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# A Comprehensive Literature Review of American Sexual Assault Culture and the Status of Women's Self-Defense

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A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW OF AMERICAN SEXUAL ASSAULT  
AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN'S SELF-DEFENSE

By

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A Comprehensive Literature Review of American Sexual Assault and the Status of Women's Self-Defense

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*Abstract:*

According to the National Organization for Women (NOW), 232,960 American women were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006, equating to more than 600 women daily (2012). American women furthermore experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes each year (NOW, 2012). Violence toward women is also evident on American college and university campuses. The U.S. National Institute of Justice (NIJ), for example, states that 35 of every 1,000 female students are victims of rape—either completed or attempted—in a given nine-month academic year (National Institute of Justice, 2005).

With more than 600 women being raped daily, the pervasiveness of partner-related offenses, and the frequency of sexual violence occurring on American college campuses, the time is past due for American society to seriously confront, at all levels of discourse and implementation, the emotional, social, and spiritual devastation of sexual assault. This project aims to address American sexual assault and offers a potential solution. It is an extensive literature review regarding the prevalence of sexual assault, its different types, and its influential cultural factors in the United States. In addition, this review explores available preventative strategies and investigates, specifically, the current status of women's self-defense programs en route to promoting women's self-defense as a viable approach to minimizing America's sexual assault culture.

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## **Introduction**

According to the National Organization for Women (NOW), 232,960 American women were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006, equating to more than 600 women daily (2012). American women furthermore experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes each year (NOW, 2012). Violence toward women is also evident on American college and university campuses. The U.S. National Institute of Justice (NIJ), for example, states that 35 of every 1,000 female students are victims of rape—either completed or attempted—in a given nine-month academic year (National Institute of Justice, 2005).

With more than 600 women being raped daily and the pervasiveness of partner-related offenses combined with the frequency of sexual violence occurring on American college campuses, the time is past due for American society to seriously confront, at all levels of discourse and implementation, the emotional, social, and spiritual devastation of sexual assault, not just regarding the impact on victims, but the soul of a nation as well. Preventative strategies are needed to minimize America's sexual assault culture. This examination intends to stimulate and add to that discourse while offering a potential solution.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project will be to conduct an extensive literature review regarding the prevalence of sexual assault as well as discuss the cultural factors that influence sexual assault in the United States. In addition, this review will explore the different types of sexual assault, the preventative strategies available, and investigate, specifically, the current status of women's self-

defense programs en route to promoting women's self-defense as a viable approach to minimizing America's sexual assault culture.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence are prevalent in American society. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), a woman in the United States is sexually assaulted every two minutes (RAINN, 2009). This project will propose that, in addition to other strategies, women's self-defense represents a viable option for equipping women with the necessary physical and mental preparedness to minimize the consequences of or prevent sexual assault.

### **Significance of the Project**

This investigation will augment the literature pertaining to America's sexual assault culture while raising consciousness regarding the various strategies, particularly women's self-defense, available to women to minimize or prevent sexual assault.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Self-defense:** an affirmative defense alleging that the defendant used serious force necessarily for self-protection. The claim of self-defense must normally rely on a reasonable belief that the other party intended to inflict great bodily harm or death and that avoidance by retreating was impossible (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012).

**Sexual assault:** touching—without consent—the sexual or other human parts of another, directly or through clothing, in order to gratify sexual desire or to cause bodily injury, humiliate, harass, or degrade another (University of Montana, 2012).

**Rape:** penetration—without consent—of the vulva or anus of another, using a body member or a manipulated object. It can include penetration of the mouth of another by the penis to gratify sexual desire or to cause bodily injury, humiliate, harass, or degrade another (University of Montana, 2012).

**Without consent:** 1) the use of violence or force against the victim, 2) when the victim lacks the capacity for legal consent, 3) when the victim is incapacitated or physically helpless (University of Montana, 2012).

**Rape Culture:** a culture in which the act of rape is normative; it is essentially a condoned behavior (Roze, n.d.).

**Sexual Violence:** Sexual Violence (SV) refers to sexual activity where consent is not obtained or freely given (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2007).

**Socialization:** the process of social interaction by which people acquire behaviors essential for effective participation in society. It is the process of becoming a social being and is essential for the renewal of culture and the perpetuation of society (Hughes et al, 2002).

**Rape Myths:** a set of largely false cultural beliefs that are believed to underlie sexual aggression perpetrated against women. Rape myths, including elements of victim blame, perpetrator absolution, and minimization or rationalization of sexual violence, perpetuate sexual violence against women (Edwards et al, 2011).

## Types of Sexual Assault

Marshall University Women's Center website (n.d.) describes the different types of sexual assault. Below is a list of the various acts that are considered sexual assault and abuse, including a short description of some of the most common types of assault:

- Rape—sexual intercourse against a person's will
- Forcible sodomy—anal or oral sex against a person's will
- Forcible object penetration—penetrating someone's vagina or anus, or causing that person to penetrate her or himself, against that person's will
- Marital rape
- Unwanted sexual touching
- Incest—sexual intercourse or sexual intrusion between family members
- Any unwanted or coerced sexual contact
- Acquaintance rape—when a known or trusted person forces another person to have sexual intercourse. The rapist can be a friend, family member, teacher, coach, neighbor, co-worker, or other known person to the victim. It can happen on a first date, at a party, or when two people have been going out for a long time.
- Drug-facilitated sexual assault—when someone secretly drops a drug, such as roofies or ecstasy, in a victim's drink. When the drug dissolves, it is odorless, may be colorless, and may be tasteless. The victim who consumes the drink may experience drowsiness, dizziness, confusion, lack of coordination, slurred speech, loss of inhibition, impaired judgment, and reduced levels of consciousness. The victim is often raped while in an altered, drugged state, and since these drugs can



cause amnesia, the victim may not remember what happened or who assaulted him/her (Marshall University Women's Center, n.d.)

Though not listed on the Marshall University site, prison rape is another type of sexual assault. It involves the rape of inmates in prison by other inmates or prison staff. Prison rape emphasizes exercising one's power and control, rather than just a sexual activity. Prison environments most often involve gender segregation, so in most prison rapes, the perpetrator and victim are of the same sex (U.S. Legal, Inc., 2013).

Though there are many different types of sexual assault, this project will focus on sexual assault as being *any unwanted or coerced sexual contact toward women perpetrated by men*. Prison rape will be excluded from discussion and analysis. Consensual sexual relations that include power-relationships, such as consensual sex between a professor and a student or consensual sex between a prison guard and inmate, will also be excluded from discussion and analysis.

## Literature Review

### Prevalence of Sexual Assault in America

According to the National Organization for Women (2012), 232,960 American women were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006, equating to more than 600 women daily. American women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes each year (NOW, 2012). Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, states that one out of every six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime, and a woman in the United States is sexually assaulted every two minutes (RAINN, 2009).

Women aged 24 and under suffer from the highest rates of rape (NOW, 2012). This assertion is certainly supported when the focus turns to violence toward women on college and university campuses. Due to the frequency of reported cases of sexual assault in America's post-secondary schools, Congress mandated, in 1999, an investigation of how colleges and universities are responding to campus sexual assault. Researchers studied a random sample of almost 2,500 schools across the nation, conducting a content analysis of written sexual assault policies at the schools, a survey of campus administrators, and an on-site examination of schools. As a result, the U.S. National Institute of Justice states that just under three percent of all college women become victims of rape—either completed or attempted—in a given nine-month academic year. Initially, explains the report, this risk seems low, but the percentage translates to 3.5 victims of rape per 100 female students. If campus enrollment is comprised of 10,000 female students, the number of rapes could reach 350 (National Institute of Justice, 2005).

As an illustration of sexual improprieties associated with college environments, the pervasiveness of rape and sexual assault has been prominent news at the University of Montana (Missoula, MT). In the spring of 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice launched an investigation of how sexual assault cases in Missoula have been handled by local police, examining 80 rape reports spanning three years. Rapes associated with the University of Montana are part of this federal review. In December of 2011, several male students were alleged to have drugged two female students and gang-raped them. An investigation has grown to include nine alleged sexual assaults from September 2010 through December 2011. Later, two more alleged assaults have been added to the list (Florio, 2012). The frequency of rapes and sexual assaults in Missoula reflect America's post-secondary rape culture.

