of the participants viewed the victims. Despite being able to reason through the reasons why they might blame the
victim and acknowledging they might be unfair in their judgment of the assault, they still were distrustful of a victim who displayed a version of victimhood than what they expected. A male participant expressed how he wrestled with the idea of the victim’s credibility based on the time she took to report the assault:

“Well, kind of with what you were saying, the fact that the crime was, like, reported, like, very soon after it happened. Like, in my opinion, that makes it more credible. Like, I don't want to sound bad or like I'm not blaming the girls or anything, but, like, sometimes, I feel like a girl might get, like, black out drunk or something and then accidentally consent to sex or something. I guess it is-- Isn't it if you're blackout you can't consent?”

He went on to say later in the discussion: “But like... Yeah, like, I guess, like, if you report the rape, like, a couple of days later, I just feel like it's not as credible. Like, I feel like you might have been consenting at the time. I gotta… (trails off)” The victim’s decision to report the assault was one of the factors participants used to judge her credibility about not only the assault, but also a number of other factors of the assault — if she was drunk at the time, if she was doubting herself, if it even happened at all.

Even though participants often had conflicting ideas about how a person should respond to the assault, the expectations changed depending on the context of the facts being discussed. For example, a group might discuss how they believe they would definitely make a police report right away if they had been assaulted. But later, the group would express their sympathy in the victim’s need to “shut down” or process the assault before they can even seek help from friends. One participant said, “I think, like, on you because you wanna talk and help him but at the same time [inaudible] they're probably
going to, like, shut down for a little bit.” A male participant said, “But, oh, a lot of times those people (victims) were, like, so worked up about it and so scared that they can't, like, emotionally handle it.”

Participants also had a different picture of the assault as described in the Clery release if it gave an indication that the victim physically resisted the perpetrator. For example, participants discussing the 2015 Clery release said:

Female Participant: “Yeah, she’s seem like she's just trying to get home.”

Male participant: “It’s kinda cool that she is was able to find a way to-- … She resisted.”

Another participant brought up an episode of Law and Order: SVU in which a victim of sexual assault complied with the perpetrator because he was threatening her with a knife. That, she said, could be a good reason why she didn’t resist the assault. Of course, this means that victims who didn’t physically resist the assault were not seen as clearly non-consenting.

Throughout the focus groups, research-established rape myths could be identified in the participants’ discussions as mechanisms for the ways in which the participants created a story with meaning out of the events described to have happened. The rape myths identified by the participants were rooted in feminist theory wherein a rape culture exists that normalizes and justifies male sexual violence against women (Buchwald, 1994; Chasteen, 2001) and reinforces women-as-victims as a secondary class of citizens (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980). As participants sought to create meaning out of the events described in the Clery release, they engaged with rape myths as devices of thought that would generalize, trivialize, encourage or deny sexual assault against women.
(Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008). In the next section of analysis, the researcher will explore how the rape myths used by the participants identified in the above section both encourage and gain credibility from a rape-supportive, patriarchal society (Hocket, et al., 2009).

**Analysis of Research Question 2**

The participants used the rape myths as identified in the previous section to affirm a rape-supportive culture on campus wherein sexual assault is denied, justified and trivialized (Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994; Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008). Under radical feminism, sexual violence is seen as a “method of patriarchal maintenance” (Escholz, Vieraitis, 2004), and the rape myths participants used to create meaning out of the sexual violence as described in the Clery releases served to minimize, relegate, trivialize and justify the sexual assault that happened in their community. Rape myths are learned belief systems (Chapleau and Oswald, 2010) that are reinforced, in this case, through a campus culture that is rape-supportive (Argiero, et al., 2010; Carr, VanDeusen, 2004; Cowley, 2014; Gardella, et. all, 2015). In the analysis of the way participants used rape myths in their construction of the events as described in the Clery releases, it can be seen that participants are upholding a rape-supportive environment by the way the sexual assaults under discussion are justified and denied.

The affirmation of a rape-supportive culture became clear when participants would verbally acknowledge damaging ways of thinking about the events described in the Clery releases. Participants could rattle off harmful beliefs about the victim, a discussion that frequently happened when the researcher would ask if the participants would feel differently if the victim in the Clery release had been a friend of theirs. One
participant responded to the question with a list of things she would be worried that people thought of her hypothetical friend, the subject of the 2015 release:

“That people might judge her. Like how we were saying like how we thought that maybe she might be drunk because she's leaving downtown at this time of hour. So maybe people would be like well she's drunk. And then, maybe she was wearing something was slutty and stuff. And so, maybe she asked for it. And then maybe somebody will be, probably be like well it can't be rape because she probably may have consented to it or something, or whatever, or maybe that because she was drunk, she might have umm, she might have thought of things differently. Like maybe he could have been trying to drag, well not drag, but like pull her to come on. But maybe she's thinking, ‘Oh, he's trying to have sex with me’ and stuff like that.”

The participant here was able to verbally identify different ways people might interpret the sexual assault that would deny or justify what had happened to the victim, her hypothetical friend. In this way, the participant was affirming the reality and dangers of a rape-supportive culture for victims of sexual assault, reasoning that radical feminism upholds (Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008). The participant is confirming that there is an environment that would deny, justify, trivialize and minimize sexual assault, suggesting the existence of a rape-supportive culture that will “maintain and reinforce women’s oppression” (Whisnant, 2013). The participant felt people would interpret the Clery release in ways that would serve to uphold a rape-supportive environment, mostly through victim-blaming.
Usually, participants didn’t come out an admit to victim-blaming thought processes. Instead, the way participants utilized victim-blaming rape myths was in circular dialogues of assumptions based on the information in the Clery release made among all of the participants in the group. For example, participants might go through a non-linear discussion of reaching conclusions using factors from the Clery release that would result in the following applied narrative and judgments on her experience:

The victim was downtown, so:

She was drunk, so:

She walked home alone or left a bar in an unsafe manner, at which point:

She engaged with the perpetrator, wherein:

She knowingly or unknowingly conveyed a sexual invitation, which lead to:

She engaged in sexual behavior with the perpetrator, but:

She couldn’t remember all of the details because:

She was drunk, so:

She probably didn’t express her lack of consent to him clearly, because:

She wasn’t resisting enough for bystanders to be aware of her discomfort, plus:

She shouldn’t have been walking home alone, because:

She was drunk, so:

She probably couldn’t be sure of what happened, and, at the very least:

She probably knew that people would assume she had led him on, or maybe:

She probably knew she had led him on to begin with, and anyway:

She shouldn’t have walked home alone, or:

She shouldn’t have been alone with him, so:
Is she sure she can be sure about what happened, and more so:

Is she sure what happened to her wasn’t something she encouraged, therefore:

Is she really a victim of assault, and really:

Can we even blame the guy?

In this narrative and construction that is representative of the groups’ discussions, only a couple of the factors were clearly represented in the Clery releases: The victims were described as “downtown” before the assault, and the victims were described as “alone” or walking with only the perpetrator. The rest were assumptions, conclusions and value judgments the participants applied to the narrative of the victim’s experience of both the assault and the decision to engage with MUPD.

In the analysis of how participants used rape myths to create meaning out of the events described in the Clery release, it’s important to remember that rape myths do not have to be false beliefs or contradictory to what actually happened. Instead, rape myths “serve to deny and justify” the assault on the victim (Lonsways, Fitzgerald, 1994). As Lonsway and Fitzgerald said, it’s not about the “falsity of the rape myths that is the concern, but the way they are systematically applied to all cases.” For example, one common rape myth is that the victim had been drinking and so can’t remember the details of her assault, thereby casting doubt on the victim’s experience and lessening the credibility of the victim’s story. When applied to the victim and her experience, the effects of those assumptions will cause people to minimize the trauma of her experience, blame her for instigating or provoking the assault, and lessen the believability of her experience. It can cause people — including police officers, university administrators and university students — to not treat her as a credible witness and to not treat her as a victim
deserving of justice (Franklin, 2010; Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz and DeKeserdy, 1997; Venema, 2014). In other words, the truth or presence of the actions, behaviors and intentions taken by the victim or perpetrator is inconsequential to the way that those interpretations cause people to question her victimhood, justify the action taken against her and deny the trauma that happened to her in a way that upholds the status quo of a rape-supportive culture (Whisnant, 2013) to the point of institutionalization (Hockett, et al., 2009). The values applied to the victim, the perpetrator and the assault based on how people interpret the facts of the event are how rape myths serve to deny and justify assault against victims (Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 2994; Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008).

**Failure to reduce risk or prevent assault.** One troubling theme in the discussion of the events as depicted in the Clery releases was the rape myth that would justify sexual victimization based on the victim’s perceived failure to employ risk-reduction techniques. Participants believe that it is within their power to stop a sexual assault from happening to them, something that feminist researchers and academics know to be untrue. This notion is troubling considering that radical feminists consider sexual violence to be a tool to “maintain and reinforce women’s oppression” (Whisnant, 2014). Even beyond actively reducing risk, many participants believed it was completely within a person’s power to stop sexual assault from happening to them. One female participant said: “From a young age, it was on my mind how to be safe all the time and follow the rules. It’s, like, I don’t care about the sexual assault, it’s that it happens, and I can stop it, and I should know how the people look and where it happened.” A male participant who identified that he didn’t worry about walking alone in the early morning said of a victim
who was depicted as walking home alone at 2 a.m.: “Yet again, I hate to say it, but you probably shouldn’t have walked into an alley. And it sounds really bad to say…” Another participant described how she felt about hearing risk-reduction tips such as the ones included in the 2014 Clery release:

Female participant: “Definitely. Because, like, with all these tips and, you know, you’re seeing them frequently, it would kind of get me a little worried about, ‘OK, they’re giving us these tips. Maybe they’re trying to say you need to make sure that you’re doing what you need to do and follow these steps so that you don’t become a victim.’ Otherwise, if you don’t do these things, you will become a victim.”

Of course, techniques to reduce a person’s risk of becoming a target of crime is not intentionally harmful; learning how to detect circumstances of danger is an important skill to teach. And it can be helpful to teach at-risk populations, such as young women on a college campus, methods for avoiding harm. However, the fact that the participants firmly believed they could protect themselves and their loved ones from sexual assault just be practicing “stranger danger” is incredibly troubling for many reasons, but not least of all that it would cause the participants to believe the victim did or didn’t do something that provoked the attack. This shows how risk-reduction techniques can uphold a rape-supportive culture that belittles the experience of a sexual assault victim. For example, a participant described how an apparent failure to engage in risk-reduction techniques made the victim seem less sympathetic:

Researcher: “So if there was-- if someone was walking around making choices that made them a more high-risk target, does that kind of take away from what
happens to them and their story? I mean, because clearly they were doing something that-- you know, if they had been doing something differently, it might have been prevented.”

Female participant: “It shouldn’t but it does.”

Researcher: “It does? Like, to who? To people who hear this story or—“

Female participant: “Like, we all just answered the question. Like, ‘Could she have done things to avoid this?’ And all of us said ‘Yes.’ So clearly it does. Should it happen? No. Do we try to prevent people from having that thought process? Yes. But we all just answered the question with a ‘Yes.’ So obviously it does. It takes something a little away from that story to somebody out there.”

In the instances of Clery releases, specifically, participants would mentally flip through and process the risk-reduction techniques the victim in the release did or did not employ. As they did so, they assigned varying levels of validation to the victim’s credibility. One participant expressed this when she said: “Now that I am looking at the second one (the 2013 release), I look at the tips, it kinda, like, sets me up to, like-- she didn't do this, this and this. Like, you go back or refer back to that, and It's kinda, like, ‘Oh. Well, I guess she was a victim because she didn't do that.’” Participants used the victim’s failure to reduce her risk as a reason for why the assault would have happened to her; it became a clear cause and effect in the way the participants came up with the narrative of the assault that was described in the Clery release. The idea that a woman is in control of her ability to prevent herself from sexual assault became problematic because of its reverse — that a woman who was sexually assaulted did something wrong, or didn’t do something right, and so was deserving of the assault. In this way, a focus on risk-reduction techniques can
perpetuate further victim-blaming rape myths that serve to maintain a system of oppression that is present in rape culture (Hockett, et al., 2009).

