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# SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BY WOMEN ON CAMPUS: WHAT WE KNOW, WHAT WE'RE LEARNING, AND HOW IT CAN SHAPE PRACTICE



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TAKE CARE



OF YOURSELF

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WELCOME!

- Sensitive topic
  - Take care of yourselves
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# ROADMAP FOR TODAY

## **What We Know**

- Limitations in the Literature
- Prevalence
- Patterns & Behaviors
- Predictors

## **What We're Learning: Survivors' Experiences**

- Disclosure barriers
- Mental health impacts
- Intersectional factors

## **Reflection & Application**

## **Implications for Prevention & Response**

## **Wrap-Up & Resources**



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## WHY FOCUS ON FEMALE PERPETRATION?

“Consistent with the feminist goal of gender equality, all behaviors that women engage in, whether nourishing or destructive, common or rare, should be acknowledged, studied, and understood to the same extent as those of men.”

– Schatzel-Murphy (2011, p. 5).

“Female perpetrators and their victims are largely missing from the wider consideration of campus sexual violence and prevention efforts.”

--Holmgreen & Oswald (2023, p. 50)

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# CASE EXAMPLE: BEN AND ALICIA



Ben is a 20-year-old junior at a mid-sized university majoring in biology. He is known as friendly and active in student government. Alicia, a 21-year-old senior, is a fellow student in Ben's pre-med study group. They are acquaintances but not close friends.

One evening, Ben attends a house party where he consumes several drinks over the course of a few hours. He becomes visibly intoxicated — slurring speech and needing support to walk. Alicia, who is sober, offers to help him get back to his dorm room, which is nearby. Several people at the party see her helping him out and assume she's just being kind.

Later that night, Ben wakes up in his dorm bed, confused, partially undressed, with Alicia beside him. He has fragmented memories of her initiating sexual activity while he was in and out of consciousness. He remembers saying, "I don't think I want this," and trying to move her hand away. He felt physically weak and unable to clearly resist.

Ben initially tells no one. He feels shame, confusion, and wonders if what happened qualifies as assault. Over the next few weeks, he becomes withdrawn and depressed. A close friend notices and encourages him to seek counseling. Eventually, Ben reports the incident to the university's Title IX office.

Alicia tells investigators the encounter was consensual. She admits he was intoxicated but says he "never said no," and that he kissed her first. She claims Ben seemed coherent enough to make decisions.

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# STEREOTYPES



- Gender-based stereotypes and assumptions about sexual aggression are reasons for lack of attention to female perpetration.
  - Female perpetrators are viewed as:
    - Less aggressive than men who engage in same behavior (Oswald & Russell, 2006; Russell et al., 2019).
    - Promiscuous, rather than aggressive (Oswald & Russell, 2006)
    - Not able to cause fear or harm in their victims (Parker et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2019).
    - Less guilty (Russell et al., 2011).
  - Male victims of female perpetrators are viewed:
    - As being romantically interested in their perpetrators.
    - Less empathically (Osman, 2011)
    - As more responsible for their victimization (Paker et al., 2022; Sleath & Bull, 2010).
    - As capable of managing the incident (Katz et al., 2007; Stealth & Bull, 2010)
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# STEREOTYPES



- Women can do no harm.
  - Women don't do that sort of thing.
  - If women do, the men are lucky.
  - Women have low sex drives and restrict sexual activity, whereas men are highly sexually motivated and will have sex whenever possible.
  - The women must either be trying to be men or crazy.
  - It's impossible for a man to achieve or maintain an erection when threatened or attacked by a woman.
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# MEN CAN BE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT BY WOMEN



- Male sex response can occur in a variety of emotional states, including anger and terror, embarrassment and humiliation, and fear (Sarrel & Masters, 1982).

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## ADDITIONAL MALE RAPE MYTHS

Men cannot be forced to have sex against their will.

They are always willing to have sex.

They are always able to defend themselves.

Only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape against men.

Men aren't impacted by rape.

Rape against men only happens in prisons.

Women cannot rape men.