To further illustrate the prevalence of sexual assault in American culture, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides the following statistics (2012):

- In a study of undergraduate women, 19% experienced attempted or completed sexual assault since entering college
- 29.9% of female rape victims were first raped between the ages of 11-17
- A 2011 survey of high school students found that 11.8% of girls from grades 9-12 reported that they were forced to have sexual intercourse at some time in their lives
- Among female rape victims, 51.1% of perpetrators were reported to be intimate partners; 12.5% family members; 40.8% acquaintances; and 13.8% strangers
- Rape in America results in about 32,000 pregnancies each year (CDC, 2012)

## America's Sexual Assault Culture

Dr. Patricia Rozee, a rape researcher at California State University, Long Beach, is co-editor of the award-winning textbook *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*. She has published extensively in the areas of sexual assault, violence against women, global rape, and women's fear of rape. Her recent work focuses on the areas of rape resistance and self-defense. She states:

Nowhere is the intersection of sex and power more evident than in the crime of rape. The sex-power relationship is the defining element of rape because men gain power over women by controlling and violating them sexually. Researchers know rape as a gendered crime, that is, a crime against women that is perpetrated by men. Most rape victims are female, a small percentage of about 2% are male, but virtually all rapists are male. Victim characteristics do not seem to predict whether a woman will be raped or not. Factors such as how she dresses, whether or not she acts "provocatively", whether she is at home or on the street, sexually active or not, are not related to becoming a rape victim. It appears that the best predictor of whether or not one will be raped is gender—being female! (Rozee, n.d).

Rozee postulates that the United States can be described as a rape culture, meaning the act of rape is normative; it is essentially a condoned behavior. American feminist and scholar Catherine MacKinnon, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School who specializes in sex equality, highlighted this idea by pointing out that rape in America is regulated, rather than prohibited (Rozee, n.d). MacKinnon discusses the regulation of rape in her book *Are Women Human?* In an interview with Stuart Jeffries from news source *The Guardian* about her book,

MacKinnon suggests that rape law enshrines rapists' points of view. In the most obvious sense, she explains:

...rapists are men and most legislators are men and most judges are men and the law of rape was created when women weren't even allowed to vote. So that means not that all the people who wrote it were rapists, but that they are a member of the group who do [rape] and who do for reasons that they share in common even with those who don't, namely masculinity and their identification with masculine norms and in particular being the people who initiate sex and being the people who socially experience themselves as being affirmed by aggressive initiation of sexual interaction (Jeffries, 2006).

MacKinnon believes consent in rape cases should be irrelevant. She provides her reasoning:

My view is that when there is force or substantially coercive circumstances between the parties, individual consent is beside the point...The British common law approach has tended to be that you need both force and absence of consent. If we didn't have so much pornography in society and people actually believed women when they said they didn't consent, that would be one thing. But that isn't what we've got (Jeffries, 2006).

Law, as well as society, doubt women's perspectives in rape cases. Katie Edwards, a doctoral candidate from Ohio University, Jessica Turchik, a post-doctorate research fellow at Stanford School of Medicine, and their research team address the regulation of rape in America's legal system and the cast of doubt upon women. They propose (2011) the legal system as an institution

that has a long history of perpetuating the belief that women lie about being raped, citing the “Hale Warning” as support for this position. Seventeenth century judge Sir Matthew Hale asserted that rape is an accusation easily to be made, hard to be proved, and harder to be defended by the party accused. This assertion became the “Hale Warning,” which was often read in courtrooms during rape cases up until the late twentieth century, casting suspicion on the testimonies of women who reported being raped. In modern court proceedings, similar language can be heard. The language used by defense attorneys in cross-examining the victim serves to recast the act as consensual or to paint victims as liars. A 1993 report prepared by the Senate Judiciary Committee found that less than one half of rape cases are convicted, 21% of convicted rapists are never sentenced to prison time, and 24% of convicted rapists receive time in local jails for less than 11 months (Edwards et al, 2011).

This judicial indifference reinforces the idea that rapists will not be held responsible for their actions. Diana Scully, the chair of the Women’s Studies Program at Virginia Commonwealth University whose research on rape, violence, and medicalization of women’s health has earned her national recognition, and Joseph Marolla, the executive director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Virginia Commonwealth University and a former sociology professor with 30 years of teaching and research experience, examined the perspectives of rapists in a study that included interviews with 114 convicted, incarcerated rapists (1985). Their data reveals that the overwhelming majority of these rapists believed they never would go to prison for rape. Some knew that women frequently do not report rape and of those cases that are reported, conviction rates are low, therefore making rapists feel more secure. These men perceive rape as a rewarding, low risk-act (Scully & Marolla, 1985).

The Scully and Marolla study implies that the incarcerated, convicted rapists made premeditated, purposeful choices to rape. A more recent 2011 study indicates that non-incarcerated and non-convicted perpetrators show similar premeditation. Antonia Abbey, psychology professor at Wayne State University specializing in sexual assault research, and Angela Jacques-Tiura, postdoctoral fellow at Wayne State University, found that men who commit sexual assault make choices about whom they target and under what circumstances. In a study of 474 interviews with single men, ages 18-35, in the Detroit Metropolitan area, 43% reported that they made a woman have sex against her wishes. Few participants reported using physical force as a tactic to obtain sex. Rather, most men used verbal coercion or the victim's impairment to obtain sex against her wishes. Compared to non-perpetrators in the study, men who used verbal coercion or the victim's incapacitation to obtain sex were more hostile toward women, had more stereotypic attitudes toward women, had more positive attitudes about casual sex, had more sexual partners, and reported more drinking problems. Many perpetrators used the victim's willingness to engage in some consensual sexual activities as justification for continuing to pressure her to have sex, feeling that consent to any sexual activity entitles them to whatever type of sex they want (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011).

Despite years of education and advocacy, rape myths are still commonly believed and the general public often has doubts about incidents that do not include the perpetrator's use of physical force. But as the Abbey and Jacques-Tiura study shows, verbal coercion and victim incapacitation are more common tactics to obtain sex against a woman's wishes. Perpetrators in

this study acknowledged that they knew the woman did not want to have sex, yet they made her anyway.

These descriptions of various tactics to obtain sex against a woman's wishes reinforce that sexual assault is normative in our culture, supporting the description of America as a rape culture.

Martha McCaughey, a professor of sociology at Appalachian State University specializing in gender and society, has also examined America's rape culture (1998). She states: "Our society is a rape culture because sexual violence (including all gender-motivated assaults such as incest, rape, battery, and murder) and the fear of violence are subtly accepted as the norm and because the prevailing cultural models of sexuality and gender perpetuate men's violence and women's fear" (McCaughey, 1998, p. 278). McCaughey explains that America's rape culture accepts men's aggression toward women as normal, sexy, and inevitable. If women refuse sexual advances, then our rape culture views the refusal as pathological, unnatural, and even aggressive. Men's bodies, according to this rape culture, make them good assailants; women's bodies make them particularly vulnerable (McCaughey, 1998).

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2006) provides insights as to how American rape culture and these stereotypical notions of male and female bodies in relation to sexuality are perpetuated. American society glamorizes and sexualizes violence. Often, sexual violence is ignored, excused, condoned, and even encouraged. Even though most people do not commit sexual violence—meaning it is not a normal behavior for most people—these kinds of norms imply a level of acceptance and a mentality of complacency about sexual violence. They create a toxic environment in which sexual violence can take place, inhibiting appropriate action and



condoning inappropriate inaction. Given this environment, it is not surprising that some people commit sexual violence and many bystanders do not speak up or intervene (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2006).

Rape culture, including the tolerance and lack of intervention from bystanders, affects the American population in general and is highlighted as a concern across American universities. The Women's Center at Marshall University in West Virginia defines rape culture as "an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women's rights and safety" (Marshall University Women's Center, 2012). Furthermore, Marshall's Women's Center described a cycle of fear as being a legacy of rape culture because most females live in fear of rape. This fear is how rape functions as a powerful means by which females are held in a subordinate position to males, even though many men do not rape and many women are never victims of rape. A few examples of social nuances that reinforce rape culture include blaming the victim ("she asked for it"), trivializing sexual assault ("boys will be boys"), pressure on men to "score," assuming only promiscuous women get raped, and sexually explicit jokes (Marshall University Women's Center, 2012).

### **Sexual Assault Culture in American University Environments**

Researchers at the University of North Dakota's Women and Gender Studies Program, led by Dr. Ann Burnett, the director of the program who specializes in how communication perpetuates a

date-rape culture, apply the concept of rape culture to college and university campuses, specifically examining date-rape cultures. Date-rape cultures are environments that support beliefs of rape tolerance and increase risk factors related to sexual violence. Many myths about rape abound, including notions such as “no” really means “yes,” the victim is promiscuous, and that women falsely report rape to protect their reputations or because they are angry at someone (Burnett et al, 2009).

Men’s athletics and fraternity cultures are more likely to project rape myths. For example, from qualitative interviews via nine focus groups at a mid-sized Midwestern university (five all-female focus groups, two all-male, and two co-ed), Burnett et al (2009) found that college men who played aggressive sports in high school are more likely to accept rape myths, more likely to accept violence, and more likely to engage in sexual coercion toward dating partners, compared to other college men (Burnett, et al, 2009). In fraternities, discussions and beliefs about women and sexuality imply a double-standard, in which men who have sex are “studs” and women who have sex are “sluts.” This double-standard is more prevalent among fraternity members compared to other college men (Burnett, et al, 2009).