For the 2014 release, the lack of details gave the participants a harder time to come up with a solid narrative of the events leading up to the assault. But that ambiguity just made more room for victim blaming. A female participant’s comments show the way the participants compensated for the lack of description:

Female group member: “Because everyone’s making assumptions about the first one (2014 Clery release) since we don’t really know.”
Female group member: “Yeah, definitely.”
Female group member: “There’s so much uncertainty with the first one where you’re like-- it could be a number of things, but most of them are, like ‘OK, maybe she shouldn’t have done this or maybe… (trails off).’ There’s always something.”

In the absence of description, participants almost automatically filled the void with contrived actions the victim did or didn’t take to provoke the assault or prevent it from happening. It becomes evident that the main ways in which the participants were finding ways to build a story from the descriptions in the Clery releases was to apply a context of rape myths they were already familiar with (Hockett, et al., 2009). If they felt unsure about what might have happened, they fell back on rape myths as the building blocks. This is a common function of a rape-supportive culture (Chasteen, 2001; Hockett, et al., 2009) that would deny justice for victims of sexual assault (Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008).
A similar mechanism happened in the discussion of the 2013 Clery release. The participants generally agreed that the victim of the 2013 Clery release was the least “deserving” of the assault because they assumed the perpetrator was a random passerby, thereby fulfilling some aspects of the “perfect victim” scenario (Weis, Burges, 1973). However, the participants still used rape myths to fill in the cracks of the perfecthood of the victim, helping the participants to come up with reasons to justify why the attack might have happened to an otherwise “perfect” victim (Weis, Burges, 1973). In this case, participants assumed the victim must have interacted with the perpetrator before the assault occurred, which meant that she didn’t properly reduce her risk by engaging in “stranger danger” techniques. It’s important to note that the Clery release made no indication that the victim and the perpetrator spoke before the assault, but participants felt that the victim must have some something that left her open to the risk of assault. As female participant described her feelings on the assault: “I would wanna know like what other like what happened to the point where he stopped, she-- I feel like she stopped. In my head, I feel like she stopped. And then like why did you stop? Like, keep walking if somebody talks to you at 2:00 in the morning.” Here, we clearly see how the participants were using rape myths to fill in the gaps of the story so that it felt more familiar, justifiable and reasonable to them. In doing so, participants often not only blamed the victim for failing to minimize her risk, but they also built a false sense of security for themselves and their friends (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994). Beyond the harm it does for each specific victim when people filter a victim’s story through risk-reduction techniques, it also harms the campus population to think that sexual assault is something that a victim had the ability to prevent and failed to do so. It
fueled the idea — and was fueled by the idea — that sexual assault is the responsibility of the victim to prevent, not a choice made by perpetrators in a culture that supports it (Hockett, et al., 2009).

This became clearer as participants contrasted the way they thought the victim behaved as depicted by the Clery release to the way the participants viewed themselves acting in similar situations. Participants spent a lot of time comparing themselves, their female friends or the way they interacted with their female friends with the way they believed the victim and her friends behaved in relation to the assault. They would compare methods they used to prevent sexual assault from occurring, such as always walking home in groups, carrying pepper spray or even arranging their facial features in “Resting Bitch Face” to discourage potential perpetrators from targeting them. As one participant described how she would normally react to strangers approaching her or requesting her attention:

“My thing is-- is like if they like someone every came up to me and was like, “I was talking to you.” My thing is you didn’t say my name so I don’t know who you talking to. And since you didn’t say my name, you know, I’m just gonna assume you weren’t talking to me. That’s-- that’s how I am. I’m-- that’s because like sometimes like when people become like-- I might be being rude then I start thinking I’m like they didn’t say your name for one and if they didn’t say your name, they probably A, don’t know you or B up to something no good you don’t know. So I’m-- I just keep walking. I act like I don’t hear them. Like I don’t look back or anything. Like if I walk down far enough, I might look back to see where that person is but I just keep walking, act like I didn’t hear anything.”
Another participant said, “If a guy asked me that at 2:00 AM and I’m walking, I’m gonna be like-- (shows skeptical face).” In another discussion, a participant described how she would have handled herself in the victim’s situation. She said: “Like especially at night, I’m just like, ‘I don’t care if I’m being rude, I don’t want nothing to happen.’ I’m just going to keep walking.” The participant’s comparison between the actions the victim did or did not take and the actions the participants believe they engage in show that they think the victim failed to protect herself in the way the participants would not have failed. This is, again, a common function of rape myths that allows people to feel safer and more in control of their safety in a community that would otherwise support sexual assault (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994).

Many times, participants created stories for why the victim would be walking home alone or why her friends lost track of her. Sometimes, the participants expressed feelings of frustration or disappointment in the victim, especially when asked to think about how they felt about the report if the victim had been their friend. In one instance, a male participant said of the 2013 Clery release victim, “If this was one of my friends I’d be like, ‘Why are you going home alone at 2:00?’” To him, walking home alone was the action she took that caused the assault against her. The participants often needed to come up with why the victim was alone, and they often discussed reasons why she was not properly reducing her risk by walking alone. A female participant outlined several possible story lines leading up to the assault from the 2013 Clery release. She said, “I feel like we don't know if she was drunk and walking home or left with him or he just walked up to her.” Other participants jumped in to clarify that the release said she was “walking home.” In this case, it was clear that the difference in her intent with her walk would
make a difference in how the participant understood the assault. Different scenarios would weigh differently on the participant’s mind. Some proposed that the victim was too drunk to realize she was leaving without telling anyone, others proposed that she had gotten into a fight with her friends. Some thought she might have snuck away to leave with the man who perpetrated the sexual assault.

No matter how the victim might have left her assumed group of safety, the participants assigned blame to both her and her friends for putting her in the situation that seemingly heightened her risk of assault. This mindset and culture that would perpetuate it was seen in the ethnographic study by Argiero, et. all (2010) that showed that men used women and sex with women as a symbol of status. The study showed how clearly a college “party” atmosphere can be set up for women to be treated as sexual prey for perpetrators in a rape-supportive culture. It was understood by the participants that it was the responsibility of both the victim and her friends that there was a predator-prey mentality when “going out.” It was the responsibility of the victim and her friends to prevent each other from becoming a predator’s prey, a possibility that they needed to be vigilant, smart and strong to prevent from happening.

Participants used many clues to construct rape myths and create what they believed to be reasonable circumstances. Factors such as the time of day the assault occurred changed the way participant’s interpreted the victim’s behaviors.

Female participant 1: “I think-- I definitely think that the early morning hours play a huge role. Like, because it cou—Exactly, like, if it's midnight, if it's 1 a.m.-

Female participant 2: “He has pulled her in.”
Female participant 1: “Then, you'd think of a whole different story. Whereas if
you think about it as like, 8 a.m., then that's a totally... If you know what I mean,
like--“

Female participant 3: “Yes. I--- I really thought at 8 a.m., and I was like--“

Female participant 1: “That's the first thing I thought, too. And I was like--
“    [laughing] [speaking simultaneously]

Female participant 3: “I was like, ‘What is she doing somewhere, where she
doesn't know where she is at 8 a.m. in morning?’”     [laughs]

Female participant 1: “Bu-- But I guess it would [inaudible]. That's why it was so
confusing if it's 8 in the morning — Why is she somewhere she doesn't know
where she is, you know?”

Researcher: “Uh-hmm.”

Female participant 2: “Yeah.”

In this case, we see how even the time of night as reported in the release will change the
narrative the participants use to describe the assault. To use their words, different times of
day means “you’d think of a whole different story.” If the assault had occurred earlier in
the night — at a time when, presumably, men prey on drunk or otherwise vulnerable
women like the victim was understood to be in the release — then it gave her more
credibility as a victim. If, however, the victim was that impaired at 8 a.m., a time when
most of their peer group was not impaired, then she was participating in behavior that
provoked or instigated the assault. The simple distinction between the assault happening
at 1 a.m. or 8 a.m., with no other facts changed, created a vast difference in the
assessment participants placed on the victim’s story. This shows how one factor that is
seemingly beyond the victims control — the time at which she was assaulted — can change the legitimacy the participants assign to the victim.

Participants described victims whose stories were more credible and believable as either walking home from the library, walking home from work or having a “normal night of drinking.” Participants often blamed the victim drinking as either a contributing factor of the assault or as a reason not to trust her account of the assault, reinforcing the connection between victim blaming and alcohol use that has already been established by existing research (Campbell-Ruggaard, Ryswyk, 2001; Cowley, 2014; Tuliao, McChargue, 2014). For the participants, a victim who was drunk should have reasonably expected an assault and was not taking steps to prevent it from happening. The very act of the victim drinking made one female participant — who repeatedly stated that it was wrong to blame the victim and that she wasn’t doing so now — question if the victim’s account of what happened to her could be believed. She said:

“The way, like, I'm kind of thinking about it is that-- Well, one is that it was never the victim's fault. Like, I hate people trying to blame the victim, like, ‘Well, she was drunk,’ and, like, I'm like, ‘No, it doesn't matter. Like, you don't touch her if she says no.’ But, you know, because [inaudible] she is around and drinking between, like, 2:34 and 1:50ish, like, most-- most of the time when you're, like, leaving (downtown bars) you can still have a cab, like, rounded up and stuff like that, and so, like, you know. And it kinda makes me wonder, like, you know, if she can, like, really tell what's going on. Because sometimes, like, people don't know until the next day, like, ‘Oh my God. Like, this happened.’ You know, and there was no one around that, like, helped her. So I'm not saying that it's, like, not
credible, and I'm not blaming her at all, but, like, you know, I'm just saying, like, how will they know exactly what happened? Because she might not know until the next day, and then they figure out—like, put her thoughts in order. Because she can still be, like, confused as to what was going on. So it just makes me wonder, like, how—like, because they didn't really say. They say, like— they call it a sex offense and they say rape, but then they said that she struggled and he ran away. …”

As with many people who process stories of sexual assault, this participant went through several stages of conflicting thought and value judgment on the information presented in the release. She weighed different factors of the story in her understanding of what happened. This participant is showing how a person will often wrestle with incompatible ideas when faced with a story of sexual assault such as those presented in Clery releases. In this case, the participant’s belief in the victim’s right to not have her consent violated conflicted with the victim’s behavior and lack of risk-reduction techniques, such as calling a cab instead of walking home alone. She applied a loss of certainty and believability to the victim’s story because the victim was perceived to be drunk, despite the participant’s repeated reassurance that she wasn’t “saying that it’s not credible.” In fact, police officers often employ this same line of thinking wherein they view a victim of sexual assault who admits to drinking or using substances as much less credible (Schuller, Stewart, 2000).

This is not to say that drinking will impair someone’s memory and that victim’s couldn’t suffer from memory impairment from substance abuse or trauma, but the participant’s complicated ideas of credibility, drinking and the victim’s right to consent
show how rape myths can deny or justify sexual assault despite the possibility of truth in some cases. For example:

Female participant 1: “I mean, I understand that anybody can be drunk and still willingly do something but not knowingly do something.”

Female participant 2: “But if you’re drunk then there are chances of you getting victim—“

Female participant 1: “Right. You shouldn’t be drunk.”

In this case, the participants were able to justify the sexual assault happening to the victim because she had been drinking or drunk beforehand, a frequent connection on college campuses (Cowley, 2014; Tuliao, McChargue, 2014). This enhances the burden on people to prevent themselves from becoming victims, which implies that victims who were drinking and subsequently assaulted deserved, encouraged or instigated the assault. For this victim, the perception that she had been drinking took some of the credibility away from the victim’s story, lessened empathy for the victim and minimized the effects of the assault on the victim in the participant’s construction of the event. This shows how a rape myth denies and justifies the assault against her (Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008; Lonways, Fitzgerald, 1994) and reaffirms a rape-supportive culture (Chasteen, 2001).