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## DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

- US Centers for Disease Control delineates four characteristics of sexual violence (Breiding et al., 2015):
  - lack of consent
  - whether the act was completed or attempted
  - nature of force employed (physical/nonphysical)
  - type of sexual activity involved



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## DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

- In accordance with CDC definitions, Cristea (2025) developed four categories of sexual violence that don't discriminate based on gender, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation of the parties involved:
  1. Sexual abuse involving penetration of the victim
  2. Sexual abuse in which the victim is forced to penetrate another person.
  3. Unwanted sexual contact
  4. Unwanted sexual experiences without physical contact

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# LIMITATIONS IN THE LITERATURE



- Most studies:
    - Focus on victimization, not perpetration, and gender of perpetrator isn't always asked.
    - Assess only women as potential victims.
    - That include both men and women ask men about perpetration and women about victimization.
    - Narrowly define rape, such that nonconsensual sex by a woman towards a man/woman isn't included.
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# PREVALENCE



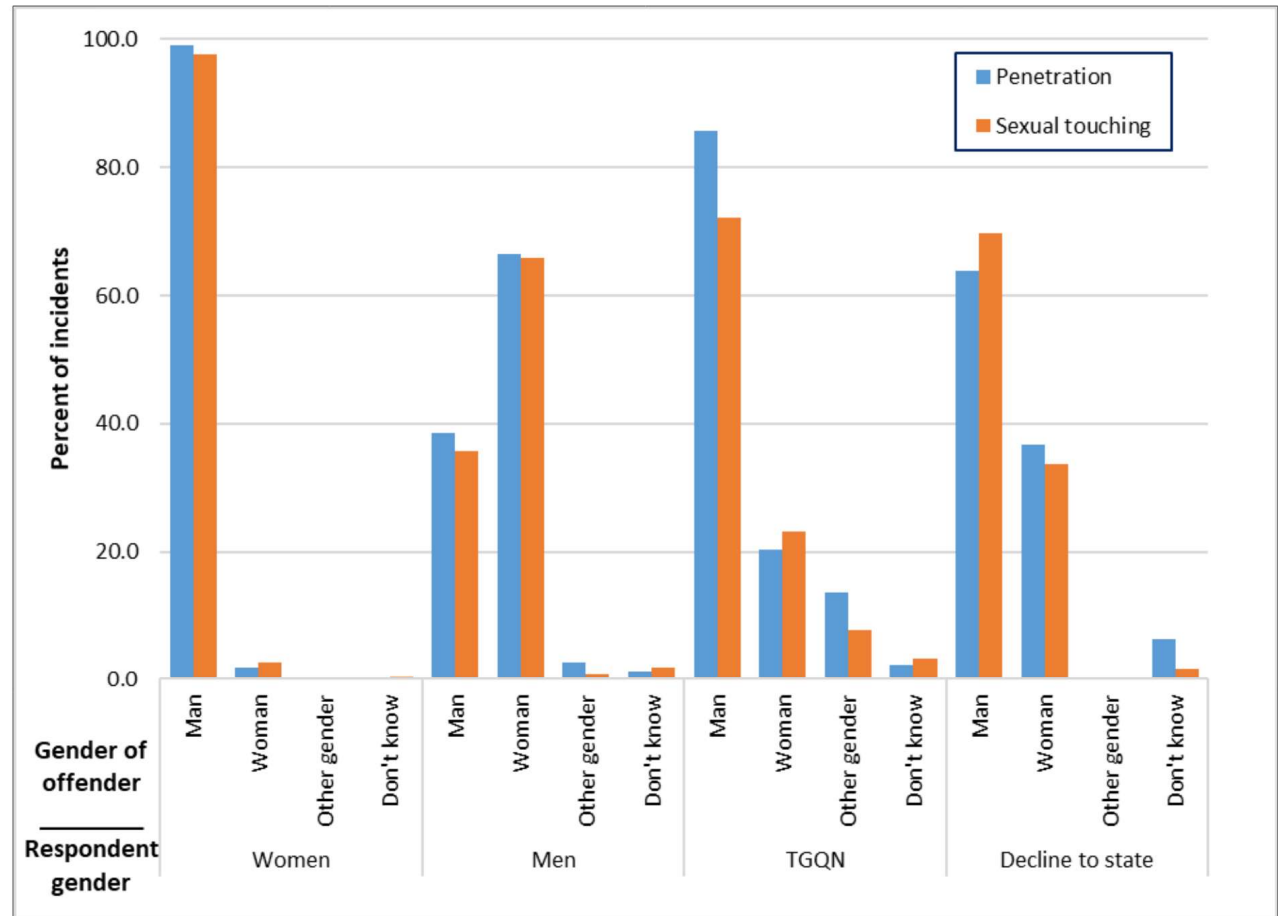
*Improving lives  
through research™*

**Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on  
Sexual Assault and Misconduct**

- AAU Survey of 2019 (Cantor et al., 2019): 13% of students across 33 universities/colleges reported experiencing nonconsensual penetration, attempted penetration, sexual touching by force or inability to consent, “since they have been enrolled in their respective school.”
  - 20.4% of women (99.1% said man was perpetrator when offense involved penetration; 97.8% said it was a man for sexual touching)
  - 20.3% of TGQN students (85.6% of penetration offenders were men; 72.2% for sexual touching)
  - 5.1% of men (66.4% of offenders were women)