The double-standard mentality among fraternity members is only a minor aspect of fraternity culture. A more in-depth analysis of the norms and dynamics of the social construction of fraternity brotherhood and its relation to rape come from Patricia Yancey Martin, professor at Florida State University who specializes in gender, women’s movement organizations, and sociology of the body, and Robert A. Hummer, a social demographer and professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Martin and Hummer (1989) developed a conceptual framework

from an initial case study of an alleged gang rape at Florida State University that involved four fraternity men and an 18-year-old coed. The rape took place on the third floor of a fraternity house and ended with the “dumping” of the woman in a hallway of a nearby fraternity house. During the time of sexual intercourse, the victim had been unconscious. Her blood-alcohol concentration was three times the legal limit for automobile driving. When found, she was comatose, suffered multiple abrasions, and had crude words and fraternity symbols written on her thighs. Martin and Hummer analyzed newspaper articles about the case (over 100 of them) and conducted open-ended interviews with a variety of respondents about the case and about fraternities, rapes, alcohol use, gender relations, and sexual activities on campus (Martin & Hummer, 1989).

After developing their conceptual framework based on the case just described, Martin and Hummer (1989) asserted that practices associated with fraternity brotherhood contribute to sexual coercion of women, including a preoccupation with loyalty, group protection and secrecy, use of alcohol as a weapon, involvement in violence and physical force, and an emphasis on competition and superiority. Individual fraternity members know the difference between right and wrong, but fraternity norms that emphasize loyalty, group protection, and secrecy often override standards of ethical correctness (Martin & Hummer, 1989). Fraternity norms and practices influence members to view the sexual coercion of women, a felony crime, as a sport, a contest, or a game. This sport is not played between men and women. It is played between men and men. Women are the pawns or prey in the inter-fraternity rivalry game. Women, or the mastery and control of them, are proof that a fraternity is successful (Martin & Hummer, 1989).

Sexual assaults on America's college campuses have made national news and have incited the interest of the general public. Joseph Shapiro of National Public Radio's (NPR) "Morning Edition" investigated myths that make it hard to stop campus rapes, bringing more national attention to these rapes (2012). He interviewed David Lisak. Lisak, a psychologist and researcher at the University of Massachusetts, is recognized as one of the nation's leading experts on non-stranger rape. Lisak states that students who commit rape on college campuses have similar characteristics to rapists in prison. In both groups, many are serial rapists. On college campuses, repeat predators account for nine out of every ten rapes. These rapists on campuses—just like men in prison for rape—look for the most vulnerable women. On a college campus, Lisak found freshmen females are most likely to be sexually assaulted, for predators perceive these freshman as being less experienced with alcohol and willing to take more risks due to wanting to be accepted. Furthermore, Lisak found these men do not think of themselves as rapists. Often, they have gotten to know their eventual victims. They do not use guns or knives. The basic weapon is alcohol. It is common for a rapist to rape a woman when she is coming in and out of consciousness or when she is unconscious (Shapiro, 2012). Martin and Hummer (1989) also highlight the role of alcohol, saying the use of alcohol to obtain sex from women on campuses, specifically fraternities, is pervasive; it is used as a weapon against sexual reluctance (Martin & Hummer, 1989).

Individual interviews with self-reported college-aged rapists, who have never been arrested or convicted for their crimes, reveal the specific details of rape methodology, including the use of alcohol as a weapon. Lisak and Roth (1990) studied 15 men, classified by self-report as rapists and attempted rapists, and compared them to a matched control group on standardized

instruments and content-coded interviews (Lisak & Roth, 1990). During individual interview sessions, subjects were asked to relay their life stories in their own words, including their relationships with women. A recap with participant “Charles” reveals his methodology as a rapist:

Charles described three incidents which conform to most legal definitions of rape. On two occasions he ‘picked out’ a woman at a fraternity party, ‘got her completely plastered,’ and carried her up to his room where he had intercourse with her while she was either unconscious or semiconscious. On another occasion he participated in a gang rape of a woman who was unconscious from alcohol, also following a party (Lisak & Roth, 1990).

The connection between alcohol and rape on campuses requires further analysis and discussion. According to a 2008 report on rape and violence, 75% of male students and 55% of female students involved in date rape had been drinking or using drugs (California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2008). A woman's alcohol consumption can increase the risk of sexual assault through her impairment of perceptions of sexual risk cues or by reducing or altering her effective responses to sexual aggression (Davis et al, 2004; Testa et al, 2003).

Debra Kaysen, clinical psychologist and researcher at the University of Washington, and her research team expand on the role of alcohol consumption and risk of sexual assault. They conducted a longitudinal examination of incapacitated rape and problem behavior in college-aged students at three west coast campuses. The study examined drinking behavior among

students who have experienced incapacitated rape before and after the incident, compared with students who have never experienced an incapacitated rape. The timing of incapacitated rape was strongly associated with changes in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems unrelated to sex (Kaysen et al, 2006).

Specifically, incapacitated rapes were concurrently and prospectively associated with more problematic drinking, and more problematic drinking was prospectively associated with the likelihood of experiencing an incapacitated rape. Incapacitated rapes also preceded increases in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems following the event. Alcohol use, then, is elevated prior to incapacitated rape and increases following victimization, meaning a habitual increase of alcohol consumption following an incapacitated rape could also increase the risk of repeated sexual assault. The study results suggest that early intervention following sexual assault may be useful to prevent problem drinking from escalating after the event. The results also highlight the importance of early prevention efforts to reduce high-risk drinking in college students as a means of also reducing the risk of alcohol-related rapes. Drinking less may act as a protective factor against incapacitated rapes by enabling women to perceive and respond to environmental cues indicating potential for assault (Kaysen et al, 2006).

Though alcohol is used as a weapon by some young male rapists, not all of them rely on alcohol. An interview with “Frank,” for instance, shows his motivation to rape as gaining dominance over a woman. When Frank was a senior in high school, he was alone with a girl in the basement of the girl’s home. They started wrestling playfully, but soon, the wrestling became more serious. Frank became aroused sexually and more aggressive. He started taking off the girl’s clothes. She

tried to stop him, but Frank was too big and too strong for her. He succeeded in “pinning” her with his body and had sex with her. Frank stated the same thing had happened more recently on at least two other occasions in college. “I enjoy the dominance involved in overwhelming the other,” Frank explained. “Often the girls I’ve done that to didn’t like it; sometimes they’ve been pretty angry, ya, but I did it anyway. I just like to” (Lisak & Roth, 1990).

Charles and Frank have never been arrested or convicted for their crimes. They are part of what Lisak calls “undetected rapists” (Lisak & Miller, 2002). RAINN, the nation’s largest anti-sexual violence organization, states that 54% of rapes/sexual assaults are not reported to police, according to a statistical average of the past five years. Those rapists never spend a day in jail, and when factoring in unreported rapes, only about 3% of rapists ever serve a day in jail (RAINN, 2009). To assess patterns among these undetected rapists, Lisak and Miller (2002) pooled data from four samples in which 1,882 men were assessed for acts of interpersonal violence, and 120 (6.4%) of those men’s self-reported acts met legal definitions of rape or attempted rape. This pool of 1,882 students came from a mid-sized, urban commuter university where students are diverse in both age and ethnicity. The mean age sample was 26.5 years, with a range of 18 to 71. The majority of the 120 undetected rapists (63.3%, 76 of 120) were repeat rapists, averaging 5.8 rapes each. Furthermore, the majority of them (58.3%) also committed other acts of interpersonal violence. The 120 rapists were responsible for 1,225 separate acts of interpersonal violence, including rape, battery, and child physical and sexual abuse (Lisak & Roth, 2002).

The evidence from the above study by Lisak and Roth (2002) indicates that a relatively small proportion of college men are responsible for a large number of rapes and other interpersonal crimes. It may provide at least a partial answer to the following paradox: while victimization surveys have established a substantial number of college women being sexually victimized, relatively small percentages of college men report committing acts of sexual violence. Among 1,882 sampled men, 76 (4%) individuals were responsible for an estimated 439 rapes and attempted rapes (Lisak & Roth, 2002).

Many repeat rapists in post-secondary environments are not being held responsible for their crimes, and the reason why may lie, in part, in their choice of victims. By attacking victims within their social networks, so-called acquaintances, and by refraining from the kind of violence likely to produce physical injuries in their victims, Lisak and Roth (2002) theorize that these rapists create “cases” in which victims are less likely to report and that prosecutors are less likely to prosecute (Lisak & Roth, 2002). Rape myths may also contribute to why rapists are not reported. Rape myths mute female victims before, during, and after the experience of a non-stranger rape. Both male and female students contribute to muting women, perpetuating a rape culture in which rape becomes part of the social milieu (Burnett et al, 2009). More specifically, half of all student victims do not label the incident as rape. According to the National Institute of Justice, in the majority of rape crimes on campus—between eighty and ninety percent—the victim and assailant know each other. Given the extent of non-stranger rape on college campuses, the institute concluded that it is not a surprise that the majority of victimized women do not define their experiences as rape (National Institute of Justice, 2005).