A contrasting example of language used to construct the circumstances of another Clery report shows how important the victim’s level of sobriety was to her ability to either avoid the assault or justify the assault happening to her. A male participant was speculating that the subject of the 2013 Clery report might not have been drinking before the assault occurred. He said, “Yeah. Like, this girl could have been completely sober and
that could have just been a terrible… [trails off].” In this case, he weighed the assault happening to a sober victim as something that is more “terrible” and distressing than if the victim had been intoxicated, as was the previous line of discussion in the group. The effects of this way of thinking is expressed clearly by a male participant, who compared women who drink frequently to women who rarely or never drink. He said, “If that person goes to a party every night, then people would be like, ‘It’s her fault getting drunk every night.’ And for those to who this is their first time to be drunk in their life, they would be like, ‘Poor you.’” Another participant added a contrasting layer to this idea of how people view victims who drink frequently. She said: “If I knew this person, (and) I knew that she has a history of drinking, I’ll be like, ‘Uhhh, damn.’ But still it doesn’t justify that action that occurred.” Here, she is identifying that there is not a true justification for a sexual assault based on the victim drinking, but she still demonstrates a strong link between the two in people’s ideas of the victim’s role in a sexual assault.

Despite stating that the victim’s drunkenness doesn’t mean she deserves an assault, the participant still acknowledges that the assault is more justifiable if the victim was known to drink.

The participants are expressing the context that affects the way people view victims. It shows that sexual assaults do not occur in a vacuum of culture and values; people use context they are familiar with to decide how deserving the victim is of the attack and how deserving the victim is of their trust. Participants expressed similar ideas in other discussion such as these:

Of the 2014 release, when asked if the participants would feel differently about the Clery release if their friend was the victim:
Female Participant 1: “Yeah, I feel like my buddy will be put in like a bad light.”
Leader: “You think?”
Female Participant 1: “Yes.”
Leader: “How so?”
Female Participant 2: “Because it's, like, portraying her as: she's drunk.”
Leader: “You think [inaudible]?”
Female Participant 1: “Yeah”.
Female Participant 2: “Yeah, she's, like, not responsible.”
Female Participant 1: “She does this often. So I wouldn't like it.”
Female Participant 2: “Yeah, that she's, like, beyond gone because she can't remember anything.”
Leader: “You think that's assumed, like she does this a lot?”
Female Participant 3: “Yeah. People definitely take it that way.”
Leader: “Yeah.”
Female Participant 2: “Yeah.”

In a general discussion of how victims are portrayed by Clery releases:

Female group member: “That’s what I would wish, that they would pay more attention or just kinda care about it a little bit more rather than just writet off because, ‘Oh, it’s just another one of those.’ Or, ‘A victim is drunk.’ And that stuff happens, but-- I don’t know.”

In another discussion of the 2014 Clery release:

Male Participant: “I feel like it almost paints some bad light on the girl.”
Researcher: “Do you think?”
Male Participant: “Like, it puts the stigma that people have, like, ‘Oh, she just
drunk and… (trails off)”

Female Participant: [inaudible]

Male Participant: “‘She woke up after that.’”

Female Participant: “It's, like, kinda the girl's fault.”

Male Participant: “Yeah.”

Researcher: “You think?”

Female Participant: “‘She's too drunk.’”

Male Participant: “That's, that's the stupid thing that we have in our society that
it's always the girl's fault but… (trails off)”

Researcher: “What about this release makes you think that people would think
that way?”

Female Participant: “Just ‘cause she can't remember anything, like… (trails off)”

Male Participant: “Yeah.”

Female Participant: “[inaudible] in their early warning hours. It's not even a
specific hour.”

As the participants made these comments, there was a dismayed air about the group
members. It was hard, even in a room of people who knew the way they thought of
sexual assaults was under observation, for a victim to escape intense scrutiny and
skepticism. The comment made by the male participant that, “that's the stupid thing that
we have in our society that it's always the girl's fault” shows how not only how a rape-
supportive culture will deny and justify sexual assaults, but also how, in the presence of
victim-blaming especially, sexual assaults can be used to uphold the oppression of
women (Escholz, Vieraitis, 2004; Chasteen, 2001; Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008). The participant was expressing how the denial and justification of sexual assault was normalized, perpetuated and minimalized (Chasteen, 2001). For example, it was generally understood by the group that it was the victim’s responsibility to not get assaulted and that if she was assaulted, then there was clearly something she did or did not do to provoke the attack. Various rape myths such as a failure to reduce risk, becoming drunk or going to a bar or party where there is a presumption of sexual assault created a system that allowed participants to justify the attack against the victim. To sum up:

Female participant 1: “Yeah, I think it has a bad effect on girls. Like, it puts us in a bad lime light, looking at the previous two examples, uhm...”
Interviewer: “Do you think?”
Female participant 1: “I mean [inaudible] we get drunk but that doesn't mean it's inviting guys into our pants, so...”
Female Participant 2: “Yeah, exactly.”
Male Participant: “Yeah. “
Female Participant 2: “And the fact that doesn't even have [inaudible] that much. It's almost like they're saying like, ‘Oh this girl's or this stupid one's...’ That guys can be jerks can be fine but girls are always getting into trouble and...”

**Miscommunication of sexual cues.** Participants applied a pre-existing context of sexual implication on college campuses to the events described in the Clery releases, one that other researchers have already observed (Cowley, 2014; Argiero, et. all, 2010; Deming, Covan, Swan, Billings, 2013). The participants often agreed on unspecified
rules of interaction between men and women that very much imitated gender dynamics of men as the sexual aggressors and women as the sexual gatekeepers, which a tenant of rape-supportive culture under radical feminism (Chasteen, 2001; Escholz, Vieraitis, 2004; Johnson, 2005). These assumptions of expectations often paved the way for victim-blaming rape myths to be used in the construction of a narrative of the assaults in the Clery releases, which served to uphold a culture-wide suppression of women by enforcing female sexual passivism and male sexual aggression (Chasteen, 2001; Johnston, 2005). For example, there was an understood dynamic that men would be sexually preying on women in bars and at parties and that women, as prey, were responsible for indicating their level of interest in men. Perhaps a better way to say it is that women, as prey, were responsible for actively, physically and forcibly expressing their discontent for sexual activity with a man. Lacking that level of expressing discomfort, women were assumed to be OK with the sexual activity men were pursuing. That was often how the victims in the Clery release were blamed for the assault; they miscommunicated or failed to actively communicate their disinterest in sexual activity with the perpetrator. In other words, in the absence of active resistance and the presence of factors such as partying, drinking or engaging with the perpetrator in any way, they were viewed as projecting sexual availability and sexual invitations to the predator (Cowley, 2014; Argiero, et. all, 2010; Deming, Covar, Swan, Billings, 2013).

If the Clery release implied or stated that the victim and perpetrator had interacted or met leading up to the assault occurring, participants used rape myths of sexual availability, sexual invitation or lack of resistance to justify the assault. In order for the victim to be totally blameless and credible to the participants, the assault had to occur
completely by chance and conducted by a perpetrator who was unknown to her, again
imitating the “perfect victim” (Weis, Burges, 1973). For example, a female participant
thought that by including the phrase “she had met” in the 2015 Clery release, which
showed that the victim and perpetrator met at some point when she was in common
drinking district of the town, it made it seem like the event as described in the release was
not, in fact, an unprovoked assault. The presence of alcohol and a party is shown to
amplify a perception of a woman’s sexual availability (Cowley, 2014).

Further, the participants used the fact that the victim somehow became involved
with the perpetrator for the first time that event as an indicator of her sexual availability.
Her assumed willingness, therefore, to participate in casual sex made her less credible to
the participants (Maxwell, Scott, 2013). A participant said: “She— like, she might have
consented to it. Or, like, it made it seem like she consented to it.” In this case, it made the
participant mistrust the victim’s version of her actions and place a seed of blame in the
participant’s construction of the event. Another participant said that by leaving out the
phrase “she had met” put the victim in a “better” light and made “(the victim) seem more
innocent in the whole manner.” By including the single detail that the victim “had met”
the perpetrator in the downtown area that evening, the version of events in the Clery
release triggered a very different view about the assault. That detail made participants
place blame on the victim that wouldn’t have otherwise been there and lessened the
victim’s credibility by portraying her as sexually loose, which can be used as a rape myth
to justify an assault against a woman (Maxwell, Scott 2013).

Furthermore, using the same Clery release, participants were concerned with the
point in the night when she met the perpetrator. To them, it made a difference in the
narrative of the event if the victim and perpetrator had interacted at the beginning or the end of the night.

Female Participant 1: “Well, like, is it the first time she had met him? Like, did she choose to leave with him if she had met him? Like, it just – It just kinda– you don’t know what that means.”

Female Participant 2: “Yeah. Like, did they meet at beginning, like, did they meet, like, when she walked out the door? He was like, ‘Hey,’ and then they left?”

The participants placed different ideas of the victim’s sexual availability and cues depending on what time in the night the two first interacted and for how long they interacted. In this case, the participants projected that the woman was so sexually available that they perpetrator need only offer her a symbolic “Hey” for her to leave to engage in sexual activity with him. This is important because the participants used the rape myth of the victim’s perceived projected sexual availability to frame the validity of the woman’s victimhood (Maxwell, Scott, 2013). For example, another female group member said taking out the phrase “she had met,” would make the perpetrator seem like less of a “random stranger” the victim had sent sexual invitations to. She said that if he didn’t seem like such a random stranger the victim interacted with, “it would take away some of the victim blame.” Another participant expressed similar thoughts. She said that if the victim and the perpetrator had met earlier in the night: “Well, that doesn’t make it OK, but it also-- it seems like it doesn’t seem that random if they were already, like, talking to each other.” The participant conceded that she would assign less blame to the
victim if she had been attacked by a completely unknown person, thus showing the prevalence of the return to the default of a “perfect” victim (Weis, Burges, 1973).

To demonstrate how much stress participants put on whether the victim “left with” the perpetrator or not, here are two examples from two different releases that address the sexual availability and even extension of an invitation that was implied when a victim left a party or bar environment with a perpetrator. In these discussions, the participants discuss the significance of that implied sexual invitation on how people view the validity of the victim’s experience with the assault.

Of the 2015 release:

Leader: “OK. Let’s look about— Let’s look at the last one (the 2015 Clery release) then. So if you guys knew this person — like, you know, her identity came out — do you think it would change the way people think about her?”

Female Participant 3: “Yeah, low key, because she just met him.”

Female Participant 1: “Which one is this?”

Female Participant 3: “The downtown one.”

Leader: “The 2015.”

Female Participant 2: “She, like, left with him, right?”

Female Participant 3: “I feel like people are just gonna say, ‘Why’d she leave with someone she didn’t know?’”

Leader: “Mm-hmm.”

Female Participant 1: “I feel like it happens a lot, like, realistically. Girls meet guys, vice versa, and, like, things happen. So, like, almost, like, I don’t know. I feel like—“
Jackson: “There’s still a stigma.”

Female Participant 2: “Yeah.”

Jackson: “With the girl.”

Female Participant 1: “Oh yeah.”

Of the 2013 release:

Female participant 1: “Yeah. I think that people, um... get the idea if you, like, leave with someone, that's your fault for trusting them, or you shouldn't have done that, which isn't really fair because you shouldn't have to worry about that stuff, you know?”

Leader: “Do you see that type of thinking on campus?”

Female participant 1: “Yeah.”

Female participant 2: “Yeah.”