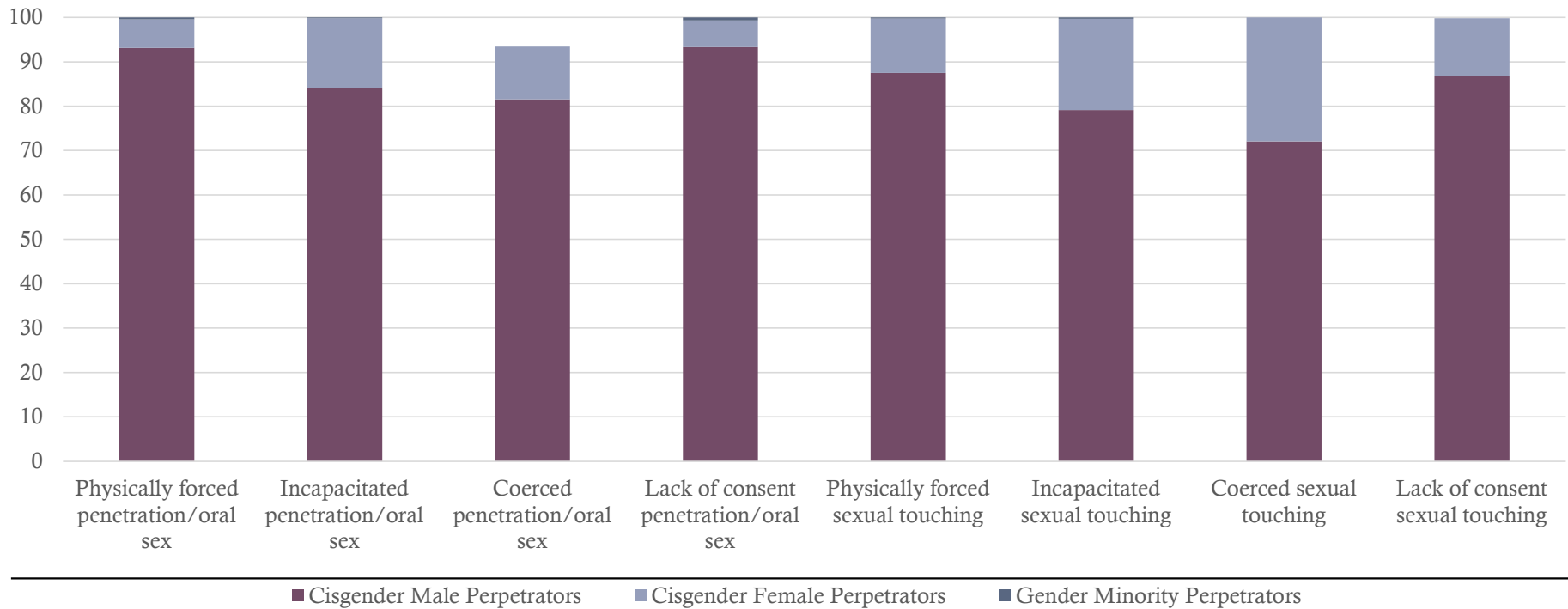
# AAU CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEY OF 2019

Figure 6. Offender gender for nonconsensual sexual contact by physical force or inability to consent by gender of victim and type of sexual contact



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# PREVALENCE: AAU SURVEY OF 2015 (MARTIN ET AL., 2020)



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# PREVALENCE:

GAMBARDELLA ET AL. (2020)



- Data collected from 11,165 college students at four colleges in Worcester, MA from 2008 through 2018 (three colleges only from 2013-2015).
- Focused analyses just on the 610 students (5.4%) who reported one or more sexual assaults.
- Time frame was first two months of each school year.
- Used data from only those students who reported their own gender and the gender of their perpetrator (n = 510).
- 14.1% of victims reported a female perpetrator.

