



VALDOSTA STATE  
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# NO MEANS NO BUT SOCIALIZATION MATTERS: HOW RELATIONSHIP LENGTH AND SEX OF INITIATOR INFLUENCES PERCEPTIONS OF RAPE CULTURE

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## Abstract

Rape culture is a circumstance that occurs worldwide and originates from socialization and normalization. The social attitudes that students hold toward normalizing sexual assault and rape, specifically when the lines are blurred, and the interaction is not clearly defined. This study examined students' perceptions surrounding rape culture. Participants, 11 males and 37 females, read a brief scenario depicting a sexual encounter between a heterosexual couple where the length of the relationship and initiator's sex were manipulated. They had been in a relationship for six weeks or one year and the male or female initiated the sexual encounter. Students then answered several questions regarding their perception of rape culture. Results showed that the sexually persistent female was perceived as more attractive compared to the sexually persistent male for engaging in the same behaviors. The socialization of males and females sends strong messages regarding sexual assault initiated by a male. In contrast, the normalization of rape culture becomes less defined when the aggressor is female. Future research is warranted to gain a better understanding of acceptable behaviors of rape culture in relation to men and women and how socialization reinforces sexual persistence.

## Introduction

Rape culture is prevalent on college campuses, researchers have examined the many concepts that feed into rape culture. In previous research targeting college students and consent, it was found that the participants sampled believed that men were the sexual initiators leaving women to be the sexual gatekeepers. Resulting in the belief that traditional customs were still prevalent within the college community; this was accepted by both female and male participants. When sexual assault is taken into account the word sexual consent always follows. It is evident that these two terms are related. Sexual assault will always be associated with sexual consent, meaning that with sexual assault there is a lack of sexual consent, making it nonconsensual (Jozkowski & Peterson 2013). The study researched the perceptions that college students hold in respects to rape culture.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants were 11 male and 37 female undergraduate students indiscriminately selected from Valdosta State University. They received no compensation for their participation. Participants ranged in the age from 18 to 24 with a mean age of 20.19 and a standard deviation of 1.79. The cultural background of the sample was 16.3% White Non-Hispanic, 12.2% Hispanic, 69.4% African American, and 2.0% Asian. Male and Female participants were randomly assigned to read about a sexual encounter. There was a total of four scenarios. In the first condition, the sexual encounter where the male and female have been in a relationship for 6 weeks and the female initiates the sexual encounter ( $n = 13$ ). In the second condition, the male and female have been in a relationship for 6 weeks and the male initiates the sexual encounter ( $n = 13$ ). In the third condition, the male and female have been in a relationship for 1 year and the male initiates the sexual encounter ( $n = 8$ ). In the fourth condition, the male and female have been in a relationship for 1 year and the female initiates the sexual encounter ( $n = 13$ ).

### Manipulation

The independent variables, relationship length (one year or six weeks), were manipulated by varying the length of the relationship and initiator sex (male, Jayden or female Nevaeh), which was manipulated by varying the sex of the initiator. The first condition consists of a 6-week relationship with the male as the initiator. The second condition consists of a six-week relationship with the female as the initiator. The third condition consists of a one-year relationship with the male as the initiator. The fourth condition consists of one-year relationship with the female as the initiator.

## Results

### Ratings on Consent

A 2 x 2 ANOVA was calculated on participants rating of likelihood of believing that the initiator received consent. The main effect of the length of relationship was not significant, The main effect for sex of the initiator was not significant, The Length of the Relationship x The Sex of the Initiator was not significant. The participants given in the one-year relationship with male as the initiator condition believed that male received vaster consent ( $M = 17.89, SD = 2.89$ ) compared to the one-year condition with female as the initiator ( $M = 16.38, SD = 5.24$ ). In the six-week relationship condition participants believed that male received vaster consent compared to the six-week relationship with the female as the initiator.

### Ratings on Attractiveness

A 2 x 2 ANOVA was calculated on participants ratings of likelihood of believing that the initiator was attractive. The main effect of the length of relationship was not significant. The main effect sex of the initiator was significant,  $F(1,43) = 5.77, p = .021$  ( $\eta^2 p = .12$ ). Subjects that read about the male initiator found him less attractive ( $M = 6.92, SD = 3.89$ ) compared to subjects that read about the female as the initiator ( $M = 4.67, SD = 2.83$ ). The Length of Relationship x Sex of the Initiator was not significant. The participants who were given the one-year relationship with the male as the initiator condition held more attractive perceptions ( $M = 3.63, SD = 2.72$ ) compared to one-year with the female as the initiator ( $M = 7.78, SD = 3.83$ ). In the six-week relationship with the female as the initiator condition participants held more attractive perceptions compared to the six-week relationship with the male as the initiator.

## Conclusion

The research showed the grave impact socialization has on college students views of rape culture. The length of the relationship and the sex of the initiator is important when deeming what is socially acceptable and unacceptable. In addition the results showed that consent can be conceptualized differently dependent on perceived attractiveness. While we have been taught that the word "no" does not grant consent, the research shows that the length of the relationship and the perceived attractiveness of the initiator can alter our perception on consent. Socialization finds the initiation of sex from a female to be more socially acceptable than the initiation of sex from a male.