It becomes clear through these interactions that the participants placed a lot of meaning on whether a victim would leave with a perpetrator. To them, it was an influencing factor of the assault. When it comes to the participants interpreting the victim’s actions to imply a sexual invitation to the perpetrator, the assault became somewhat of a given in the minds of the participants, showing the mechanism of the rape myth of implied sexual invitation negating the need for consent (Maxwell, Scott, 2013). If a woman choses to leave a party with a potential sexual partner, she is not seen as much as a victim than if a woman was attacked by a stranger. Participants picked up on cues from the Clery release that the victim had previously engaged with the perpetrator in a seemingly party-like atmosphere or bar environment to support a conclusion that she had sexual intentions with the perpetrator — or at least gave him the idea that she had sexual intentions with
him (Cowley, 2014). A male participant pointed out how easy it is for a female’s victims to be misinterpreted as a sexual invitation when talking about the victim of the 2015 release. He said:

Male participant: “Exactly. Well, yeah, I-- I think it's more of a misunderstanding—well, not misunderstanding, it's like the female believes that she's having this guy walk her home, and he believes he's going home with this girl and sleeping with her.”

The way this line of thinking can affect the way people create narratives that use rape myths to justify or deny a sexual assault is that the victim becomes more responsible for an assault if she was perceived to have indicated in any way that she wanted something sexual to take place with the perpetrator — or with anyone, for that matter. For example, a female participant said of the victim as described in the 2015 release that “you could definitely see there being an assumption that she had intentions at some point of going home with this guy or something that’s flirtatious there, to that extent.” In this case, without any indication from the Clery release that the victim had flirted with or specifically indicated her sexual intentions to the perpetrator, the participants applied a sexual intention to her behavior (Maxwell, Scott, 2013).

As the male participant identified previously, perpetrators and others will attribute value to the victim’s actions if they can be perceived as a sexual invitation, and some of those actions can be as simple as walking home with a man. A woman inviting a man up for a cup of tea (Burt, 1980) — or walking home with him from a bar, as it were — is cause for people to dismiss the assault as something she had no control over. This greatly lessens the random unfairness of the assault because it implies, of course, that she “led
him on” and that men cannot control their response to a woman’s perceived sexuality nor should they be expected to (Cowley, 2014; Chasteen, 2011; Johnson, 2005). Not only does this justify the assault against the victim, but it also excuses the perpetrator’s actions as being something he could have been expected to conduct. The implications of this rape myth being used in the construction of sexual assault incidents is significant because it not only takes away autonomy of women from the decision to engage in sexual behavior, but it also implies that only women who are attacked by strangers are true victims of sexual assault. It also reinforces a rape-supportive culture that sets up women as perpetual prey for the sexual attacks of men (Johnson, 2005).

Participants also viewed drinking as a huge indicator of the victim’s sexual availability. Drinking and engaging in regrettable sexual activity often went hand-in-hand for the participants. Another study found a similar link between drinking and increased perception of sexuality among young people (Cowley, 2014). During the focus groups, the participants used alcohol to blur the links of consent, unwanted sexual activity and increased sexuality while drinking. Thus, “intoxication serves to excuse the aggressor while increasing blame to the victim” (Leigh and Aramburu, 1994). One female participant, for example, described her confusion about drinking and consent:

“They are, like, drunk or drinking and the girl consents, like, she's like, ‘Yes, of course I wanna do it.’ Like, because, like, let's be honest, like, a lot of times stuff like that happens when you're kinda buzzed or, like, you know, like, you've been drinking, so it's like, is a guy supposed to say, like, no matter what, like, even if she just had, like, a couple of drinks, like, ‘No, I can't do it with you because
you're-- This isn't, like, real consent because you've been drinking.’ It's just, like, a very, like, gray area.”

What is important to point out beyond this very legitimate confusion many college students have about consent (Deming, Covan, Swan and Bilings, 2013) is the connection between drinking and sexual availability (Cowley, 2014). The participant outlined this when she said, “Let’s be honest, like, a lot of times stuff, like, that happens when you’re kinda buzzed or, like, you know, like, you’ve been drinking.” This participant is echoing what Crowley (2014) found: an assumption that victims who were drinking were displaying exaggerated sexual availability. In another study that looked at how police officers perceive victims who had been drinking, the officers were much more likely to believe that the victim had willingly engaged in the sexual activity or, at least, led the perpetrator to believe she was willing (Schuller and Steward (2000).

It is vitally important to recognize the connection the participants drew between the victim drinking and the victim becoming sexually more available or even sexually more aggressive toward the perpetrator. Again, in this analysis of the effects that rape myths have on the way people perceive sexual assault to have occurred, the truth of whether she is drinking is inconsequential. What matters is if people assume that a victim drinking indicates she is more sexually available because that serves to justify the attack occurring against her. Several participants picked up on how the context of rape myths in sexual assault is unfair to the victim:

Female Participant 1: “Yeah, I think (Clery releases have) a bad effect on girls. Like it puts us in a bad lime light, looking at the previous two examples, uhm... [trails off]”
Leader: “Do you think?”

Female Participant 1: “I mean, yeah, maybe we get drunk, but that doesn't mean it's inviting guys into our pants, so…”

Female Participant 2: “Yeah, exactly.”

Male Participant: “Yeah.”

Female Participant 2: “And the fact that doesn't even have [inaudible] that much. It's almost like they're saying like ‘Oh this girl's or this one’s stupid…’ That guys being jerks can be fine but girls are always getting into trouble and... [trails off]”

Another participant showed the same contrasting view than what the group thought most people would think from the Clery release. The participant was conceding that being viewed as a drunk victim was something that people viewed as wrong or a bad decision. She said:

“It's still not right at all. Just because-- even if she was really drunk, even if he was really drunk, and they were both at a bar and she-- Even if she was like, ‘Yeah, come home with me.’ That doesn't, she didn't deserve it.”

Here, the participant is able to identify a difference between the victim being drunk and being open to sexual activity. Still, the idea the participant identified of “Yeah, come home with me,” is a significant to the context of college sexual assault. Participants were familiar with the idea that if someone goes home with someone else after drinking, there is an implied association of sexual activity, despite the true intentions or comfort level of the people involved (Cowley, 2014). The rape myth of sexual availability and invitation (Maxwell, Scott, 2013) was strongly woven into the narratives the participants constructed of the events described in the Clery releases. It not only polices women’s’
sexuality by taking away autonomy of women from the decision to engage in sexual behavior (Chasteen, 2001), but it also implies that only sober women who are attacked by strangers are true victims of sexual assault (Weis, Burges, 1973). Therefore, the implications of this rape myth being applied to victims in what is intended to be an objective document such as a Clery release made the participants associate ideas of victim blaming that lessened the severity of the assault (Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994).

Another important factor in the context of how participants viewed the incidents described in the Clery releases was whether the victim physically or verbally struggled with the perpetrator in an abrasive manner. Participant discussion often engaged the rape myth that if the victim didn’t struggle enough or signal her discomfort strongly enough to bystanders, then she was probably willingly engaging with the perpetrator at the time of the assault. This mirrors an established rape myth wherein victims who were sexually assaulted with the threat of a weapon or immediate physical danger are seen as more credible than victims who might not have been threatened and controlled in such a way by the perpetrator (Bachman, 1998; Chen & Ullman, 2010; Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003; Starzynski, Ullman, Townsend, Long, & Long, 2007; Weis, Borges, 1973; Venema, 2014; Williams, 1984). Participants would not only apply a wide interpretation of the victim’s sexual cues, but they also suggested that the perpetrator would have had reasonable, anecdotal justification to believe the victim was consenting, despite the victim reporting the incident as an assault or an absence of consent. A participant described this line of thinking of the victim’s willingness to go along with the perpetrator as:
“People could have seen that she must have, like, willingly gone into that situation. And then anytime you have somebody willingly do anything, then it’s always gonna bring up the thought that some person in society that, ‘Oh, if she willingly put herself in that situation, maybe she shouldn’t have gone up there in the first place.’ That’s victim blaming, that’s exactly what it is.”

Inclusion of details of the victim’s struggle, or lack thereof, was very important to the participant’s interpretation of the events described in the Clery releases. At one point during a discussion of the 2015 Clery release, the researcher asked the participants to imagine that one phrase was removed from the release — the phrase that said “the female victim stated that she had struggled with the suspect.” The following conversation shows how much the image of the victim actively, physically struggling changed the way the participants viewed the assault occurring:

Researcher: “If--- If we had taken out the phrase... Like, the half of the sentence here that says how-- that, ‘The female victim stated that she had struggled with the suspect and he ran from the scene.’ And instead it just read, um, ‘They walked to the area of the University Hall where the rape occurred. Um, he ran from the scene.’ Does that change how you think of what happened? Or maybe, does that change how you think of the victim even?”

Female participant 1: “Can you read this? Like---“

Researcher: “Yeah. The new one again? Yes, sure. So, ‘They walked to the area of University Hall where the rape occurred. He ran from the scene.’

Female participant 1: “See, yeah, that sounds more like---“

Female participant 2: “Yeah.”
Female participant 1: “...like--- She--- Like, she might have consented to it. Or like, made it seem like she consented to it.”

Female participant 3: “Or going to---

Researcher: “Right.”

Female participant 3: “...happened and then he like left after? Maybe---“

Researcher: “Mm-hmm.”

Female participant 3: “Maybe then he can say, like, ‘She was not struggling,’ like…”

Various: “Mm-hmm.”

Various: “Yeah.”

Female participant 3: “I don't know. ‘She didn't try to stop it.’”

Various: “Yeah.”

Various: “Yes.”

Female participant 2: “I mean, for sure, like, she's more like, I don't know, drunk or, like, drugged up or something. Like, she doesn't have as much control of herself or something.”

After hearing a version that took out the detail that the victim “struggled with” the perpetrator, participant completely rearranged the narrative in their minds. Suddenly, in the lack of a struggle, the victim’s credibility plummeted because participants no longer trusted that she didn’t give consent. To clarify, the truth that the victim did or did not struggle during assault had no bearing on how much credibility the participants gave the victim; what changed was whether or not the Clery release said she struggled. If that one fact can alter the way participant believe an assault happened, it shows how much the
very language of the Clery release and the details included can transform a victim’s experience into someone else’s version of her story. Another participant put it clearly when she explained what the detail of her resisting meant to her understanding of the assault: “So that it doesn’t … leave that open and (to) be like ‘why did she do that?’ She just tells you straight up. Like, ‘Oh, OK. Well she resisted. That obviously means that she said no.’” By including the victim’s attempts to resist the assault, it changes the context for victims who do not struggle, a reaction to sexual assault that is often a valid way of protecting oneself or those around them from further trauma. If participants receive reports that sometimes include a detail if she struggled or not, then the reports that do not include that detail will create more opportunity for victim blaming.

**Victim-created foundations for disbelief.** As previously stated, participants used a pre-conceived notion of a blameless victim as a foil for the victim in each Clery release (Weis, Burges, 1973). When the victims in the Clery releases were described to actively deviate from that image — or to conspicuously not engage in action she was expected to — participants often used that as a reason to distrust the victim’s experience or minimize the assault against her. Of course, participants wanted the victim to demonstrate that she was sober, walking home from work or the library and was randomly selected by a strange passerby, whom she actively struggled with during the assault (Weis, Burges, 1973; Maxwell, Scott, 2013; Cowley, 2014; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994). But the participants also found other actions and behaviors the victims did or did not do that would cause them to view her as less credible. For example, participants found a lack of details included in the report or attributed to the victim’s recollection suspicious. They also assumed that there was a benefit to women for lying or
exaggerating about an assault and that this was behavior that women often exhibited (Maxwell, Scott, 2013). But the participants also wanted the victim’s reaction to the assault to be demonstrated in a way that made sense to what they would expect or want her to feel or act.

It was important to the participants for the victim to remember copious specific details because they assumed she wanted to help herself and help the police apprehend the perpetrator. This was something they assumed all victims would actively want to do if they had indeed suffered an assault. If the Clery release led the participants to think the victim had done the opposite of providing reliable details, the participants would think that the assault either didn’t happen in the way she was retelling it or that she was lying about it occurring. In reality, it is a perfectly valid and sometimes strategic bodily response to fear and trauma for victims of sexual assault to not only distance themselves from the assault occurring to their bodies, but to also dissociate from their awareness altogether. This might lead victims to not remember details about their attacker or the attack themselves. But the participants instead assumed that a lack of memory or lack of ability to express the details and facts of the attack indicated that the victim was lying and unreliable.