**GAMBARDELLA  
ET AL., 2020**

**Table 1.** Demographics of Victims by Gender of Perpetrator.

Variable	Female perpetrator ( <i>n</i> = 72)	Male perpetrator ( <i>n</i> = 438)	Total sample ( <i>n</i> = 510)
Gender (%)			
Male	73.6	2.5	12.5
Female	26.4	97.5	87.5
Sexual orientation (%)			
Heterosexual	69.4	77.8	76.6
Sexual minority	30.6	22.2	23.4
Race/ethnicity (%)			
White	84.7	83.6	83.7
Racial/ethnic minority	15.3	16.4	16.3
Year in school (%)			
First year	25.9	23.9	25.6
Second year	26.3	18.3	25.2
Third year	23.1	21.1	22.8
Fourth year	18.5	29.6	20.1
Graduate student	6.2	7.0	6.3
Residence (%)			
On-campus	44.4	62.3	59.8
Off-campus	55.6	37.7	40.2
Age, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	19.99 (2.77)		

*Note.* *SD* indicates variables for which means and standard deviations are depicted; % indicates percentage.

**GAMBARDELLA  
ET AL., 2020**

**Table 2.** Context of Sexual Assault Victimization by Gender of Perpetrator.

Variable	Female perpetrator (n = 72)	Male perpetrator (n = 438)	$\chi^2$
Same gender victim (%)	26.4	2.5	68.07*
Relationship to victim (%)			
Stranger	8.6	19.4	4.81*
(Ex)romantic partner	28.6	15.7	6.91*
Friend	35.3	31.2	0.27
Acquaintance	25.7	31.2	0.85
Involved victim's use of (%)			
Alcohol	84.4	79.0	0.98
Drugs	30.2	13.2	8.04*
Involved perpetrator's use of (%)			
Alcohol	77.0	78.3	0.05
Drugs	17.4	15.6	0.09
Other (%)			
Perpetrator was campus member	88.2	66.9	12.70*
Assault occurred on campus	49.3	49.8	0.01
Assault occurred during or after a party	65.4	69.4	0.17
Victim sustained injuries	2.9	5.9	—

Note. Unable to compute  $\chi^2$  for injuries sustained due to insufficient cell size.

\* $p < .05$ .

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**PREVALENCE:  
GROWING UP WITH  
MEDIA STUDY**  
(YBARRA & MITCHELL, 2013)



- 1058 youth ages 14-21 years.
  - Forced sexual contact, coercive sex, attempted rape, and completed rape.
  - For participants aged 18-21:
    - 9% reported lifetime sexual violence perpetration
    - Males represented:
      - 58% of the perpetrators of any sexual violence;
      - 48% of the perps of forced sexual contact;
      - 75% of the perps of coercive sex;
      - 89% of the perps of attempted rape;
      - 68% of the perps of completed rape.
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# PREVALENCE: GROWING UP WITH MEDIA STUDY

(YBARRA & MITCHELL, 2013)



- Males starting their sexual violence earlier than females
  - By ages 18 and 19, the split between male and female perpetration was nearly equivalent.
- Females are more likely than males to perpetrate against victims who are older than themselves (males perpetrated against younger victims).
- Females are more likely than males to perpetrate as part of a team/group (2 in 10 female perpetrators did so in a group, in comparison to 1 in 39 male perps).

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# PREVALENCE: STUDIES OF SEXUAL & GENDER MINORITY COMMUNITIES



- 22% of sexually victimized college women reported a female perpetrator (Martin-Storey et al., 2018)
- Of a sample of sexual minority college students, 18% of sexually victimized women reported a female perpetrator (Murchison et al., 2017).
- In studies of sexually victimized gender-nonconforming students 22%-43% report female perpetrators ( Martin-Storey et al., 2018; Mellins et al., 2017; Murchinson et al., 2017; Paquette et al., 2019)

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# PREVALENCE: VIRTUAL SEXUAL ASSAULT

(WALKER ET AL., 2019)

- UK university students (n = 391; 321 female).
- 16.37% perpetrated the nonconsensual sharing of private sexually explicit material (messages, pictures, and/or videos).
- No gender differences in perpetration of this type of behavior.
- Most frequently shared with a close friend.
- Perpetration was significantly associated with victimization.