## **Socialization Factors Influencing Rape**

The socialization of women contributes to the disbelief that women can defend themselves. Socialization is the process by which people acquire behaviors essential for effective participation in society. It is the process of becoming a social being and is essential for the renewal of culture and the perpetuation of society (Hughes et al, 2002). Patricia Searles, a certified self-defense instructor, professor of sociology and women's studies at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, and author of scholarly books on rape and society, and Patti Follansbee, a professor of health science/family therapist at the State University New York at Brockport, assert (1984) that women have been socialized to believe they are the “weaker sex.” Females have been taught to be passive, dependent, emotional, helpless, inadequate, lady-like, inactive, and incapable of protecting themselves. They have been encouraged to avoid victimization by relying on men for protection, including fathers, boyfriends, husbands, brothers, and police officers—or other external agents, such as large barking dogs or burglar alarms (Searles & Follansbee, 1984).

Research by Sarah Murnen, a social psychologist at Kenyon College in Ohio who studies gender-related issues from a feminist, socio-cultural perspective, also supports the notion that females in America are socialized to be the “weaker” sex. Murnen et al (1989) posit that traditional feminine characteristics, such as passivity, submissiveness, nurturance, and helpfulness, potentially affect a woman's victimization experience. If a female experiences unwanted male advances, a feminine gender role might prohibit effective dealing with sexually coercive males. Although a female is taught to set the limits on a male's uncontrollable quest for sexual gratification, she is also taught to give in to his sexual desires, such as nurturing his needs

rather than her own. This conflicting socialization could limit the extent to which a female can indicate disinterest in unwanted sex. Furthermore, if a man is extremely persistent and aggressive, a woman's helplessness could contribute to her victimization by reducing her ability to thwart or escape coercive acts, including rape. If a woman is raped, she might remain silent because she is expected to be passive and private regarding her sexuality. Adversarial sex is likely the result of socialization practices that teach men to be dominant and sexually aggressive and women to be submissive and less sexual (Murnen et al, 1989).

In a study of 130 women from the University of Albany, Murnen et al (1989) provide support of the influence of traditional gender socialization roles prohibiting women from effectively dealing with unwanted male advances. The subjects completed a packet of questionnaires dealing with sexual experiences. Over half of the women wrote a description of unwanted sexual activity. Most of the episodes occurred while the women were in college. The most common description was an attempt at intercourse made by a man the woman knew at least moderately well. He most often used persuasion, to which the woman made no response. The dominant response of the women to an attempt at intercourse was to do nothing. The subjects exercised traditional roles in relationships where the man consistently persuades the woman to have sex, and she often eventually gives in to his persistence. Women viewed their feelings about sex as not as important as the man's feelings. In other incidents, a woman's nurturing behavior led to an experience with a coercive male. Descriptions of female passivity and nurturance are consistent with traditional behaviors expected of women (Murnen et al, 1989).

These traditional gender socialization patterns are gender-stereotyped behaviors. Murnen et al (1989) suggest that gender-stereotyped behaviors lead to under-communication, miscommunication, and perhaps sexual assault. Generally, it seems women are often trained to be ineffective communicators in sexual relations. Many women in the study perceived their sexual needs as less important than their male companions. Moreover, many blamed themselves if they experienced unwanted sex and then often continued relationships that were adversarial in nature. Women were most likely to blame themselves when they knew the person well and when they did not respond to the attempt at sex. On the other hand, women were able to blame the man if they did not know him well, if he used more obvious means of coercion, such as physical force, and if their response to his sexual advances were clear and vigorous (Murnen et al, 1989).

Issues of blame and consent are more recently addressed by M. Diane Clark, educational psychology professor at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC who specializes in dating and rape scripts, prevention of risky behavior in girls, and women's leadership, and Marjorie H. Carroll, psychology professor at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Clark and Carroll provided a date-rape scenario to 417 participants (292 women and 125 men) from a medium-sized regional public university in the eastern part of the United States and asked participants to describe the events of the rape. Participants wrote a rape script, an individual's perception of what typically occurs during a rape. For both men and women, the study results indicate that there is not a single rape script. The term "rape" connotes varying conceptualizations for different people (Clark & Carroll, 2007).

Generally, the men's script is more consistent with an experience of verbally coerced sexual intercourse where the man is verbally coercive, is unwilling to take no for an answer, and in which the woman gives in, although the experience upsets her. In contrast, the women's script is more consistent with an experience of unwanted sexual intercourse, in which the couple is described as being in a relationship where the man is ready to incorporate sex into the relationship and the woman eventually gives in because of concerns of negative consequences for the relationship if she does not (Clark & Carroll, 2007).

In addition to these general themes, other themes emerged. Women are placed in the position of being the recipients and gatekeepers of sex, whereas men are the initiators. Some female scripts reveal psychological barriers to physical resistance that women experience with unwanted sex, such as being emotionally overwhelmed. In contrast, some male scripts imply men are often wrongly accused of rape. If a woman does not escalate her resistance to a man's advances (either through repeated verbal resistance or physical resistance), he assumes consent, and the act is not rape. For instance, one male wrote: "It's not rape! She did not try to fight him off, she just said no. If she struggled it would be rape." Another man wrote: "Unless he held her down or continued as she said stop at least three times, it is not rape" (Clark & Carroll, 2007).

These study results indicate that the same event can be interpreted as a rape by the woman while the man believed the woman consented to all sexual activities. Differences in the socialization process of women and men likely contribute to these differences in acquaintance rape scripts. Clark and Carroll assert that the issue of consent and how it is defined by women and men clearly needs to be a focus of sexual education classes (Clark & Carroll, 2007).

In addition to addressing issues of consent in sexual education classes, a stronger presence of dating violence prevention and intervention programs in high school and college are needed. A history of dating violence is connected to women's victimization. In a longitudinal dating violence study conducted with female freshmen at a North Carolina university, Paige Hall Smith, director of the Center of Women's Health and Wellness at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and researchers found that the group of women most likely to be physically or sexually assaulted across the four years of college were those with a history of both childhood and adolescent victimization. Women physically victimized in adolescence but not in childhood were the second highest group at risk and were at greater risk for re-victimization in their freshman year. Women who were physically assaulted in any year of college were significantly more likely to be sexually assaulted that same year. The researchers conclude that if dating violence victimization can be prevented during adolescence, dating violence during college and possibly domestic violence in adulthood may also be prevented (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003).

Margaret Madden, a social psychologist specializing in gender issues and the current Provost and Vice president for Academic Affairs at the State University New York at Potsdam, and Thomas Sokol, a self-defense and community health instructor at the State University New York at Potsdam, (1997) also examined the socialization of women but linked it specifically to rape defense. They explained that socialization may make it difficult for women to imagine hurting another person; women may feel they have no right to hurt another. Therefore, it is crucial for self-defense instruction to convince women that they have the right to defend themselves with no

victim-blaming. This challenge of women's socialization requires recognition of the social context of rape and a discussion of sexual violence as a mechanism of social control (Madden and Sokol, 1997).

The socialization of men, as well as that of women, is important to analyze as another cultural factor that influences rape. Scully and Marolla (1985), who have studied convicted, incarcerated rapists, assert that traditional socialization encourages males to associate power, dominance, strength, virility, and superiority with masculinity and to associate submissiveness, passivity, weakness, and inferiority with femininity. Moreover, males are taught to have expectations about their level of sexual needs and expectations for corresponding female accessibility, which function to justify forcing sexual access. The justification of forced sexual access is supported by legal, social, and religious definitions of women as male property and sex as an exchange of goods. Socialization prepares women to be "legitimate" victims and men to be potential offenders. The United States is a rape culture because both genders are socialized to regard male aggression as a natural, normal part of sexual intercourse (Scully & Marolla, 1985).

Scully and Marolla (1985) further explain this sense of justification among rapists. In their interviews with convicted rapists, they found that many convicted rapists denied their crimes and attempted to justify their rapes by arguing that their victims had enjoyed themselves despite the use of a weapon and the infliction of serious injuries, or even death. In fact, many argued, they had been instrumental in making the victims' fantasies come true (Scully & Marolla, 1985). Some men justified rape because it can be used to put women in their place and as a method for proving their manhood. Others had the attitude that sex is a male entitlement; when a woman

says “no,” rape is a suitable method of conquering the “offending” object, the woman. Some men rape because they have learned that in American culture, sexual violence is rewarding (Scully & Marolla, 1985).

A feeling of reward from sexual violence is not limited to incarcerated rapists. They are also reaped in fraternities. Martin and Hummer (1989) suggest that fraternities create a sociocultural context in which the use of coercion in sexual relations with women is normative and in which the mechanisms to keep this pattern of behavior in check are minimal at best (Martin & Hummer, 1989).