Female Participant 1: “It just seems like she wasn’t all there, doesn’t know exactly whatever is happening in the [inaudible].”

Female Participant 2: “Not very reliable.”

In perhaps the most telling and disturbing instance, a female participant wondered aloud if the victim of the 2014 Clery release had “dreamed” the assault had happened because of how few details were present in the report. The participants displayed the same line of
thinking that many police officers employ when weighing the credibility of a victim who had been drinking. According to Schuller and Stewart (2000), sexual assault claims are viewed as much less severe by officers if the victim had been drinking; the participants mirrored this mechanism.

In another instance talking about the same release, a participant stated that she needed to personally justify the victim’s lack of memory.

Female participant 1: “Yeah. But I… I agree, but I definitely think it's like, If-- If you were just going off of, like, should we believe this girl just because of this (the Clery release), then it's, like, a bit more ambiguous. But it's, like, when I read this, I feel like, OK, yeah, let's talk to her. Like, I wanna know why you didn't know which res (resident) hall you were in.”

Researcher: “Yeah.”

Female participant 1: “Were you visiting or, like, were you really drunk? Like, not that that-- Not that we think they shouldn't make a case... Or they shouldn't look at it at all, but it is kinda like, well, like it does make it harder for us to know for sure if you even did anything at all. You might have just been like, just woke up this morning and had your clothes off or something and you could've done that.”

Researcher: “Uh-hmm.”

Female participant 1: “You could’ve just, you know what I mean, like, you never know.”

Female participant 2: “And then maybe, like, let's say if... Let's say a rape didn't happen, maybe she got so blacked out, like... and what she might have found
herself... I don't know, just unclothed or anything in a hall? Maybe she might have, um, the last person she can remember is this male.”

Researcher: “Mm-hmm.”

Female participant 1:”That could be it.”

Female participant 2: “But she just assumed that she was raped since she was somewhere she didn't know.”

Researcher: “Mm-hmm.”

Female participant 1: “She could've had her clothes off or something then she just assumed or I don't... because it just seems, like, really hard to, like, just say, just based off of this.”

Female participant 2: “Yeah.”

This shows the clear connection in the participant’s mind of how many details were attributed to something the victim was able to provide police for the Clery release to how likely it was that she was telling the truth about the assault or whether an assault even occurred in the first place. The doubt that participants applied to the victim’s account based on cues from the Clery release made them take her much less seriously. In many cases, if the Clery release clearly stated that the victim was able to give one detail but was unable to give others, the participants would blame the victim for not remembering more about the assault. They assumed that if she could remember some things, she should be able to remember more, and if she couldn’t tell those details to the police, her credibility was viewed as tarnished. For example, one participant said of the victim of the 2014 Clery release: “Well, she’s able to remember that she was at a residence hall, so she could put a little bit more into that report. Then possibly she won’t look like the crazy drunk
person.” To the participants, not being able to remember details made the victim both mentally unstable and irresponsibly drunk to the point that the assault against her seemed like less of a surety. As such, the participants often expressed frustration as the lack of details provided by the victim in the 2015 Clery release.

Female Participant 1: “Oh no, I wasn’t blaming the woman. I just said, like, the general public, like, it doesn’t paint a-- It doesn’t paint a good a picture. I think as a friend, it would be like, ‘Really, that’s all you have to say?’”

In a discussion of the 2014 Clery release, participants expressed a frustrated, dismissive view:

Female participant 1: “There's like so much vagueness that...”

Female participant 2: (crosstalks) “Right.”

Female participant 1: “… You don't... Like, people—It-- Like, gives people the initiative to be like, ‘She don't know what she's talking about.’ Like... (trails off).”

In a contrasting example, participants drew a line between the victim’s ability to remember the assault and being responsible for provoking the assault. This discussion came after the participants were asked to place themselves in the victim’s position and, knowing this very release would come out about them, decide if they would report the assault.

Female Participant 1: “I think about, like-- But I think it will be, like, from now on, people are gonna think of me different and all that stuff that comes along with it.”
Female Participant 3: “Especially, like, the story with the girl she doesn’t remember anything (the 2014 Clery release). Just ‘cause she doesn’t remember stuff, doesn’t mean it’s justifiable for his actions so…”

Participants had to distinguish between the victim’s memory of the assault and her responsibility for it occurring. However, the participants identified that her lack of memory would be reason for people to not believe her.

Sometimes, the participants were more sympathetic to the victim’s inability to remember details. Two female participants discussed reasons why the victim might not remember or provide details for the police report because they don’t want to admit to themselves that the assault occurred:

Female participant 1: “(What) we hear is like, ‘She was really drunk.’ There were lot of stories of girls like saying, ‘I got really drunk I did this and that.’ But, like, I believe what they’re saying, (that) they don’t remember any of it. But, like, it’s hard to tell because if they're telling the truth that they don't actually remember or if it’s like they don’t want to admit to themselves the situation. Like, I usually hear-- I feel like girls talk about that kind of stuff a lot.”

Female Participant 2: “I feel like they are almost, like, just say, ‘Shoot. I cannot remember.’ Even though something could’ve happened they weren’t-- I mean it could be an assault but they don’t want to admit it.”

In this case, we see the conflicting notions that a victim would cover up details of the assault to protect herself. Even though the participants were expressing a desire to trust the victim, they felt that the lack of details in the report forced them to be more critical of the account. Although this way of thinking is sympathetic to the victim, it still shows that
a lack of details made the participants value the release’s description of the events as less credible than if more details had been present.

Another way participants applied meaning to the victim’s actions to create disbelief in her story was by assuming she had more benefits to lie or exaggerate about the assault than to tell what could be believed as the truth. Participants often weighed the perceived benefits for the victim to lie about the assault (Maxwell, Scott, 2013). In order to fit in with the narrative the participants wanted to form where rapists are “other” (Weis, Burges, 1973) and that participants are in control of sexual assault happening to themselves or their friends (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994, many participants came up with reasons to doubt the victim’s story and gave her motives to not be truthful. One female participant said, “What is the truth? Like she could just be saying, like, she might not have wanted to admit that she, like, was walking home with him or something, like, it could be a lot of different things.” In another discussion, participants pontificated on how many people had been falsely but successfully convicted of rape:

Female participant 1: “It just like makes me wonder how many like innocent guys are like in jail or aren’t a pervert...”

Female participant 2: “I think you’d be surprised.”

Female participant 1: “You're right. ... Like, how many of them, like, actually did it and, like, how many of them, like, they don't know what happened. Or, like, in both ha--- Like they both didn't know what happened, she was just like, "Oh my God. Like-- They--- They're gonna think--' Like, because there’s girls that are
like, ‘Oh my goodness, I had sex with this guy. I don't want anybody to know that, like, I did it.’”

This discussion shows how readily the participants didn’t believe the victim — to the extent of thinking that hoards of men were locked away in prisons for rapes they did not commit.

Beyond straight out lying, another one of the ways that participants attributed a loss of credibility to the victim was if she didn’t react to the assault in a way the participants thought would be appropriate. This included both her emotional reaction, her ability to remember details and her willingness to engage with the legal system. One participant reference a Clery release that was not presented to the focus groups for discussion that stated that the victim decided to not receive rape kit testing:

Female participant: “And then it’s like-- I remember one girl reported she was raped but then she refused a rape kit. It’s like, it doesn’t-- whatever, though.”

Researcher: “What does that make you think about what happened?”

Female participant: “I mean, I would say she was scared and she didn’t want to confront it and make it real. But other people might say that she just wanted a story. It just depends on how you look at it.”

In this case, a victim who refused a rape kit could reasonably assumed to have made up the assault. In other words, if the victim didn’t have the proper reaction and didn’t follow the procedure the participants thought would be correct, the assault’s very occurrence was effectively denied. This rape myth is established in existing literature, as a victim who delays reporting is also shown to be viewed as less credible by police detectives (Jordan, 2004). A participant summed up how this rape myth can be used to affirm rape-
supportive culture on college campuses clearly when she said: “But at the same time, I think that as bad is it, it gives it credibility if you press charges.” Again, this goes to show how the seemingly extraneous details in Clery releases can be used to create a narrative and build meaning out of the events. In another discussion about the 2014 Clery release, a female participant said that she would be more skeptical of a victim who decided not to press charges:

“Yeah, just, like, the feeling of like, ‘Did it really happen?’ Even though how horrible is that, but it’s like, ‘Why wouldn’t you?’ But I mean, not everyone is like that. So there is people that don’t want to press charges because they just want to leave the past and move on. But at the same time, I think that as bad is it, it gives it credibility if you press charges.”

Here, the participant clearly draws assumptions about the facts of the event as described in the Clery release based on whether or not the victim would want to press charges. This shaped the way the participants viewed the assault, even though it arguably did little to contribute to what information the public would need to protect their campus from a similar assault occurring.

**Further Analysis**

Participants often drew a strong delineation between those who engage in victim-blaming thoughts and those who do not, placing themselves solidly in the camp of those who do not victim blame. It was clear that many participants were aware of the destructive effects of victim blaming, but it was equally clear that they did not understand how those rape myths were functioning in their own complicated construction of sexual assault and how those rape myths can maintain a rape-supportive culture (Hocket, et al.,
2009). In other words, they could identify rape myths as something “others” would think but still regularly expressed victim-blaming sentiments and utilized them in their construction of what happened and their assessment of the victim’s credibility. This touches on a key component of a rape-supportive culture wherein people (men) in the mainstream of culture must uphold the rape myths and other systems of oppressing women (Chasteen, 2001). Although the participants expressed a belief that people outside of the mainstream or outside of their social circles would be the ones who endorse victim-blaming, the participants clearly demonstrated a reliance on rape myths to interpret and create meaning of the sexual assaults in the Clery releases (Chasteen, 2001).

For example, one participant stressed, “I never blame the victim,” despite engaging with the group to decide if the victim adequately employed risk-reducing techniques. In one particular instance, participants were discussing if people would think the victim was “asking for it.” The group agreed that there would be students on campus who thought that way but were able to distinguish those people as “douche bags” and separate from those in the room. Several times, participants would agree that, yes, people on campus would blame the victim for being drunk, going home with the perpetrator or displaying otherwise misleading cues but would clarify that it wasn’t those in the room who thought so. Despite this reassurance, the participants uniformly engaged those very rape myths in their construction of events as depicted in Clery releases. This shows how rape myths are engrained in the way that society reinforces the oppression of women and sexual assault victims (Hocket, et al., 2009). The participants, though falsely denying endorsing rape myths themselves, still identified the presence of a rape-supportive culture on campus.
Participants demonstrated that they use the Clery releases as symbols of meaning in the context of the way they view sexual assault on their campus. The assaults described in the Clery releases were often benchmarks of campus culture and shared knowledge for the participants. One male participant, for example, said he remembered receiving the 2014 Clery release because “it was so big.” He meant that so many people were talking about it and for so long that it became associated with campus culture. Another participant, who was a transfer student, said she hadn’t received a Clery release from MUPD yet, but she knew about them because her partner went to MU and would always tell her about them. “Veteran” Clery release recipients — upperclassmen in the focus groups — often would instruct the freshmen of the group about what it was like to receive several of them in a close timeframe. The upperclassmen discussed common points of knowledge associated with the Clery release and even had short-hand for notable past incidents that weren’t the three Clery releases used in the focus groups: “the Bear Hugger,” “the streaker,” and “the one with the red Mustang.” One junior participant said the amount of Clery releases she received during the last school year contributed to her feeling unsafe on campus. She said she has since adjusted her behavior in an effort to protect herself from the fate of the many victims she read about.

More than just provoking the assault, the victim was seen by participants as responsible for any resulting circumstances, even if that meant police involvement or prosecuting the crime against the perpetrator. Here, a participant explains how she would advise her friends about reporting sexual assaults:

Female: “At least for me, I think about it-- I always try to think about it, like-- not, like, you should side with the rapist ever, but it just like, ‘Okay, you have to be
positive that this is what you know to be true because if not, you’re gonna ruin someone’s life over something you’re not--.’ You know what I mean? Like, if you don’t really know. Which might sound bad but it’s just like you have to think it about it that way. I think.”