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# PATTERNS AND BEHAVIORS



- Men are more likely than women to have been victimized via intoxication/use of drugs (Forsman, 2017; Gambardella et al., 2020; Krahe et al., 2003).
  - Ybarra & Mitchell (2013): Most common tactics – arguing or pressuring the victim (32%) and getting angry /making the person feel guilty (63%). Tactics were similar by gender.
  - Schatzel-Murphy et al. (2009) – heterosexual women engaged in a range of coercive tactics; percentages in parentheses are men’s vs. women’s perpetration
    - Seduction of unwilling partners (54% v. 24%)\*
    - Manipulation (40% v. 30%)
    - Use of alcohol and/or drugs (24% v. 17%)
    - Physical force (4% v. 5%)
  - Struckman-Johnson et al. (2003) found the same order of tactics for female perpetrators.
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# PATTERNS & BEHAVIORS

Most common acts perpetrated by women against men were nonconsensual kissing/petting, followed by intercourse and then oral sex (Krahe et al., 2003)

36% of men reported coerced sexual touch by a woman; 27% reported coerced intercourse (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1998)

Coerced sexual behaviors (men and women's perpetration) (Schatzel-Murphy et al., 2009)

Attempted to or obtained sex play (65% v. 48%)\*

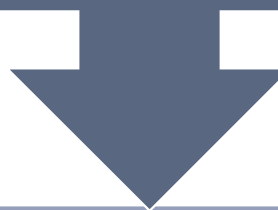
Attempted to or obtained oral sex (37% v. 17%)\*

Attempted to or obtained vaginal or anal sex (26% v. 16%)

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## PATTERNS & BEHAVIORS

Most likely victims were current or ex romantic partner or a friend (Gambardella et al., 2020; Krahe et al., 2003; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2013)



Resistance strategies of male victims (O'Sullivan et al., 1998):

58% mild verbal protest

47% moved to leave

26% strong verbal protest

5% physically resisted and fought back

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# IN THEIR OWN WORDS...



- “She said I didn’t like her if I didn’t want to. Massive guilt trip. I didn’t want to.”
- “She was drunk and said if I didn’t, that she would break up with me.”
- “I didn’t have to make a move on her because she was all over me. She wouldn’t take no for an answer. Usually, I like to get to know the person. I felt I was forced into sex. After, I felt terrible and used.”

Source: Struckman-Johnson (1988)

- “When it originally happened, I was so confused...It was at least a month before the word rape even entered my mind. Then after that, I didn’t think anyone would believe that a girl half my size took advantage of me when I was drunk.” Source: Vera, 2025, p. 19

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# PREDICTING FEMALE PERPETRATION



- Life events/behaviors
    - Consumption of violent X-rated material (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2013).
    - History of child sexual abuse victimization (Anderson et al., 1998; Krahe et al., 2003).
    - Victimization from sexual coercion (Russell & Oswald, 2001).
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# PREDICTING FEMALE PERPETRATION



- Attitudes
    - Believing that men are sexually weak and available (Clements-Schreiber & Rempel, 1995).
    - Adversarial sexual beliefs; that sexual interactions are inherently adversarial (Anderson, 1996; Schatzel-Murphy, 2011).
      - “subscribe to rigid and adversarial gender role stereotypes that cast men as domineering and exploitative and women as seemingly passive yet actually sly and manipulative.”
    - Having an emotionally uninvolved and manipulative approach to intimate relationships. (Russell & Oswald, 2001)
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# PREDICTING FEMALE PERPETRATION



- Traits
    - Highly feminine (Russell & Oswald, 2001)
    - Hyperfemininity, which is comprised of two underlying constructs (Schatzel-Murphy, 2011)
      - viewing female sexuality as a commodity
      - expecting dominant behavior from men.
    - Hypergender (Hamburger et al., 1996)
      - refers to a belief that men should be risk takers and use violence when necessary, and that women should value relationships with men above all else and use their appearance and sexuality as a commodity.
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# PREDICTING FEMALE PERPETRATION: KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN & WOMEN (SCHATZEL-MURPHY ET AL., 2009)

For men, keystones of prediction model are:

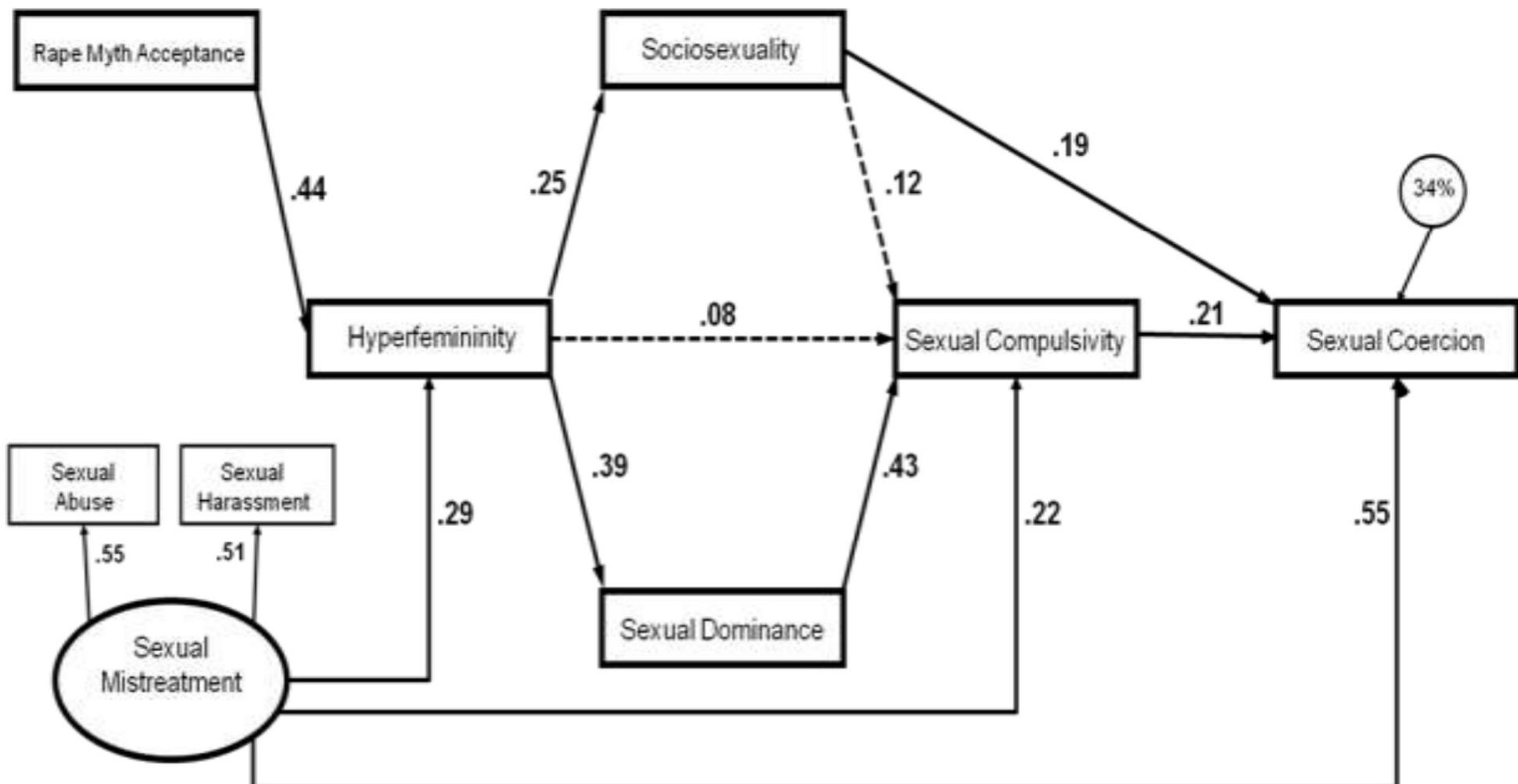
- Sexual dominance (i.e., deriving sexual pleasure from dominating someone in a sexual situation)
- Sociosexuality (i.e., one's willingness to engage in uncommitted sexual relations or casual sex)

For women, keystone is:

- Sexual compulsivity (i.e., difficulty controlling sexual urges)
- Prior sexual abuse victimization directly and indirectly via sexual compulsivity predict sexual coercion.

Model for women replicated and expanded by Schatzel-Murphy (2011)

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# DISCLOSURE BARRIERS

- For male victims (could include those with male perpetrators):
  - Having a personal connection to the attacker (Schwartz et al., 2017)
  - Fear of reprisal by attacker (Forsman, 2017)
  - Fear of being held responsible for their own victimization (Forsman, 2017)
  - Concerns about sexuality (Forsman, 2017)
  - Fear being told that what happened to them “really didn’t happen” (Forsman, 2017)
  - Shame and embarrassment (Schwartz et al., 2017)
  - Involvement of alcohol (Schwartz et al., 2017)
  - Perception that this doesn’t happen to men (Vela, 2025).
  - Didn’t think people would believe them (Vela, 2025).