As part of this sociocultural context, fraternities treat women as commodities, knowingly and intentionally using women for their benefit. As bait, beautiful, sociable women are believed to impress the right kind of pledges and give the impression that the fraternity can deliver this type of woman to its members. The use of women as servers is exemplified in the Little Sister program. Little Sisters are undergraduate women who are rushed and selected in a manner parallel to the recruitment of fraternity men. These women are not full fraternity members, however. They pay monthly dues to the fraternity and have well-defined roles. They are expected to attend social events, host fraternity parties, and hang around the house to take care of the men. In return, the women receive the protection of the men. The title of Little Sister reflects their subordinate status to the men, the Big Brothers, thus promoting a gender hierarchy on campus that fosters subordination and dependence in women while also encouraging sexual exploitation and the belief that it is acceptable (Martin & Hummer, 1989).

Rape myths are another cultural factor affecting the socialization of men and women, thus influencing rape. Edwards et al (2011) assert that rape myths are one way in which sexual violence has been sustained and justified throughout history. These myths permeate current legal, religious, and media institutions, despite their falsehoods. They not only influence societal attitudes towards rape victims, but also influence important decisions related to legal cases and how information is reported to the public. Rape myths include elements of victim blaming, perpetrator absolution, and minimization or rationalization of sexual violence (Edwards et al, 2011).

Some religious institutions, for example, have contributed to the myth that husbands cannot rape their wives. Some people use Biblical verses (“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” Ephesians 5:22 or “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does,” Corinthians 7:4) to justify sexually aggressive behaviors. Biblical scriptures such as the aforementioned are reflective of larger religious ideologies, making the church partially responsible for perpetuating the societal notion that husbands have conjugal rights to their wives (Edwards et al, 2011).

In addition to rape myths being apparent in adult relationships, the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault 2008’s report on rape and violence indicates that rape myths are evident in early adolescence. A survey of 1,965 eighth and ninth graders indicated the following:

- 11% agreed that if a girl said “no” to sex, she usually really meant “yes”
- Nearly 27% agreed that girls who get drunk at parties or on dates deserve whatever happens to them



- Over 46% felt that being raped was sometimes the victim's fault
- 40% agreed that girls who wear sexy clothes are asking to be raped
- Over 33% felt that they would not be arrested if they forced a dating partner to have sex
- More than 20% agreed that when a girl wears sexy clothes on a date, it means she wants to have sex
- 36% agreed that when a girl agrees to go into a bedroom on a date, it means she wants to have sex
- Over 15% said that forcing your date to have sex is acceptable in some circumstances
- Over 7% said it is acceptable for a boy to force a girl to have sex if she got the boy sexually excited (California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2008).

A lack of reporting sexual assault, in addition to rape myths, is commonplace among American youth. According to the National Survey of Adolescents, 86% of sexual assaults among adolescents are unreported. In a sample of 263 adolescent females who reported unwanted sexual experiences in the 2006 National Survey of Adolescents, the most often cited reason for not disclosing or delaying disclosure was embarrassment. The closer the relationship to the perpetrator (knowing the perpetrator or the perpetrator being a family member) made immediate disclosure (within a month of occurrence) unlikely (California Coalition of Sexual Assault, 2008).

Pornography is another representation of rape myths. Andrea Dworkin, a feminist and writer best known for her criticism of pornography, asserts in her book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981) that pornography portrays sexual violence as something that is desired and

enjoyed by women. Pornography fosters rape myths and leads to violence against women (Dworkin, 1981). Edwards et al (2011) support the notion that pornography influences rape myths, but clarify this support to indicate that pornography itself is not the sole causative factor for aggressive tendencies or rape myth acceptance. Rather, it serves to bring these beliefs to the surface and reinforce such already held misogynistic beliefs (Edwards et al, 2011).

Rape myths can have a powerful effect on the legal system. Edwards et al (2011) explain that within the legal system, if jurors and judges believe rape myths, offenders may be more likely to be acquitted. Rape myths influence jurors' stereotypical views of rape. For example, if victims do not sustain physical injuries from an assault or if a weapon is not used, such factors are often considered evidence that the victim is lying and that the alleged perpetrator is innocent. Jury members' attitudes toward rape (i.e. women are responsible for preventing rape, women bring rape upon themselves) have been found to be the single best predictor of their decisions in rape case verdicts. Furthermore, any evidence of victim drinking, drug use, or adultery leads to disbelief of perpetrator guilt (Edwards et al, 2011).

### **Sexual Assault Awareness and Solutions**

To address and prevent sexual assault in America, sexual assault awareness seminars on campuses and in communities can help people understand why our rape culture persists and how awareness can help women alter their behaviors to avoid certain situations that may result in sexual assault or rape. Women can learn preventative behaviors to better protect themselves. For example, runners may be encouraged to carry pepper spray and run only in daylight. College students may become more cautious about getting intoxicated at parties in which they have few

reliable friends to help them get home safely, thus avoiding situations conducive to date rape (RAINN, 2009). This awareness approach focuses on women's behaviors, whereas other approaches may focus more on changing men's behaviors.

Organizations such as *Men Stopping Violence* (MSV), for example, aim to reeducate men to stop their acts of violence. Douglas, Bathrick, and Perry (2008) discuss the community-centered approach of *Men Stopping Violence*. MSV seeks the involvement of men identified as batterers, as well as men who are not. MSV educates men about the causes of male violence against women. It promotes a shift of focus from intervention to prevention strategies that insist that all men can become potential change agents. By being community-centered, MSV aims to change social norms; it enables men to support each other in the process of change and to hold each other accountable for abusive and sexist behaviors. An end of violence toward women must incorporate a shift of social norms toward nonviolent, nonsexist, and non-patriarchal mentalities (Douglas et al., 2008). Changing men's behaviors and attitudes might, in the long-run, help limit the negative effects of America's rape culture on women.

Regarding the college example discussed earlier, The University of Montana developed an awareness program for students to address the highlighted attention on sexual assault. PETS—Personal Empowerment Through Self Awareness—is the cornerstone of the university's campaign to address issues of sexual violence. As an online tutorial, it is designed to target the entire university campus. All students are required to complete the PETS online tutorial and quiz before being able to register for classes. PETS consists of informative, educational videos that deal with sexual assault and rape. Topics covered in the tutorial include state law as it

pertains to rape and sexual assault, cultural contributors to such crimes, alcohol, gender stereotypes, what constitutes consent, and bystander intervention (The University of Montana, n.d.).

Women's self-defense is another possible preventative action to discourage America's rape culture. Weitlauf, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine and researcher on women's self-defense, (2000) states that physical self-defense training can be a highly successful method of empowering women. It gives women greater personal control over their own physical safety and well-being. Participants of self-defense training view themselves as far more able to discern danger, control their emotions in the event of an attack, discourage an assault, and physically defend themselves by escaping from or disabling an assailant (Weitlauf et al, 2000). Self-defense will not directly stop perpetrators from targeting women, but it emphasizes prevention by enabling women to thwart an attack, preparing women physically and mentally to effectively respond to violent situations, to immobilize their attackers, and then run to safety.

### **Self-Defense as a Means to Minimize America's Sexual Assault Culture**

Rape would no longer be a problem in America if men stopped raping. The likeliness of this occurring, however, is unrealistic. Programs that re-educate and socialize masses of men to stop rape could take decades or longer to show successful outcomes. In the meantime, women's self-defense might serve as a legitimate way to minimize America's rape culture, preparing women physically and mentally to defend themselves and avoid situations that increase the risk of rape. Self-defense is a set of awareness, assertiveness, verbal confrontation skills, safety strategies, and

physical techniques that enable people to successfully escape, resist, and survive violent attacks. Self-defense training can increase people's options and help them prepare responses to slow down, de-escalate, or interrupt an attack. Like any tool, the more people know about it, the more informed they are to make a decision and use it (National Coalition Against Sexual Assault via City of Portland, Oregon, 2013).

An important clarification is necessary when discussing women's self-defense. Whereas the typical understanding of self-defense is associated with the physical means of protection, most advocates of women's self-defense generally consider both physical and mental (holistic) preparedness strategies for combating sexual assault. Unlearning femininity, for example, is a mental necessity for enhancing the physical aspect of self-defense. McCaughey (1998) states that "feminine hesitance and perceptions of women's physical incompetence relative to men are part of the parcel of rape culture because they help men win verbal and physical fights with women, and because they help rationalize those attacks" (McCaughey, 1998, p. 281). But by forcing women to act in unfeminine ways through self-defense, women learn to make their aggression, and the femininity that prevents it, conscious (McCaughey, 1998).