Here, the participant puts the burden of truth not only on the victim to prove she had been raped and certain of the details of the assault, but she also puts the burden of the justice system process on the victim, as well.
Discussion

Clery releases are, by nature, stories that are built with the barest-bones of details. Because of the necessary objectivity and time requirements for distribution, there is not much ability for ample facts and scene-setting. As the participants demonstrated, with that lack of details, people will fill in the gaps of the story with narrative constructions they are familiar with as they process what is described to have happened. The participants leaned on rape myths to complete the story of the timely warnings. The rape mythes were learned through and engrained in the rape-supportive culture on college campuses (Carr, VanDeusen, 2004; Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008).

Clery releases certainly make an impact on the campus culture. Participants recognized how much influence Clery releases can have on people on campus; the releases are, after all, intended to be mass communicated to every student. One participant expressed how upset she would be if her friend had been the subject of the 2015 Clery release:

Female participant: “Yeah. I would be really sad. I would probably wanna cry, actually. Like… I don't know. And then I would probably might be a little mad about this Clery release because of how it's, like-- how it's written. I would probably be a little mad about that and stuff.”

Researcher: “What do you mean?”

Female participant: “I don't-- Because, like, like, I said when you read it and stuff, like, all-- Like, when I would read it, and if I know that was my friend, and I have
all these, like, negative things that came to my mind, like, what we were talking about. And maybe, umm, that might not be the case and stuff, and she's told me what happened, I would be kinda mad about that. Like, you know, people are thinking this way when it really didn't happen that way.”

Clery releases are significant to the student culture on campus. In this case, the participant was cognizant of this fact, and she knew that victims described in the Clery releases would be susceptible to the very scrutiny that she and the other focus group members had applied to the events described in the releases. Here, she shows that the way people interpret the Clery releases is powerful, emotional and influential. Clery releases not only carry facts and information, but they also carry meaning, values and emotional impacts on the context of the culture of the students who receive them. As much as the Clery releases exist as part of the campus’ context of sexual assault and safety, the way they are interpreted by their audience is significant.

The participants were sometimes aware of common rape myths and would mention them, such as the idea the victim don’t “ask for it.” When participants were able to identify these rape myths aloud as a common way of thinking about sexual assault, they would clearly indicate that it was wrong to think about the victim that way. However, the participants would then express the same thoughts that the rape myth was a label for. An example of this was when a participant said, “I never blame the victim,” despite going on to wonder why she didn’t call herself a cab to leave the bar so that she could avoid the assault. In this way, the narrative the participants constructed would often employ the mechanisms of rape myths that served to deny and justify the assault without the
participants explicitly stating the rape myth itself, showing how engrained the rape myths were in campus culture (Hockett, et al., 2009).

In their construction of the dynamics of the assault, participants constantly sought to determine how well the victims in the Clery releases aligned with their ideas of “perfect victims” who were blameless in the attacks against them (Weis and Borges, 1973). The ghost of a perfect rape victim is something feminists have been trying to dissolve for centuries (Whisnant, 2014), yet the young people who participated in this focus group still regularly used this idealized victim as a baseline comparison for real-life victims. The gray areas where the real-life victim differed from a “perfect victim” was where participants were able to place blame on the victim.

Victim-blaming rape myths serve a function for people who use them in the way they interpret sexual assault incidents (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994); rape myths are safety blankets. Victim-blaming allows people to believe that a woman who is sexually assaulted did something wrong, inciting the assault. This allows for bystanders to believe that it can’t just happen to any woman if she somehow deserved it (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994). Similarly, it allows for the belief that the perpetrators were doing something in response to the women, not of their own accord (Bohner, Siebler, Raaijmakers, 1999; Lonsway, Fitzgerald, 1994). Thus, participants often employed rape myths to minimize, deny and justify the threat of sexual assault to themselves and their loved ones.

But victim blame went even further than that for the participants. It became the victim’s fault for the police to have to conduct investigations and for courts to have to go through the process of convicting rapists. This shows how much pressure people put on
the victims for the assault itself and for any effects thereafter. The function of victim blaming, then, certainly does uphold the radical feminist idea that rape myths and victim blaming are a “means to intimidate women, and this intimidation and acceptance of rape myths may reinforce a social hierarchy in which men are dominant” (Hocket, et al., 2009). By engaging with rape myths that would deny, minimize or justify sexual assault, the participants were affirming the status quo of a rape-supportive, patriarchal culture (Maxwell, Scott, 2013).

Not only are the victims blamed for being sexually assaulted by the perpetrator, but discussions in the focus groups also included speculation about the large number of innocent men who were in jail for sexual assaults they did not commit. This distressingly ignores the reality of sexual assault convictions and sentences wherein 97 percent of rapists never spend a day in jail for their crimes, according to data from the Department of Justice. Sexual assault convictions are incredibly difficult to successfully prosecute, yet participants were more willing to believe that a large number of men had been falsely convicted of sexual assault because women were making it up than they were willing to believe that women were telling the truth about it to begin with. In fact, justice is so hard fought for victims that police officers and detectives themselves often overestimate the amount of victims who make false reports (Ask, 2010; Lonsway, Archambault, Lisak, 2009; C. Spohn et al., 2014). In cases of sexual assault, victims become a source of trouble and exertion for everyone involved, which shows how sexual assault can be used as a “method of patriarchal maintenance” (Escholz, Vieraitis, 2004). The victim is fighting an uphill battle against assumptions and implications that are engrained in the minds of everyone who reads the Clery release — just to be taken seriously.
The participants used the Clery releases to support and justify the ways they use rape myths to interpret events outside of the incidents in the reports. The Clery releases enforced rape myths and assumptions the participants might have about sexual assaults in general, which are upheld by a rape-supportive culture (Carr, VanDeusen, 2004; Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, Vandello, 2008). One participant said the Clery releases she read during the focus group session influenced the way she thought of the relationship between perpetrators and victims. She said: “I feel like when I read all these, we think they’re just random guys coming out to people taking advantage of girls, not raping, like, people you know, like, your friends, like, people you trust.” Instead, research has shown that the vast majority of sexual assaults are committed by people known to the victim (Dunn and Gilchrist, 1993). This is clearly a misunderstanding of the occurrence of rape that the Clery releases perpetuate — sometimes by nature of the requirements of the release, which are generally used when the perpetrator is unknown to the victim. Still, the Clery releases are widely read by students, and their influence on the way students interpret the landscape of sexual assault on their campus should not be minimized.

The overall discussion of the participants shows the symbiotic relationship Clery releases have with the campus culture of sexual assault (Hockett, et al., 2009). Students use existing ideas and assumptions such as victim-blaming rape myths to create meaning out of the events described in the Clery releases. But Clery releases also affirm and support victim blaming notions (Hockett, et al., 2009) as students find reasons to validate those ways of thinking about sexual assault occurrences on their campus from Clery releases. As such, Clery releases provide an opportunity to influence the way students think of sexual assault on their campus, and they can be used as a tool of communication.
and community knowledge to either sustain or challenge victim-blaming rape myths in the complicated construction of campus culture (Hockett, et al., 2009).

As Title IX and Clery Act policies become more refined and specific, research such as this project will become more important. In order to break away from the rape-supportive culture that necessitates these policies, it must be understood how the processes and effects of the policies contribute or detract from rape-supportive culture. The vague language and ambiguity of the Clery Act itself has already been determined to cause problems with compliance for many universities. That coupled with the accepted theories that sexist oppression will perpetuate in our society (Hockett, et al., 2009; Whisnant, 2013) shows how important research such as this study is. This research will be able to inform those who write or work with Clery releases what implications the language has. As researchers have already established, rape-supportive cultures and rape myths go hand-in-hand to fuel and uphold one another (Chapleau, Oswald, 2010; Hocket, et al., 2009; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, 1997). Further, it is evident through existing research that both university administration (Boswell, Spade, 1996; Franklin, 2010) and police officers (Venema, 2014 Campbell, Johnson, 1997; Feldman-Summers, Palmer, 1980; Jordan, 2001; Page, 2007; Page, 2008; Ullman, Townsend, 2007; Leigh, Aramburu, 1994) regularly engage with rape myths to create meaning and assign credibility to victims in cases of sexual assault. If the very police officers who are composing the Clery releases to be sent out as mass communications to students engage rape myths in their own interpretation of a sexual assault, then the information that is mass communicated will naturally be encoded with harmful rape myths.
Because Clery releases are designed to be sent to the entire student population, encoded rape myths have the potential to be spread, further engrained and reinforced in campus culture (Hockett, et al., 2009; Chapleau, Oswald, 2010). The impact of upheld and endorsed rape myths as seen in Clery releases is truly disheartening in many ways.

First, as Finch and Munro (2004) wrote, rape myth acceptance results in fewer conviction rates and less severe sentences in sexual assault cases. Therefore, if timely warnings are perpetuating rape myths and victim-blaming, then college campuses won’t become places that are conducive to effective, successful convictions of sexual assault.

Second, countless studies have shown that victims of sexual assault not only internalize rape myths to deny and justify sexual assault against themselves (Chen, Ullman, 2010; Koss, 1993; Koss, Bachar, Hopkins,, Carlson, 2004; Venema, 2014, Williams, 1984), but also anticipate how rape myths will be used to filter their stories in others’ minds. Therefore, victims will anticipate being dismissed, villainized, disbelieved, shamed or even hurt further, which will often lead them to make the decision to not report the assault or seek justice (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternice-Thames, Wasco,, Sefl, 2007; Chen, Ullman, 2010; Konradi, Burger, 2000; Patterson, Greeson,, Campbell, 2009; Rennison, 2002; Venema, 2014). If the Clery releases are meant, under The Clery Act, to encourage a clearer picture of crime on campus (Fisher, 2002; Carter, 2002; Janosik, 2001) and to discourage acts of crime to make campuses safer (Griffaton, 1993; Janosik, 2001), then the perpetuation of rape myths in Clery releases goes directly against that goal. If there are stricter guidelines in the law and campus policies that prevent such treatment, more victims might be inclined to report their assault so the crime data is more accurate and can help authorities address and eradicate instances of sexual assault. But,
perhaps more importantly, if more victims feel comfortable reporting their sexual assault, they will hopefully be able to get the help they need to overcome it instead of it remaining a silent burden on them and their families.

Third, according to radical feminist theory, an unchallenged patriarchal society fuels and is fueled by other systems of oppression, including racism, homophobia, ageism, classism and religious intolerance (Aosved, Long, 2006). Therefore, every person in society can reasonably feel the effects of perpetuated victim-blaming rape myths. The far-reaching influences of rape myths to deny and minimize the occurrence of trauma in a community that can interpreted in the Clery releases shows how sexual assault can function as a group-based oppression (Whisnant, 2013).

Therefore, this research must raise the question if timely warnings are beneficial or detrimental in the fight against sexual assaults on university and colleges campuses. This research has shown how institutional processes and reporting of sexual assaults contributes to rape-supportive culture instead of eradicating it (Boswell, Spade, 1996; Franklin, 2010). Timely warnings have been shown in this research to perpetuate systems that would oppress victims of sexual assault by engaging with preconceived notions of victim-blaming and upholding barriers to justice.

There seems to be a contradiction to the intent of the timely warnings and the reality of their impact on campus culture. The Clery Act was intended to help create safer environments on college campuses (Griffaton, 1993; Janosik, 2001). Along those lines, Clery Act language forces universities to use timely warnings (again, “Clery releases” at MU) as a tool that “will aid in the prevention of similar crimes” (Department of Education, 2011). But Clery releases cannot accomplish this if the information presented
will trigger culture-wide victim blaming. Even including risk-reduction techniques in Clery releases does more harm than good when it comes to perpetuating a victim-blaming, rape-supportive culture, as was shown by the participants’ discussions in this research. Instead, a public health approach is needed to eradicate sexual assault on college campuses where the widespread systems of oppression, including rape myths, is uprooted through social change (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) that challenge deeply engrained beliefs such as gender norms, sexual expectations and patriarchal control (Chasteen, 2010; Hockett, et al., 2009; Griffin, 1971).