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## DISCLOSURE BARRIERS: GAMBARDELLA ET AL., 2020

- Reasons for not seeking formal help (either on or off campus) for victims of female perpetrators (includes both male and female victims):
    - Assault not that serious
    - Assault was a private matter
    - Situation resolved itself
  - These were the most common reason regardless of gender of perpetrator.
  - One significant difference for not seeking help from campus resources was that victims of female perpetrators were more likely to feel that campus services would not believe them (12.8% v. 4.8%).
  - One significant difference for not seeking help from off-campus resources was that victims of female perpetrators were significantly more likely to feel that the resources would not take their situations seriously (25% v. 8.6%).
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## DISCLOSURE BARRIERS: GAMBARDELLA ET AL., 2020

**Table 3.** Prevalence of Help-Seeking by Gender of Perpetrator.

Type of help-seeking	Female perpetrator (%) ( <i>n</i> = 72)	Male perpetrator (%) ( <i>n</i> = 438)	$\chi^2$
Informal help	39.7	61.6	12.38*
Formal help	2.7	14.8	7.98*
On-campus resources	1.4	9.2	—
Off-campus resources	2.8	8.1	—

Note. Unable to compute  $\chi^2$  for injuries sustained due to insufficient cell size.

\**p* < .05.

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# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY DISCLOSE?

Less likely to receive support or be believed by law enforcement (Hammond et al., 2017; Russell, 2017).

Blamed for their own victimization, significantly more so than victims of male perpetrators (Davies et al., 2006; Parker et al., 2022).

Victim-shaming (Schwartz et al., 2017)

Turned away because the services are only for female survivors (Vela, 2025).

- Further isolates the victim



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# CASE EXAMPLE CONTINUED: WHEN BEN SPEAKS UP



A week after the incident, Ben is struggling with anxiety and sleeplessness. He decides to talk to a few close friends from his dorm suite — Jason, Marcus, and Rachel — about what happened the night of the party.

**Jason :** "Wait, hold up. You're saying Alicia assaulted you? Man, come on... most guys would kill to be in your shoes. She's hot, dude. You're lucky."

**Marcus:** "I mean... I'm not saying it didn't happen, but it's kind of hard to imagine. Are you sure she didn't just misread the situation? You guys were both drinking, right?"

**Rachel:** "Ben, I'm so sorry. I believe you. That sounds terrifying. You said no and she didn't stop — that's not okay. Have you thought about talking to someone at the counseling center or Title IX?"

**Follow-Up Reactions (Social Ripples):** Later that week, Ben hears secondhand that a few people are joking that he's "the guy who got raped by a girl." Alicia's friends are downplaying the situation, calling it "a drunken misunderstanding" and accusing Ben of "trying to ruin her life over regret."

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# MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS: MALE VICTIMS OF FEMALE PERPETRATORS



- Higher levels of aggression post-assault (Forsman, 2017)
- Academic performance decline (Vela, 2025).
- After controlling for other influences on trauma, victims who are cisgender men and cisgender women showed no differences in trauma symptoms (Paquette et al., 2019).
- For male victims, having one or more female perpetrators was associated with lower levels of trauma symptoms (Paquette et al., 2019).
- “Men may feel constricted by their male gender role in expressing distress during and after a coercive incident.” (Schatzel-Murphy, 2011).

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# MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS: GAMBARDELLA ET AL., 2020

**Table 4.** Differences in Well-being by Gender of Perpetrator.

Indicator of Wellbeing	Female perpetrator ( <i>n</i> = 72)		Male perpetrator ( <i>n</i> = 438)		<i>t</i> -test
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
General Health Questionnaire	11.64	8.07	10.80	7.17	-0.810
Alcohol use	4.75	2.39	3.88	2.11	-2.95*
Marijuana use	1.27	1.92	0.628	1.21	-2.76*
Other drug use	0.102	0.166	0.094	0.365	-0.197

\**p* < .05.

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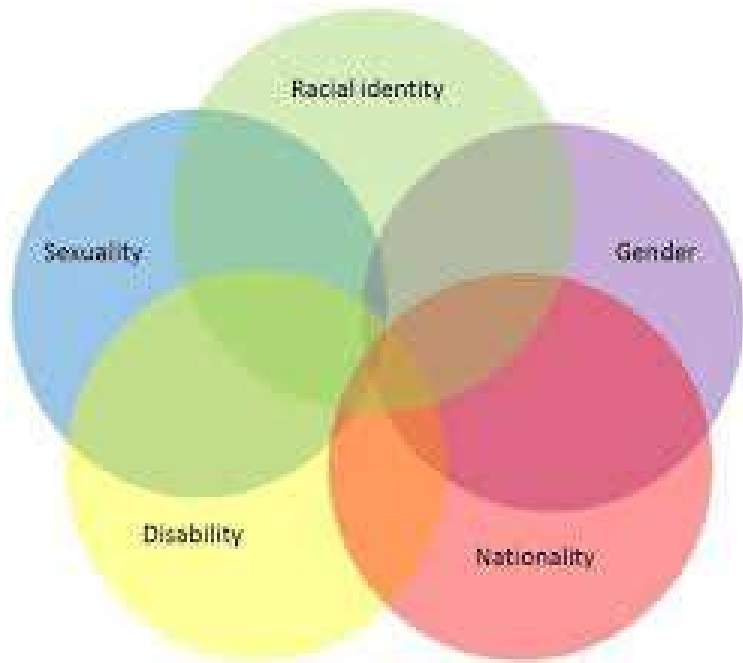
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## MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS: FEMALE VICTIMS OF FEMALE PERPETRATORS