To resist a rape culture, Rozee supports women's self-defense. Self-defense mastery, she explains, is a radical act. It confronts rape culture by removing men's control over women's physical bodies. The sex-power relationship is a defining element of rape, and self-defense challenges it, empowering women by reducing the constant fear of rape. That constant fear acts to imprison women in their homes and keeps them in unhealthy relationships with male "protectors." Most importantly, self-defense emboldens women by increasing their freedom of action—freedom to go, to do, and to be (Rozee, n.d).

Though Rozee mentions self-defense mastery, the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault asserts that it does not take years to learn women's self-defense. A basic course can offer enough concepts and skills for women to develop self-protection strategies that they can continuously build upon. Self-defense is not karate or martial arts training. It does not require years of study to perfect. Women have successfully improvised and prevented an assault, even without having taken a structured class. Self-defense training increases women's awareness, physical-protective options, and preparedness (National Coalition Against Sexual Assault via City of Portland, Oregon, 2013).

McCaughey also advocates women's self-defense as a way to combat America's rape culture (1998). She states: "Self-defense not only teaches women new responses with which to thwart assaults; it challenges basic assumptions—rape myths—about men's and women's bodies" (McCaughey, 1998, p. 278). Her perspective acknowledges the joint importance of teaching women self-defense and of society changing its views toward women. Self-defense is a catalyst for that change. Such classes typically challenge rape myths. Dr. Leanne Brecklin, a professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Illinois, proclaims that women who have taken self-defense and assertiveness training will "evidence less rape myth acceptance, fewer adversarial sexual beliefs, less sexual conservatism, and less acceptance of interpersonal violence" (Brecklin, 2004).

## **Current Status of Women's Self-Defense**

### *Barriers to Women Enrolling in Self-Defense Courses*

Numerous obstacles hinder women from enrolling in and committing to self-defense classes. Hollander (2010) provides insight as to why women do or do not enroll in self-defense classes. She gathered data from a study of women enrolled in university classes. Of 292 participants, only 18 (6.2%) said they had never considered taking self-defense training. Most women, then, demonstrated an interest in self-defense training. For those interested in self-defense, common barriers included logistical issues, such as time, expense, and the availability of classes (Hollander, 2010).

Such insight, however, only represents surface-level explanations for women being interested in, but not participating in, self-defense. A deeper look at barriers to self-defense reveals more complex reasons for resistance to enrolling. Hollander (2009) examines three forms of resistance to women learning self-defense: 1) the belief that women's resistance is impossible, 2) the belief that resistance is too dangerous for women, and 3) the belief that resistance risks blaming the victim for the assault. Her article uses her own experiences and research as a foundation and cites other scholars' and practitioners' similar experiences and research to aid in understanding the extent and the sources of resistance to women's self-defense (Hollander, 2009). A more detailed description of the three forms of resistance identified by Hollander warrants further discussion and is provided in the following sections.

*It's Impossible:* First, several opponents believe it is impossible for women to defend themselves against male violence. Hollander experienced this resistance personally when her

grant application for women's self-defense research was denied. One member of the review committee argued that research on women's self-defense was not worth funding, indicating that "women are not capable of defending themselves against men's violence" (Hollander, 2009, p. 576). Hollander explains how both men and women react in disbelief whenever women take up self-defense classes. Men, in particular, often laugh about the idea of a female fighting off a man. Her qualitative interviews with women enrolled in self-defense reveal the following responses from others:

- "My dad made fun of me"
- "All of my friends made fun of me. They kept telling me that it wasn't an effective way of protecting myself and [that] I would be better off taking martial arts of some kind"
- "My female friends were supportive, my Greek female friends were intimidated or unaffected, my male friends were skeptical or would joke about it, my family just thought it was 'just another one of those feminist women's studies things'" (Hollander, 2009).

*It's Too Dangerous:* Some opponents believe that if women learn self-defense, they will become overconfident, foolhardy, aggressive, or lose control, and the consequences will be dangerous. Women may put themselves in risky situations, or they may start abusing men. Women will get hurt, and the result will be more danger for women, not less.

(Hollander, 2009). Hollander counters this "too dangerous" rationale, highlighting the stereotypical view it promotes. Such a view suggests that women are not intelligent



enough, street smart enough, or rational enough to apply their knowledge of self-defense judiciously (Hollander, 2009).

Some women from Hollander's research viewed self-defense as dangerous to themselves because they feared that they might actually enjoy using self-defense skills. Self-defense was unacceptable because it meant learning to be violent. One female interviewee said, "Women need to be safe from violence without having to learn self-defense, and we must develop better means of conflict resolution than physical violence" (Hollander, 2009, p. 579). Hollander clarifies that these fears—that women's resistance is dangerous to both themselves and to society more generally—prevent women from learning self-defense and deter people interested in prevention from supporting self-defense. These fears, consequently, help maintain existing gender hierarchies, which could be threatened if women were to effectively defend themselves against men (Hollander, 2009).

Regarding women's fears of participating in self-defense because it implies learning to become violent, McCaughey (2000) acknowledges that violence is inherent in self-defense, but such violence is positive, necessary, and situational. She explains:

I insist that we admit that self-defense trains women for violence in certain circumstances, should they [those circumstances] arrive. We need not hide our ability and willingness to use violence to protect ourselves, any more than we should hide our desire for intimacy without intimidation, or our insistence on sex with consent...This does not mean teaching women to become bullies or perpetrators of violent crime. It means that we uphold

women's legal right to self-defense violence...Embracing women's right to self-defense violence is embracing women's status as equal citizens who have boundaries and lives worth defending (McCaughey, 2000, p. 184).

A woman fearful of her own potential violence may need to ask herself a question: "Is my life worth defending?"

*It's Victim Blaming:* Critics of self-defense have argued that encouraging women to protect themselves implies women are responsible for protecting themselves and are responsible for controlling men's violence (Hollander, 2009, pp. 580-581). Women do not want to be blamed for men's violence, so by not advocating self-defense, women can avoid being blamed. Jill Cermele, professor of psychology at Drew University specializing in gender violence, women's resistance, and the efficacy of self-defense training for women, explains that victim-blaming involves the fear that women will be responsible for the assaults against them by virtue of failing to act or failing to act effectively, thus contributing to our culture of victim-blaming as well as increasing the level of self-blame that victims or survivors may experience (Cermele, 2004).

Patricia McDaniel, social and behavioral science professor at the University of California, San Francisco, and researcher of gender violence, also discusses victim-blaming. In her article "Self defense training and women's fear of crime," she states:

As self-defense training becomes more popular, it is important to be aware of the danger of it becoming another way in which women are forced to assume responsibility for being raped, and even for preventing rape. Women may be told that if they want to stop rape, they must learn to defend themselves, instead of men being told to stop raping (McDaniel, 1993, p. 45).

Rather than women learning to defend themselves, this stereotypical notion of American society holds that men must stop raping and abusing women. Learning self-defense is not prevention, according to this notion; only true prevention would be to stop men's violence. Hollander (2009) disagrees, saying, "I believe that learning self-defense is a form of prevention and even, in some ways, a form of primary prevention... Good self-defense classes, and good instructors, do not blame women for their own victimization" (Hollander, 2009, p. 582).

In addition to the three forms of resistance to self-defense that Hollander details, another form of resistance is offered by Searles and Berger. Women are resistant to enrolling in and staying with self-defense classes when they are taught by men and based on the martial arts model. Searles and Berger (1987) describe this type of class and why it is unsuitable for women. According to them, this type of self-defense is taught in co-ed groups. It involves highly stylized techniques that take years of practice to master. Instructors typically lack sensitivity to women's issues and are frequently paternalistic. The co-ed situation can make it difficult for women to move beyond the traditional gender-role expectations. Often, women students are likely to feel embarrassed or

uncomfortable exerting themselves physically with men present. They may be more likely to assume a passive, helpless role in the classroom (Searles & Berger, 1987, p. 64).

In contrast to Searles and Berger's description of the negatives of a martial-arts based self-defense class, Amy Angleman, researcher and professor at the Center for Psychological Studies at Nova Southeastern University in Florida, and her research team offer a more recent and positive discussion on the traditional martial arts-based model. A widespread public perception is that traditional martial arts training is geared toward men, not women, because women are less able to perform many of the techniques due to strength limitations. Grandmaster Yoshihiki Shinzato disagrees in his interview with the researchers. Shinzato is one of the top Okinawan karate and self-defense instructors in the United States. He is a fifth-degree black belt with international recognition. Based on decades of teaching experiences, Shinzato explains that physical strength is not the most important factor during violent encounters. Rather, speed, flexibility, and determination are more critical components in determining the outcome of an assault. Women, he asserts, are quite capable of performing advanced martial arts techniques. Strength helps, but it is not the most important element of training for self-protection (Angleman et al, 2009).