Several rape myths used by participants spoke specifically to bystander-intervention based efforts that haven become the norm on college campuses such as Green Dot programs. Those rape myths included failure to reduce risk and failure to alert bystanders. In an era that focuses on increased intervention efforts on college campuses, the participants’ discussions show how intervention-based philosophies saturated into the culture of a campus can indeed deny and justify sexual assaults against victims. In order for a victim to be completely non-deserving of her victimhood, victims must be innocent of any perceived sins in the light of an attack against them. That way, there can be no reason for people to doubt or discredit them. If there is a factor that people can use to justify the attack, however, it allows people to be dismissive of the event. To show the effects of this, the participants’ sense of “stranger danger” grew with more discussion and Clery release examples. As a female participant said:

“We finished talking with this. It’s, like, it makes you realize a lot of things, like,

‘Whoa, I can’t be too alone at night,’ or, like, ‘Oh my gosh, I can’t let her do
that,’ or, like, just when you’re drinking, the people you talk to and leaving your drink first. I mean, I don’t personally do that it’s just, like, I’m aware of it, like--“

After reading and discussing the Clery releases, students walked away with a stronger sense of a need to protect themselves from sexual assault and a weaker sense of the possibility of ending sexual assault by helping people understand what respectful and healthy sexual dynamics should be. If MUPD and campus administration has a goal of ending sexual assault on campus, then officials should consider if a focus on risk-reduction techniques both in Clery releases and in communications to students is a realistic method for reducing assault. The messaging cannot be solely focused on the victim if the goal is to stop perpetuating rape culture. This was something the participants themselves brought up several times. In one group discussion of the risk-reducing “tips” included with the 2013 release:

Female participant 1: “And also these preventative tactics are always directed to women. It should be more like, ‘Men, don’t do this.’”

The participants expressed this contradiction of the culture surrounding them and recognized that, without a reconciliation of this, there could be no increased safety for the potential victims on campus. For example, in another discussion:

Female Participant 1: “And there’s no, like, I don’t know. I feel like it’s always kinda been an issue in a lot of places, like, rape is something that is, like, a [inaudible] you just have to be aware of it, but try to stay away from it. But it’s like, ‘You can’t stay away from rape, it just happens.’ I feel like more people should be, like, told like, ‘Don’t rape.’”

Female Participant 2: “Everything’s directed towards us like, ‘Don’t get raped.’”
Female Participant 1: “Yeah. Don’t drink ‘cause you’ll get raped.”

Female Participant 3: “Mm-hmm.”

Female Participant 1: “Yeah. It shouldn’t have to be that way.”

These discussions show how confusing the message is of sexual assault on their campus. The participants express here an idea of powerlessness when it comes eliminating sexual assault – one that directly echoes the inherent and necessary powerlessness of victims of rape and abuse.

It isn’t exactly fair, therefore, of the Department of Education to ask universities to attempt to tackle prevention of crimes — especially sexual assault — in timely warnings. In fact, the law itself prevents timely warnings from being an effective instrument to lower instances of crime because authorities rarely release a follow-up to the notifications of danger and crime. According to Michael Torney’s 2013 essay, existing punishments and consequences for crimes do not serve as deterrents if criminals feel there is a low risk to be caught for the crime. As timely warnings are sent out potentially several times throughout a semester to a college campus with no follow-up of the perpetrator being caught or no indication of authorities finding out more information on the perpetrator’s identity, the idea that a person can get away with sexual assault is reinforced again and again. Therefore, timely warnings serve no purpose in deterring this type of crime in the future.

But if universities want to show an effort in compliance with those policies of including prevention in timely warnings, they might be able to find a way to minimize the harm of rape myths found in timely warnings. Messaging to people in these cultural structures cannot only be focused on the ways potential victims can reduce their risk of
assault. Instead, a public health approach must be taken wherein social change can influence and eradicate a rape-supportive culture and replace it with one where consent, sexuality and health relationships are at its core. If risk-reduction techniques are included in the Clery releases, they must be also paired with education on how to prevent yourself and others from becoming perpetrators. The timely warnings could include information about the true prevalence of sexual assault on campus; how social systems can reinforce instances of sexual assault (Schwartz, DeKeseredy, 1997); techniques used by perpetrators to prey on victims, such as using alcohol as a weapon to impair and incapacitate; and a realistic, uncomplicated definition of affirmative consent. The onus cannot be on the victim to prevent rape; the onus must be on everyone to prevent themselves from raping. If the goals of radical feminism are to end imbalances that lead to situations where populations and individuals are, by nature, vulnerable to other groups and individuals, then a simple focus on “not getting raped” is not enough to protect those who are vulnerable. On college campuses where the timely warnings are distributed, this imbalance of power between those who are often victims and those who are perpetrators will come through in the mass-communicated timely warnings and continue to justify and uphold the culture that allows those very assaults.

Feminist efforts to change the status quo of a world in which women are victimized and men are justified in doing so have been ongoing with much attention for several decades. More and more recently, these efforts are taking hold, and instances of sexual assault are being focused on in the media, protested and analyzed. Of course, all of this is still done under the influence of rape myths, as was shown in the research, but the momentum of change has been amping up. Studies such as this one can help shed light on
the problem and prevalence of rape-supportive culture so that progress can grow even more.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to every qualitative research project based on the narrow scope. Some of the limitations of this research were that the findings were contingent on which participants were in each group, how comfortable they felt sharing and the natural progress of the discussion. Therefore, the focus group discussions should only be taken as direct evidence of what was said in the groups, with extrapolation and inference needed to broaden the implications to the rest of the campus environment. In addition, more than half of the participants in the focus groups were freshman who had little to no experience with Clery releases due to the lack of releases during the applicable school year. The freshman participants were still able to provide the gut reactions, assumptions and narratives the researcher was exploring, but the discussion was not able to extensively cover previous interactions and conversations around Clery releases as robustly as hoped.

**Future research**

This research gives rise to further areas of study. Some of those areas include the other types of rape myths that were associated with the Clery releases that were not victim-blaming. Specifically, the researcher was able to pull out rape myths associated with perpetrator excusing, which were outlined in Table 1. Some of the rape myths include that participants viewed the perpetrator as “other” or mentally ill, that the perpetrator was drunk and making impaired decisions and that the perpetrator shouldn’t be held responsible for his misunderstanding of consent and the victim’s projection of her consent. And, by nature of the Clery releases that focus on instances where the
perpetrator is unknown to the victim, there was a perpetuated rape myth that rapes occur from a stranger in the bushes. More research is needed to identify how perpetrator-excusing rape myths are interpreted from Clery releases and the broader implications of those rape myths on campus culture.

There is another important aspect of Clery releases — and sexual assaults in general — that was not explored in this study, and that is one of race. The implications of racial coding that was present in the Clery releases deserves further study, especially considering the reinforcement of perpetrators as “dark-skinned” or “mixed-race” males. This area of study was regrettably beyond the scope of the research questions that focused on victim-blaming, but the cultural consequences of endorsing men of color as perpetrators of sexual assault merits many more studies.

Another potential study includes applying a gatekeeping lens on the Clery releases and those who write them. It would be worthwhile to interview those at MUPD who write the Clery releases to find out what instruction or training they had received to writer the Clery releases, their knowledge of rape culture and rape myths and their awareness of how the audience interprets the Clery releases. The results of that qualitative study could help inform more detailed policy for Clery Act timely warnings.

Along those lines, another future study that could be conducted is piloting stricter policy rules for writing timely warnings. A sample group such as the one in this study could be presented with alternative ways of composing timely warnings to best determine which limited the amount of rape myths or other negative connotations based on the language and information available.
Of course, a major area of study includes exploring the differentiation between intervention and prevention messaging on campus in relation to the Clery releases. MU is a Green Dot campus, so it would be important to know how that changes or informs the way students interpret Clery releases. In particular, future research might focus on risk-reduction and bystander intervention messaging on campus and how those inform participants’ acceptance of rape myths that justify the assault because of actions of the victim. This could be accomplished by comparing responses to stories of sexual assault similar to those in the Clery releases at Green Dot and non-Green Dot campuses. A future qualitative study could also address how much timely warnings either encourage or discourage college students from potentially reporting cases of sexual assault. That study could also be conducted as a focus group among college-aged women.

Another study that could be of practical interest to campus and legislative policy makers could be to explore how information, training and education changes the way students interpret sexual assault accounts such as those in the Clery releases. For example, researchers could take half of the participants through sexual assault education about the realities of campus sexual assault. The researchers would then present Clery releases to separate groups of students who had received that education and those who had not. A comparison of the narratives and discussion that arose from each group could help determine the effectiveness and impact of education geared toward sexual assault on campus.
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Appendix

Figure 1: Requirements of the Clery Act

- Compile and publish an Annual Security Report. By October 1, each university is required to make this report available to students, faculty and prospective students, parents and employees. The report should include relevant policies and changes in policy, the past three years’ worth of crime data for the index crimes (explained later) and information on programs and procedures that help sexual assault victims.
- Maintain a public crime log. Campus police or security departments are expected to keep an open log of crime incidents within two days of knowledge of the crime taking place. Information on the incident should include, according to the statutes: “nature, date, time and general location of the crime” as well as type of crime (20 U.S.C. § 1092).
- Report crimes statistics. Data from the following seven index crime categories as outlined by the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports must be gathered:
  - criminal homicide
  - sex offensives, both forcible and non-forcible
  - robbery
  - aggravated assault
  - burglary
  - motor vehicle theft, and
  - arson.

The university must collect this data if any of those crimes occur on campus, “in unobstructed public areas immediately adjacent to or running through the campus and at certain non-campus facilities such as Greek housing,” according to the Clery Center.
- Distribute timely warnings if an ongoing or immediate threat is related to one of the index crimes. According to the statutes, “Such reports shall be provided to students and employees in a manner that is timely and that will aid in the prevention of similar occurrences” (20 U.S.C. § 1092).
- Enact emergency response or evacuation procedures, notification system and testing policy. This covers more than crime events covered by timely warnings by including instances such as fire, natural disaster or disease. These procedures should be outlined in the ASR.
- Report fire safety procedures and data. Information on fires at on-campus residences must be reported in a publically accessible log and in an annual report.
- Establish procedures for missing students. Institutions must specify where reports should be filed if a student has been missing for more than 24 hours.
Figure 2: Example A of timely warning

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**Figure 12-A. Sample Timely Warning**

**UWPD CAUTIONS STUDENTS ABOUT DATE RAPE DRUGS**

*April 11, 2002*

by (name deleted), (title), *UW Police Department*

The University of Wyoming Police Department received reports of two possible sexual assaults over the weekend of April 5. The circumstances of these assaults suggest the involvement of date rape drugs.

In both cases, the victims reported symptoms consistent with the use of these substances: a rapid onset of intoxication out of proportion to what they may have had to drink, and reported memory loss. In one case the victim declined to pursue a criminal investigation, and the UW Police Department is actively investigating the other.

The phenomenon of drugs being used to facilitate sexual assault has been widely reported across the country. Although no confirmed cases have previously been reported on-campus, the UW Police Department urges the Laramie community to be alert to the possibility and take steps to protect themselves. Date rape drugs, commonly Rohypnol, GHB, and Ketamine, can be slipped into an unsuspecting person's drink. Rapid and severe intoxication follows, along with dramatically reduced inhibitions and memory loss. In this condition, anyone can be extremely vulnerable to sexual assault.