- “Having one or more female perpetrators was associated with higher levels of trauma symptoms among sexual minority women, but not heterosexual women, where no significant differences were observed based on whether a male perpetrator was reported” (Paquette et al., 2019, p. 6).



# INTERSECTIONAL FACTORS



- Race/ethnicity – most studies are largely White samples, and even when samples are more diverse, there is no attempt – or statistical power – to test differences among the different race/ethnicities.
- Sexual and gender minorities experience unique chronic stress that can further exacerbate their vulnerability, barriers to getting help, and mental health impact of victimization.
- GLBs are more likely to be sexually assaulted than their heterosexual counterparts, with bisexuals at highest risk.
  - Many studies, however, suggest that lesbians are the least likely to be sexually assaulted.
  - Transgender students are at highest risk of victimization, compared to all other genders.
  - Little-to-no information on how experiences differ based on gender of the perpetrator.

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## CASE EXAMPLE: INTERSECTIONAL FACTORS



- Brittany is a first-year student at a faith-based university. She recently began a relationship with a woman, Lila, who is not a student. Lila stopped by to surprise Brittany with flowers one evening. They were talking and lost track of time. It was decided it would be ok for Lila to spend the night. Lila woke Brittany up during the night and was rubbing her breasts and vagina. Brittany told Lila to stop but Lila continued to do so and inserted her fingers into Brittany's vagina. On Monday, Brittany told a close friend what happened and begged her not to tell anyone because she was concerned about what others would think.
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**IMPLICATIONS  
FOR  
PREVENTION  
AND  
RESPONSE:  
HOMEWORK**

What barriers exist for victims of female-perpetrated sexual assault in your setting?

What assumptions show up in training, policies, or student education?

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## IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

- Services and policies are generally designed with male perpetrators/female victims in mind.
- Incorporating female perpetration into:
  - Title IX response protocols
  - Victim services and intake forms
    - Screening for all
  - Outreach
  - Bystander and prevention education
- Rethinking “gender neutrality”



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# RESOURCES

## 1. RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

- **24/7 Confidential Hotline:** 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- **Online Chat:** [rainn.org](https://rainn.org)
- Services include: crisis support, referrals, legal info, and male survivor stories.
- *Dedicated content for male survivors:* Male Survivor Info

## 2. **1in6** (*Specifically for men who have experienced unwanted or abusive sexual experiences*)

- Website: [1in6.org](https://1in6.org)
- **Online support groups**, therapist search, education materials.
- 24/7 helpline through partnership with RAINN.

## 3. MaleSurvivor

- Website: [malesurvivor.org](https://malesurvivor.org)
- Online forums, peer support groups, survivor retreats, and therapist directory.
- Emphasizes healing for male survivors of childhood and adult sexual abuse.

## 4. FORGE (For Trans and Nonbinary Survivors, including men)

- Website: [forge-forward.org](https://forge-forward.org)
- National support, webinars, and survivor toolkits.
- Inclusive of trans men and nonbinary individuals.

## 5. Fenway Health – Violence Recovery Program (VRP)

- **Website:** [fenwayhealth.org](https://fenwayhealth.org)
  - **Services:** Specialized counseling, advocacy, and support for LGBTQ+ survivors of violence, including sexual assault.
  - **Note:** Fenway Health is recognized for its comprehensive care tailored to LGBTQ+ individuals.
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# RESOURCES: RAPE CRISIS CENTERS

## 1. Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)

- **Website:** [barcc.org](http://barcc.org)
- **Phone:** 1-800-841-8371
- **Services:** 24/7 hotline, counseling, legal advocacy, and medical accompaniment.
- **Note:** BARCC provides services to all survivors, regardless of gender or sexual orientation

## 2. Pathways for Change (Central Massachusetts)

- **Website:** [pathwaysforchange.help](http://pathwaysforchange.help)
  - **Phone:** 1-800-870-5905
  - **Services:** Crisis intervention, counseling, and support groups.
  - **Note:** Committed to serving diverse populations, including LGBTQ+ survivors.
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Q&A  
KEEP IN TOUCH!

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