As opposed to being a barrier, Shinzato views the traditional martial arts model for self-defense as advantageous. According to Shinzato, a person will generally receive better quality training in self-defense courses based on the traditional martial arts model. One of the strengths to this model is that a good instructor will tailor the training to individuals, teaching techniques that are suited to peoples' unique physical capabilities. Other self-defense courses are too much of a

“one-size-fits-all” type of program. It is important for both men and women learning self-defense techniques to have a limited number of techniques in their repertoire. Mastering a few automatic techniques is much more effective than having knowledge of an extensive number that are not executed fluidly. However, Shinzato underscores that no matter the type of self-defense course, a key variable to increasing self-protection is consistent and diligent practice and repetition, enabling responses to be automatic (Angleman et al, 2009).

### *Positive Benefits of Self-Defense*

Traditional views discourage women from defending themselves in the event of an attack, claiming women will be hurt worse by the assailant if they try to resist. However, Madden and Sokol (1997) argue that resistance is effective. Their review of literature discusses feminist pedagogical issues concerning whether self-defense instruction methods and content of courses truly result in the empowerment of women. They conclude that the use of self-protection reduces the odds of being raped. More forceful resistance is related to less severe abuse. Women should be encouraged to scream and fight when physically attacked. They should be encouraged to learn self-defense, and more opportunities for learning these skills should be made available to all females of all ages (Madden & Sokol, 1997). Madden and Sokol (1997) also discuss mental benefits for women who have learned self-defense. They indicate, for example, that female self-defense students generally reported feeling more active, brave, in control, independent, and less worried about being home alone or out after dark. Women reported increased use of vigilant behavior in potentially dangerous situations, as well as increased confidence in their ability to respond assertively to assault (Madden and Sokol, 1997).

Jocelyn Hollander, a professor of sociology at the University of Oregon specializing in research on self-defense training and the prevention of violence against women, further supports the positive benefits of women taking self-defense lessons. Hollander (2009) asserts that self-defense training is one of the most promising interventions to prevent violence against women. Her research entails studies that supported her assertion. For example, an analysis of data from the National Crime Victimization Survey found that there was an 81% reduction in the likelihood of completed rape for women who used physical protective action, such as physically fighting or attempting to flee (Hollander, 2009). Hollander discussed studies showing that forceful resistance (fighting), non-forceful physical resistance (fleeing or pulling away), and forceful verbal resistance (yelling) are all associated with rape avoidance. Moreover, women who fight their attackers do not sustain greater injury compared to those who choose not to resist (Hollander, 2009).

The positive benefits of self-defense are not limited to the physicality of being able to resist an attacker and sustaining fewer injuries. Self-defense also benefits women on a cognitive level. Hollander (2009) discusses the mental benefits of learning self-defense, including “reduced fear, increased self-confidence, more comfortable interactions with others, more positive feelings about one’s own body, and a general sense of empowerment and self-worth” (Hollander, 2009, p. 582). Julie Weitlauf, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine and researcher on women’s self-defense, and her colleagues (2000) further argue the benefit by stating physical self-defense training can be a highly successful method of empowering women. It gives them greater personal control over their own physical safety and well-being. Participants of self-defense training viewed themselves as far more able to discern

danger, control their emotions in the event of an attack, discourage an assault, and physically defend themselves from by escaping from or disabling an assailant (Weitlauf et al, 2000).

Furthermore, women's self-defense is beneficial for women post-assault. A study of 1,623 female college sexual assault survivors analyzed assault characteristics and experiences related to women's enrollment in post-assault training. Women who participated in post-assault training were more than twice as likely to label their experience as rape and were more likely to disclose their assault. Post-assault training participants experienced less current anxiety symptoms than non-participants (Brecklin & Ullman, 2004).

#### *Various Approaches in Teaching Women's Self-Defense*

Strategies for teaching women's self-defense have evolved over the past several decades. In the 1970s, the police-sponsored course was popular. Searles and Follansbee (1984) explain how this type of course advises women to limit their mobility and avoid potentially dangerous situations. Not physically fighting back when attacked is encouraged. Rather, women are to engage in a passive resistance, such as telling an offender that they are menstruating or playing along until they can escape. This police-based approach insists that resistance may make the offender angrier and increase the chances of him hurting the woman. Emphasis is on teaching releases, such as methods for women to remove themselves from an attacker's grasp. Focus is not on teaching the skills necessary to incapacitate an attacker (Searles & Berger, 1987). Police-sponsored classes stressing passive resistance are an outmoded approach. Research challenges the passive resistance notion, finding the more forcefully a woman resists, the less abuse she will

endure. In more recent times, women are encouraged to scream and fight back when attacked physically (Madden & Sokol, 1997; Brecklin, 2004; Hollander, 2009).

The police-sponsored courses of the 1970s featured males as primary instructors, and whether or not men should teach women self-defense is debated in the literature. Madden and Sokol (1997) explain the pro-male side of the debate. Men should instruct because the training needs to be as realistic as possible. Students need to practice techniques against larger male attackers to be convinced that the techniques are effective. Male instructors need to be present to be the targets (Madden & Sokol, 1997). However, Madden and Sokol (1997) also acknowledge the need for a strong female figure, saying a woman should be the primary instructor. Supplementary male instructors need to be very careful about how they deliver advice to female instructors or students. Students must be discouraged from nurturing the male after they attack him. Though he deserves credit for the demanding physical role, if students try to nurture him, they ignore their own feelings about their actions. Following the physical self-defense lessons, male instructors should be asked to leave the room while the primary female instructor engages the female students in a group discussion (Madden & Sokol, 1997).

In contrast, Searles and Follansbee (1984) criticize the presence of any men in a women's self-defense class. The ideal self-defense course, they say, is team-taught by women for women. A women-only situation provides an atmosphere in which a woman can feel good about her body and about physical activity. The atmosphere must be supportive and noncompetitive. Instructors must create an environment that does not encourage comparative judgments between participants, but where all work together to help each other develop and grow (Searles &



Follansbee, 1984). This all-female environment, however, lacks practicality. As Madden and Sokol (1997) say, female students need to practice techniques against a larger attacker to be convinced that the techniques are effective (Madden & Sokol, 1997). The presence of any male needs to be well-defined with practical purpose.

Also aligning with the no-men-present philosophy of teaching, a feministic approach to women's self-defense focuses on psychological skills, rather than physical technique. According to Searles and Berger (1987), assertiveness training and a focus on early detection and avoidance of danger are highlighted in a feminist approach. The assumption is that even highly developed physical skills provide little protection if women do not have the mental preparedness that would enable them to put the physical skills to use. These courses seek to help women understand how traditional gender-role socialization can make them easy victims by teaching them to be passive and nonassertive, to take responsibility for others' feelings, to feel uncomfortable and unfeminine when exerting themselves physically, and to feel embarrassed or guilty about being victimized. Feminist self-defense is designed to help women develop self-confidence and self-worth, which would in turn enable them to act effectively in their own defense. It teaches women to have the right to harm an assailant (Searles & Berger, 1987). Despite the positive aspects of developing women's self-confidence, self-worth, assertiveness, and ability to detect and avoid danger, the feministic approach to women's self-defense, as Madden and Sokol have pointed out, also lacks the practicality of working with and defending against the male body.

Rather than focusing on gender, however, the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault states that the quality of a class depends on the knowledge, attitude, and philosophy of the instructor,

not necessarily on gender. The most important aspect is that the instructor, male or female, gears training to suit individual students' strengths and abilities (National Coalition Against Sexual Assault via City of Portland, Oregon, 2013).

### *Characteristics of Effective Women's Self-Defense Classes*

Redefining gender and femininity through self-defense characterizes an effective women's self-defense course. Sociology professor and scholar De Welde of Florida Gulf Coast University (2003) conducted ethnographic research on the process of subverting gender through self-defense classes, offering a much more complex analysis of how self-defense training affects women on multiple levels. Her research spanned thirty-six months when she participated as a teaching assistant in nineteen different four-day women's self-defense classes. These intense self-defense courses aimed to equip women with efficient and effective skills, using power inherent in the female body. Through learning self-defense, these specific classes also worked on a cognitive level, helping women redefine femininity (De Welde, 2003).

Self-defense, in the context of De Welde's study, encompasses a realm of resistance that challenges traditional conceptions of "woman" and "femininity." Through narratives of powerful women, "self-defense offers a practical way, though not the only way, for women to become engaged and empowered in their lives. It provides a space for women to accept their actions as agentic, thereby challenging traditional gender narratives of women as non-agents" (De Welde, 2003, p. 250). Through self-defense training, women in the study started to view themselves as powerful, in control, and as having expanded choices in restrictive and dangerous situations. In other words, self-defense helped develop women's self-agency, their conceptual understanding

of self as an agent capable of shaping motives, behaviors, and future possibilities (De Welde, 2003).

De Welde (2003) identifies three stages in participants' self-empowering transformation:

- 1) *Reframing Victimization*: In this stage, the participants learned to see and label themselves as victims. Instead of interpreting others' behaviors as acceptable when they in fact were not, these women shifted their understandings of situations so that they exercised choice in how they would respond to someone invading their space or forcing their desires on them. These women learned to exercise the "I am in control" narrative. They learned to accept responsibility for their expected complacency and then to shift their interpretations of situations to reflect their control.
  
