

## Research Description

My name is Jennifer Alvarez Rosas and my research project is on sexual assault. I selected this field of research, sadly, due to my experiences from my first semester here at Fresno State. In my first 2-3 months as a student I was sexually assaulted twice. Since then, I have been interested in how sometimes this can be a silent crime, especially if students are afraid of retaliation or humiliation. Luckily, in my Honor Research Methods class in 2017, we had to do a research project. This gave me an opportunity to look further into my inquiries of sexual assault on college campuses. I specifically looked at gender because I wanted to know if males experienced sexual assault on college campuses and how many do. I also looked at race because I belong to a minority and was wondering if for some reason my race lead to my victimization. I decided to incorporate fear of sexual assault as a part of my research so that I may collect some form of data from those who had not experienced any victimization. Knowing that sexual assault is very prevalent on college campuses, I wanted to see how prevent is was at Fresno State particularly.

Before I started my research project, I had to do some literature review and see what research was done on sexual assault in regards to gender and race, and fear for each group. Originally, I strived to find correlations between sexual orientation as well, but due to insufficient number of diverse responses, had to remove the category. I started my literature review by using the Henry Madden Library's One Search database. This search engine helped me find peer reviewed articles with statistics from other campuses and the general population. As a result of using One Search, I was able to construct a survey base on the surveys other researchers used.

I also used basic Google searches but looked at articles cited directly on these websites to get information from primary sources. I also used information from the sexual assault training at my workplace, and I used some of the information that I learned during the presentation to create a definition of sexual assault and to create the categories of sexual assault in my research. I trust that the information I gathered from this presentation is correct because the presenter is the Title IX Coordinator here at Fresno State.

After getting as much information as possible, I began conducting my own research using students that are in my courses. I allowed my survey to be open for approximately two or three weeks in order to allow students the time to take my survey.

After receiving 174 responses, I found that data organization was the toughest part of this research project. With the help of my professor, Dr. Jenna Kieckhaefer, I used the SPSS program to run ANOVA tests and Chi Squared tests to see if there were any statistically significant results found in the data collected.

I was truly surprised by my results. I did not expect many student to confess and confide in me to give an honest response that they had been sexually assaulted on campus. I think the greatest thing my research has done is collect data on sexual assault that occurred on campus that cannot be found on the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). The UCR only collects data on crime that has been reported, and my research attempted to capture those instances of crime that went unreported.

Race and Gender Influences on the Risk and Fear of Being a Sexual Assault Victim

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### Abstract

There are many inquiries about whether one's race and/or gender influence their fear of and risk of being sexually assaulted. Adequate information regarding sexual assault on college campuses is readily available through the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). However, the UCR only has data on sexual assaults that have been reported, and thus not on those who did not file a formal report. The current research examined what could influence one's risk of being sexually assaulted during their college career at large western undergraduate university. Specifically examined were which gender and/or which race is more likely to experience sexual assault, including: touch without consent, attempted penetration, achieved penetration, being in a sexually abusive relationship, coerced to perform a sexual act, or any unwanted sexual act performed against them. This research also examined the participants' levels of fear of experiencing any type of sexual assault between gender and race. The survey data was collected via an online convenience sample. The data indicated males and females have similar levels of fear of being sexually assaulted. However, there were some differences found between which race actually experienced sexual assault. These findings support the claim that women, specifically those who belong to a racial minority are more at risk to experience victimization in college.

*Key words:* sexual assault, race, gender, college students

### Race and Gender Influences on the Risk of Being a Sexual Assault Victim

19-year-old Jeanne Clery went straight to bed in her dorm room after coming from a party. A boy who lived off campus by the name of Josoph Henry, 20 years old, walked onto campus and into the dorms through a door that was propped open with pizza boxes. Finding the second-floor door locked, he tried the third floor. Jeanne's room was the first door that Henry tried to open. Jeanne had left her door unlocked because her roommate had lost her key, and woke up to find Henry rummaging through her room. In order to keep Jeanne from making any noise, Henry cut her throat with a beer bottle. He then proceeded to rape, sodomize, and then strangle her (O'Dell & Ryman, 2016). This is one example of how brutal sexual assault can be on college campuses.

Sexual assault on college campuses is still a major problem (Banyard, Ward, Cohn, Plante, Moorehead, & Walsh, 2007). Did you know that someone who is victimized by any type of crime has a greater likelihood of being victimized again than those who have not experienced any victimization (Daigle, 2018)? Out of all individuals who experienced any type of victimization, 28% experience two or more incidents during the same year. Anyone can be a victim of any crime at any point in their lives. Certain factors make you more prone to be victimized such as your demographic characteristics, regarding your gender, age, marital status, or your socioeconomic status (Banyard, et al., 2007). The purpose of this research is to investigate if one's race and gender make one more likely to be a victim of sexual assault among adult students at California State University, Fresno because there isn't sufficient data on sexual assault regarding this population.