To protect yourself, do not leave drinks unattended and be wary of accepting drinks from people you do not know well. To be even more careful, make sure that you open and pour your own drink, and don't share drinks with others. It is also wise to use the buddy system while socializing - when you go out with friends, agree to keep an eye on one another and to go home together. If a friend starts to exhibit symptoms of date rape drug ingestion, seek medical help immediately. Signs to look for include: dizziness and/or nausea, memory loss, breathing or motion difficulties, and acting disproportionately intoxicated relative to the amount of alcohol consumed.

The UW Police Department urges anyone who believes they or a friend have been the victim of a date rape drug to immediately contact their local law enforcement agency. On-campus, the UWPD can be reached at XXX-XXXX. Victims of any form of sexual assault are encouraged to seek confidential support at the University Counseling Center, 340 Knight Hall, XXX-XXXX.
Figure 3: Example B of timely warning

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**Figure 12-B. Sample Timely Warning**

**TIMELY NOTIFICATION BULLETIN**
Possible Threat to the Community
"Your Right to Know"
January 26, 2004

In compliance with the "Timely Notice" provisions of the federal *Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998* the University Police are giving notice of a disturbing act of violence reported to have occurred near the Tri-Sigma Sorority House, Greek Row/"Tree House" Residences, on the campus of James Madison University.

**REPORTED OFFENSE:** Reported Assault & Battery, constituting a Forcible Sexual Offense, was reported to have occurred on the university’s residential area known as Greek Row at approximately 12:45 a.m., early Saturday morning January 24, 2004. This location is on the campus of James Madison University just to the south of the Newman Drive railroad track crossing and the university's power (steam) plant.

**SUSPECTS:** Both described as “college” age males; race unreported; the first attacker of “average” build, approximately 5’10” in height, about 140 lbs.; wearing a black hooded garment and blue jeans; the second attacker shorter than the first, of “medium” build; wearing a grey hooded garment and blue jeans.

The complainant reported that she was returning to her residence hall very early Saturday morning, unaccompanied. As she walked south along Greek Row she stated that two male subjects approached from behind and threw her to the ground. They then attempted to remove her clothing. Both subjects fled on foot after the victim screamed.

It can be assumed that conditions continue to exist that may pose a threat to members and guests of the community. It is the duty of the institution to warn of possible “dangerous conditions” on or near its campus, and at affiliate organizations off campus; an "affirmative duty" exists to warn persons associated with this university of possible peril at the hands of some third party or parties. Consider carefully whether your presence at or near this complex while unaccompanied could place you in danger.

Please forward this notice to your colleagues and post it on appropriate bulletin boards in your area. If you have any information that might be helpful in this investigation, contact the University Police by telephone at (XXX)XXX-XXXX; in person at Shenandoah Hall, Patterson and South Main; or, if you wish, anonymously through “Silent Witness,” at http://www.jmu.edu/pubsafety/silent.htm.
Figure 4: Example C of timely warning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 12-C. Sample Timely Warning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRIME ALERT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the evening of 01/22/10, the individuals below gained access to Philip Amsterdam Hall by following students into the building. They then burglarized a room and stole three laptops. The investigation into this incident has yielded photographs of two subjects that were involved in the theft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should you see these individuals on campus, please contact the Campus PD immediately at XXX-XXXX or anonymously at XXX-TIPS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DESCRIPTION of Suspect #1:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race---------------Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex----------------Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexion---------Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair---------------Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Description—Close Cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes---------------Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-----------------17-25; Subject appears to be in his teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBJECT #1 CLOTHING:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last seen wearing- Black baseball cap with green trim, long black coat with hood, dark colored pants with cuffs at the bottom, dark colored shoes with green soles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DESCRIPTION of Suspect #2:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race---------------Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex----------------Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexion---------Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair---------------Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Description—Short Dreadlocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes---------------Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-----------------17-25; Subject appears to be in his teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBJECT #2 CLOTHING:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last seen wearing- Backward white and dark colored baseball cap with ‘SL’ logo, black hooded winter coat over dark colored collared shirt, dark colored pants, dark colored shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please share the information contained in this crime alert with other people on campus who may not have seen it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5: Clery release as issued by the MU campus police department on Oct. 5, 2014

University of Missouri
Police Department
901 Virginia Avenue Columbia MO 65211 (573) 882-7201

CLERY RELEASE
Oct. 5, 2014

Information on Rape Reported to MUPD:

On Oct. 4, the University Police Department (MUPD) received a report from a female victim that she was raped in the early morning hours of Oct. 3 by an unknown male in a residence hall. The victim did not know which residence hall, and at this time, can only provide the following description of the suspect: tall male, dark haired, dark complexion and skinny.

This information is provided to the community in an effort to keep the community informed of crimes on campus. MUPD encourages all victims of crime to report the incident so they may receive assistance, counseling, and help with the incident in addition to apprehending the suspect and providing accurate crime statistics to the community. MUPD has posted several documents, covering various safety topics that can be reviewed and printed at: http://mupolice.missouri.edu/safetytips.php

Clery 10-2014

(In accordance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998. To learn more about Jeanne Clery, please visit: http://www.securityoncampus.org/)
Figure 6: Clery release as issued by the MU campus police department on Sept. 9, 2014

CLERY RELEASE
September 9, 2014

Information on reported sexual assault:

On Sept. 9, officials from the University of Missouri's Title IX office reported a sexual assault to the University Police Department (MUPD). Title IX officials investigated the report, identified the victim and worked with her to gather the following information on the incident.

The victim reported to the Title IX investigator that some time between 12 and 1 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 5, she was sexually assaulted by an unknown male near the benches between Jesse Hall and Hill Hall. The victim reported her vagina was penetrated by the suspect's finger. The only description the victim could provide at this time is the male suspect was wearing all black clothes and was taller than 5'8".

No additional information or details are available, and the victim has chosen not to discuss the incident with the MUPD at this time.

This information is provided to the community in an effort to keep the community informed of crimes on campus. MUPD encourages all victims of crime to report the incident so they may receive assistance, counseling, and help with the incident in addition to apprehending the suspect and providing accurate crime statistics to the community. MUPD has posted several documents, covering various safety topics, so you can review it and/or easily print the information to share with co-workers, friends, and family at: http://mupolice.missouri.edu/safetytips.php

Clery 8-2014

(In accordance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998. To learn more about Jeanne Clery, please visit: http://www.securityoncampus.org/)
Figure 7: Clery release as issued by the MU campus police department on Nov. 11, 2013

Clery Release
Nov. 11, 2013

Information on sex offense reported to City of Columbia Police Department:

The City of Columbia Police Department is investigating a sexual misconduct report. The incident occurred in 1400 block of Bouchelle Avenue across the street from the main MU Campus around 2 a.m., Nov. 8. A female victim reported to the City of Columbia Police Department that while she was walking home a male stopped her and grabbed her breast. She resisted and the male left the area. The male was described as a mixed race male, medium skin tone, short brown hair, slender build, and approximately 5’6.” Contact the City of Columbia Police Department for additional details.

In an effort to keep the community informed of crimes that happen near campus property, the MUPD is sending this Clery release. Additionally, the University Police Department offers the following tips to help keep you safe. Remember, you can do everything properly and still be the victim of a crime.

When possible, walk in pairs as there is strength in numbers.
Walk in well lit areas.
Trust your instincts. If something feels wrong, something is probably wrong.
Be aware of your surroundings.
Walk close to the curb, facing oncoming traffic.
Carry bags close to your body.
Look confident (good posture, confident strides, head upright and on a swivel)
Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back.
If you are being followed, head for a crowded place.
If people start milling around you, it could be a set-up for a mugging.
Know yourself, how do you react in a crisis situation? Do you scream, cry, freeze?
Remember there is no right or wrong approach to dangerous situations.

Clery 14-2013

University of Missouri Police Department
901 Virginia Avenue Columbia MO 65211 (573) 882-7201
Figure 8: Introduction script and focus group questions

Survey of information:
Name
Age
Year in school
Major
Ethnicity

Introductory script for researcher:
So, what I’m interested in studying is how those of us on campus use the information in Clery releases. I’ve always talked about them with my friends when we get them, and I’m curious if those discussion happen with other people, too. I want to see if these releases are really helpful to campus or not, in a variety of ways. What makes research like this so interesting is that there’s usually tons of different viewpoints and ways of thinking about these types of things. And it’s way more interesting when people don’t necessarily agree on how they think about it all. So I’m excited to hear what you all think and your experience with the Clery releases.

Safety/confidentiality concerns:
Also, I want to be sure to clarify that if you or someone you know has had experience with sexual assault or being the subject of a Clery release, you are not required to share that information here in this setting. I also have the contact information for several resources should any of this discussion upset anyone. As a participant in this research, you have the ability to get up and leave at any point, for any reason, without affecting your ability to be compensated. Although the results of this research might be published, your name and participation in this research will be kept anonymous. Each of you will be assigned aliases, and any documentation of your names will be kept confidential and destroyed as soon as possible.

Opening group question:
Share your first name, age, major, hometown, a fun fact, anything else you would like to add.

   Go around circle, all answer.

Introductory questions:
-Briefly, how familiar are you with Clery releases? How often do you read them when you receive them?
   Go around circle, all answer.
-What do you think their purpose is?
   Open to any participant.
   -Does anyone see it differently? Does so-and-so’s answer represent all of your views?
   Open to any participant.
Do you talk about Clery releases with your roommates or friends or family when they come out? How does that discussion go?

*Go around circle, all answer.*

**After showing each Clery release:**

*Introductory:*
- Show of hands, who remembers receiving this release?
  *Participants raise hands, researcher records.*
- What do you think the release is implying happened during the event depicted here?
  *Open to any participant.*
  - Does anyone see it differently?
    *Open to any participant.*
- Do you think there’s a difference between what the release is implying happened and what probably actually happened?
  *Open to any participant.*
  - Does anyone see it differently?
    *Open to any participant.*
- Do you think this release is probably a reasonable portrayal of the event? Why is it reasonable, or why is it unreasonable?
  *Open to any participant.*
- Did you remembering talking with anyone about this release? If so, what did you talk about? If not, what do you think would have been said?
  *Go around circle, all answer.*

*Further questions, especially if discussion is stilted or stalled:*
- If your friend had been the one who reported the assault in this case, would that change how you view this release or the event? How would it change, or why wouldn’t it change?
  *Open to any participant.*
- If your friend had been the one who was accused of the assault in this case, would that change how you view this release or the event? How would it change, or why wouldn’t it change?
  *Open to any participant.*
- Do you think the victim and perpetrator were treated fairly in the release? Who was treated more or less fairly, and why?
  *Open to any participant.*

*Wrap-up on the release:*
- Does anyone have any other thoughts they’d like to share on this release?
  *Open to any participant.*

**After showing additional Clery releases:**

*Complete line of questioning above, then ask these questions to compare:*
Do you think what happened here is much different than what was described as happening in the first (or previous) release(s)? What do you think those differences are? What makes you think that way?  
*Open to any participant.*

-If you talked about this with your friends or anyone else, was it different than how you discussed other releases? If you didn’t, do you think it would have gone differently?  
  *Go around circle, all answer.*

**Final questions after all releases have been shown:**

-After reading and discussing these Clery releases, which one do you think is most fair to both the victim and perpetrator? Why?  
  *Open to any participant.*

-Does anyone think a different Clery release was more fair? Why?  
  *Open to any participant.*

-Which one do you think is least fair to both the victim and perpetrator? Why?  
  *Open to any participant.*

  -Does anyone think a different Clery release was less fair? Why?  
  *Open to any participant.*

-Optional: If your friend were the subject of one of these Clery releases, which of these would you prefer to have written about him or her? Why?  
  *Open to any participant.*

-Do you think Clery releases make anyone act differently to avoid being a victim or perpetrator of sexual assault?  
  *Go around circle, all answer.*

-How do you think Clery releases influence the way people on campus view these instances of sexual assault?  
  *Go around circle, all answer.*

-Do you think Clery releases affect the way people on campus think about sexual assault that occurs on campus overall?  
  *Go around circle, all answer.*

-How do you think Clery releases affect the conversation about sexual assault on campus?  
  *Go around circle, all answer.*