- 2) *Liberating the Self*: This stage reflects power and control. Participants learned to display agency in volleying between narratives of femininity and of defender; their reconstructed self-images reflected both these qualities. Rather than rebuffing all aspects of their femininity, the women liberated themselves from pieces of its discourse that would compromise their new defender self-narratives. They learned a positive attitude toward the self, which involves engaging in self-honor, self-respect, and self-love. The self-defense instructor's aim was to prompt the women to free themselves from negative self-descriptions. In other words, the women learned that they were worth defending.

3) *Enabling the Body*: In this stage, self-defense techniques help to enable the body by focusing on the potential strength of women's lower bodies, namely their hips. Though the instructor taught upper body strikes and blocks, she emphasized using kicks to shins and knees as the most effective stopping techniques. Enabling the body helped the participants to incorporate both defender and feminine aspects into their new self-narratives. As a result, women's self-identities could contradict and complement each other. Women could embody multiple traits at once, meaning women could be both victims and resisters, defenders and aggressors, and powerless and powerful. Self-defense training can offer a framework for women to fight against the assumptions of a sexually hierarchical society (De Welde, 2003).

By reframing victimization, liberating the self, and enabling the body, the female participants in the intensive, four-day self-defense courses learned more than just self-defense skills; they analyzed how their socialization to be feminine contributed to vulnerability and danger in their lives. A course encouraging a reconceptualization of what it means to be feminine helped women participants transform their thinking about not only how to defend themselves, but also what constituted their selves that are worth defending (De Welde, 2003).

The course described by De Welde stresses the importance of cognitive changes for women learning self-defense, and other researchers support this emphasis. Searles and Follansbee, for example, (1984) explain how an effective self-defense class requires cognitive intervention: "It is not enough to teach women *how* to defend themselves. They must also be trained and motivated

to overcome socialized tendencies toward passivity, helplessness, low self-esteem, and self-sacrifice” (Searles & Follansbee, 1984).

To incorporate a cognitive intervention, an effective self-defense class involves a great deal of talking, according to Madden and Sokol (1997). Women need to express emotions that inhibit them from being convinced they can perform the physical techniques. When concluding a lesson, instructors need to ask female participants how they felt about the exercise. Limiting class size to about 10 is important for allowing time for a discussion of feelings (Madden & Sokol, 1997).

In addition to incorporating a cognitive intervention, a good self-defense class is designed to prepare women to deal both physically and psychologically with sexual and other forms of violent assault. Women’s self-defense, according to Searles and Follansbee, is approximately 70-percent psychological. A good self-defense course provides a framework within which women can begin to understand both cultural attitudes toward women and female gender-role expectations, including how these attitudes have contributed to their victimization. A comprehensive course must provide considerable opportunity for group discussion (Searles & Follansbee, 1984). For decades, group discussion has been repeatedly highlighted as an essential component to an effective women’s self-defense course (Madden & Sokol, 1997; Searles & Follansbee, 1984).

Another feature of an effective self-defense course, similar to discussion, is a verbal emphasis on women never being responsible for assaults. A good self-defense class, says Hollander (2009), requires instructors to not blame women for their own victimization. Instructors should

emphasize that women are never responsible for an assault. The responsibility for assault lies squarely with the perpetrator. Effective instructors make clear that “the fact that women can and do resist men’s violence does not mean that *all* women should resist *all* kinds of violence in *all* situations or that women should be blamed if they choose not to resist or are unsuccessful in doing so” (Hollander, 2009, p. 583).

The National Coalition Against Sexual Assault supports this non-blaming mentality, stating that a woman is not at fault for an assault no matter her decision in a self-defense situation and no matter what action she takes or does not take. A woman’s decision to survive the best way she can must be respected. Good self-defense classes should not be used as judgment against a victim or survivor. Furthermore, good self-defense classes emphasize that women do not ask for, cause, invite, or deserve to be assaulted. Women and men sometimes exercise poor judgment about safety behavior, but that does not make them responsible for the attack. Responsibility rests solely with attackers who use violence to overpower, control, and abuse others (National Coalition Against Sexual Assault via City of Portland, Oregon, 2013).

McCaughey (1998) discusses qualities of an effective self-defense instructor to nurture a class that suits women’s needs. She views femininity as an obstacle to women exerting physical aggression. Her interviews with self-defense instructors reveal a consensus that female students “need to get over being nice, a fear of guns, a fear of hurting people, a physical hesitancy, and their own disbelief in their physical power” (McCaughey, 1998, p. 282). Good self-defense instructors help women to reimagine their bodies as active agents capable of fighting, yelling, and killing. To do this, they share women’s stories of triumph and survival, attempting to undo

women's beliefs that they cannot fight (McCaughey, 1998). Fighting against socialized femininity is as important as learning physical defense techniques.

In sum, a good self-defense course is based on intelligence, not muscle. It covers critical thinking about self-defense strategies, assertiveness, powerful communication skills, and easy-to-remember physical techniques. Instructors respect and respond to women's fears and concerns. Instruction is based on the belief that women can act competently, decisively, and take action for their own protection. An effective course offers the tools for enabling women to connect with their own strength and power (National Coalition Against Sexual Assault via City of Portland, Oregon, 2013).

## Conclusion

This literature review establishes the prevalence of sexual assault in the United States and discusses the various preventative strategies available to counter America's rape culture.

Furthermore, this project examines the factors impacting sexual violence and describes the current status of women's self-defense en route to advocating women's self-defense as a viable approach to minimizing sexual assault in American life.

The prevalence of rape and sexual assault in American culture is evidenced by the following description referenced elsewhere in this project:

- 232,960 American women were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006
- American women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes each year
- A woman is sexually assaulted every two minutes in the United States
- One out of every six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime
- In a study of undergraduate women, 19% experienced attempted or completed sexual assault since entering college
- 29.9% of female rape victims were first raped between the ages of 11-17
- A 2011 survey of high school students found that 11.8% of girls from grades 9-12 reported that they were forced to have sexual intercourse at some time in their lives
- Rape in America results in about 32,000 pregnancies each year



Numerous cultural factors influence and sustain America's rape culture, which include the pervasiveness of rape myths, traditional socialization of women as the "weaker" sex, the discouragement of women hurting another person, and gender stereotyped behaviors leading to ineffective communications among the sexes. Furthermore, the socialization of men to associate power, dominance, strength, and superiority with masculinity, the belief that sexual violence is rewarding, the belief that self-defense is a form of unacceptable violence, and fraternity (university) culture treating women as commodities also support America's rape culture.

An investigation of the current status of women's self-defense classes shows numerous positive benefits of women's self-defense. For example, women who fight their attackers do not sustain greater injury compared to those who choose not to resist (Hollander, 2009). Female self-defense students generally report feeling more active, brave, in control, independent, and less worried about being home alone or out after dark (Madden and Sokol, 1997). Participants of self-defense training view themselves as far more able to discern danger, control their emotions in the event of an attack, discourage an assault, and physically defend themselves from by escaping from or disabling an assailant (Weitlauf et al, 2000). Yet, despite these benefits, numerous barriers persist, keeping women from enrolling in and committing to self-defense classes. Barriers include the stereotypical view that it is impossible for women to defend themselves against men, self-defense is too dangerous for women, and self-defense promotes victim blaming.

These barriers, however, are social attitudes toward women that can be changed. Introducing females to self-defense during adolescence, for example, may help to make self-defense more comfortable for females and more socially acceptable. Community-based self-defense programs

could help establish women's self-defense as a normal and positive preventative action to minimize America's rape culture. These programs could build upon the effective characteristics of current self-defense courses, such as the use of a primary female instructor who engages students in group discussions, the use of supplementary male instructors who serve as realistic attackers for women during practice, cognitive emphasis on women not being responsible for assaults, cognitive emphasis on women being worth defending, and cognitive discussions that help women redefine "woman" and "femininity."

Awareness is an important part of women's self-defense. A woman's alcohol consumption is associated with an increased risk of sexual assault, reducing her ability to respond effectively to sexual aggression (Davis et al, 2004; Testa et al, 2003). A woman's self-defense skills may not be effective when she is under the influence of alcohol; therefore, incorporating a cognitive emphasis on the dangers of alcohol-facilitated rape of incapacitated women is also important in a self-defense class.

With a woman being sexually assaulted in America every two minutes (RAINN, 2009), meaningful measures must be taken to subvert America's rape culture. Programs that re-educate and socialize masses of men to stop rape and programs educating both men and women about rape myths are important strategies to undermine America's rape culture, but women's self-defense represents a pragmatic approach to minimize sexual assault, empowering women with both the physical and mental preparedness to respond effectively to attacks and avoid situations that increase the risk of sexual violence.

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