## **Literature Review**

Usually, sexual assault is analyzed by factors that are within an individual's control such as use of alcohol, presence in high-risk situations, and being in situations where consent can be misinterpreted (Fagen, McCormick, Kontos, Venable, & Anderson, 2011). There are only a few studies that examined factors contributing to sexual assault that are not within an individual's control, including gender, sexual orientation, and race. For the purpose of this research, sexual assault will be defined as "any type of sexual activity that the recipient does not want or agree to, including touching and intercourse against the person's will" (Fagen, et. al., 2011).

### **Gender**

It is estimated that 97,000 college students each year are sexually assaulted (Fagen, et. al., 2011). Approximately one out of every four women in college will experience sexual assault. Knowing which demographics make up the 25% of wronged females could help in developing programs designed to help that specific population recover. Most research has focused on the risk of victimization of heterosexual males and females, proving what we now know: women are more at risk than men and men are usually the perpetrators (Johnson, Mathews, & Napper, 2016). It is known that women are at more risk than men, but what is not known is the breakdown of demographics among men and women who are victimized.

### **Race**

It has been previously mentioned that if someone has been sexually assaulted, they are more likely to be sexually assaulted again compared to someone who has never been assaulted (Daigle, 2018). However, the level of risk grows higher if one belongs to a racial minority (Ullman & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). One study showed that out of the 27% who were raped as an

adolescent and belonged to a racial minority, 42% were also raped in adulthood (Ullman & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Although there have been studies about the risk of sexual assault according to race on college campuses, there have not yet been consistent results to show that one group is at a greater risk (Johnson, Mathews, & Napper, 2016)

Another study found that different types of sexual assault have affected different racial groups (Ullman & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). For example, Hispanics were not found to be related to any specific type of victimization, while Asians were less likely to report experiencing sexual touching than whites (Johnson, Mathews, & Napper, 2016). Additionally, biracial groups were more likely to report victimization in all categories, except abusive relationships, than whites (Johnson, Mathews, & Napper, 2016). African American and white women have relatively equal rates of being sexually victimized (Ullman & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Some unrepresentative samples have found higher rates of sexual assault among just African American women, which could have been due to income inconsistencies throughout the study (Ullman & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016).

Difficulty recovering from sexual assault can heavily depend on if one belongs to a racial minority or not (Ullman & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). It is important to know if a certain minority group makes an individual more susceptible to sexual assault because repeat victimization can affect the way you recover as a survivor. In order to prevent repeat victimization, knowing what can make one susceptible to victimization in the first place can help greatly. That is why the purpose of this research is to examine if there is a correlation between gender and race and the risk of being sexually assaulted as a student at California State University, Fresno.

## **Fear**

Studies indicate, “That college students’ perceptions about sexual assault are often associated with their particular lived experiences, informed by their gender, sexuality, race, and other structural forms of oppression and privilege” (Worthen, & Wallace, 2017). This means that gender influences the perception of fear of sexual assault among college students as well as their race. Most people think that sexual assault is a problem on their own college campus, but levels of concern skyrocket when students have experienced it before (Worthen, & Wallace, 2017).

Across all societal contexts, women have reported higher levels of fear of crime than men (Özaşçılar, & Ziyalar, 2017). One explanation for this could be that women have a higher risk of being sexually assaulted if they are a college student compared to a woman in the entire general population. In this study, by Özaşçılar and Ziyalar (2017), the levels of fear for seven different crimes were rated amongst men and women. The 7 crimes were fear of: physical assault, sexual assault, murder, burglary while at home, burglary away, robbery, property stolen, and being cheated, conned, or swindled out of money. The results of this research indicated that women feared sexual assault the most, while the biggest fear for males was assault. The greatest difference between the two genders was the fear of being sexually assaulted.

Race can also influence the amount of fear one has concerning sexual assault. Unfortunately, there has not been sufficient data found indicating that one racial group is more fearful of sexual assault than another. However, there is research stating that one racial group, African Americans, is more at risk than another, Whites and Hispanics, but one cannot generalize that the group more at risk will for certain have higher levels of fear (Johnson, Mathews, & Napper, 2016). This is one thing the current study attempts to answer.

### **Current Study**

The purpose of this current study is to add to the research of sexual assault. The research that has been conducted regarding sexual assault has not had consistent results regarding which racial group is more at risk (Johnson, Matthews, & Napper, 2016). In addition, this current study will assess the levels of fear of becoming a victim of sexual assault among different populations regarding race and gender. This research will look to see if there are certain races that are more prone to a specific type of sexual assault, like nonconsensual touching, penetration without consent, and more. It is hypothesized that men across all levels will have low rates of sexual assault compared to women. In addition, it is predicted that sexual assault will be greater among females who belong to a racial minority. Lastly, it is predicted that every race of males will have lower levels of fear of experiencing sexual assault than women.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

This study included 174 Fresno State students. The participants included people from every demographic group concerning gender and race. In other words, both males and females were surveyed. Our data consisted of 71% female, 28% male, and 1% whom preferred not to say. We had five categories for race. 4% identified as Black, 18% as white, 59% as Hispanic, 13% as Asian, and 6% as other. Participants were gathered through a convenience sample of Fresno State Students through the researcher's classes. A survey was administered to the researcher's classmates through an online survey. The survey was also administered to the members of the professional criminology fraternity, Phi Omega Alpha, of which the researcher is a member of. Students were compensated for their time by allowing them receive extra credit and/or allowing

them to provide their email address if they would like to enter a raffle for a \$5 Starbucks gift card.

### **Procedure**

Students were emailed a web-link to the survey through Google Forms. They were informed that the survey contains material directly related to sexual assault. If the participant agreed to do the survey, it took approximately five minutes to complete. Their confidentiality is also promised before they begin the survey. They were reminded before they began that they could withdrawal at any time. After the student was done taking the survey, they were thanked for their time.

### **Dependent and Independent Measures**

The survey included the independent quasi variables of gender and race. The dependent variable was the presence or absence of sexual assault. The survey that was administered to students informed them about the purpose their response will serve in this research. The survey also defined sexual assault for any participants who are unsure about the meaning.

There was a total of five, close ended questions the participant was asked. It asked each participant for their gender and race. The participants were allowed to select the appropriate gender that they identified with. For race, if the participants were multiracial, they were able to choose the race they identify with the most. The participant also had the option to select "Other" if they did not identify with the options listed.

Next, the survey asked if they had been sexually assaulted. The survey had a matrix with offenses listed on the y axis (the independent variable) in which the participant was allowed to select each that applied and the frequency of the offense on the x axis (the dependent variable). The frequencies that they were allowed to choose were "have not experienced," "once," "a few

times,” and “several times.” Regardless of what the participant selected, they filled out a chart with the same sexual offenses, however the second time with a ranking next to each one. This part of the survey was to assess the levels of fear that students had of experiencing each of these types of sexual assault while in college. The rankings were on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning not fearful, 3 meaning moderately fearful, and 5 meaning very fearful. This survey was based off the survey that Johnson and colleagues (2016) used in their research. The two questions allowed the participants to provide their email address if they would like to enter a raffle for a \$5 Starbucks gift card, and it allowed the student to enter their name and which criminology class they were in to receive extra credit.

## Results

### Gender’s Impact on Sexual Assault

One-way ANOVAs were conducted with gender of participant as the independent variable and occurrence of sexual assault as the dependent measure (Table 1). Gender of the participant was significantly related to how many times penetration without consent was attempted,  $F(1,171) = 6.61, p = .01$ . The data showed that penetration without consent was higher amongst females ( $M=.19, SD= .52$ ) than males ( $M= .00, SD= .00$ ). The gender of the participant was significantly related to how many times the participant was coerced to perform a sexual act,  $F(1,171) = 4.99, p = .03$ . The number of times that a participant was coerced to perform a sexual act was higher among females ( $M= .25, SD= .63$ ) than males ( $M= .04, SD= .20$ ). The gender of the participant was significantly related to number of times they were touched without consent,  $F(1,171) = 8.77, p = .00$ . The number of times that a participant was touched without consent was higher among females ( $M=.65, SD= .93$ ) compared to males ( $M= .23, SD= .56$ ). The gender of the participant was also significantly related to the number of times

one has had an unwanted sexual act occur against them  $F(1,171) = 13.31, p = .00$ . Females ( $M = .40, SD = .76$ ) had higher rates of this compared to men ( $M = .00, SD = .00$ )

The one-way ANOVAs also revealed a significant relationship between gender and fear of sexual assault. The gender of the participant was significantly related to the fear of being in a sexually abusive relationship,  $F(1,171) = 19.97, p = .00$ . Women ( $M = 2.65, SD = 1.65$ ) showed greater fear of being in a sexually abusive relationship compared to men ( $M = 1.5, SD = 1.03$ ). The gender of the participant was related to the amount of fear of attempted penetration occurring during their college career  $F(1,171) = 35.49, p = .00$ . Women ( $M = 2.99, SD = 1.6$ ) reported higher levels of fear of penetration being attempted than did males ( $M = 1.5, SD = 1.09$ ). The gender of the participant was related to the level of fear of achieved penetration without consent occurring,  $F(1,171) = 32.33, p = .00$ . Males ( $M = 1.54, SD = 1.15$ ) were less fearful of rape than were women ( $M = 3.03, SD = 1.67$ ). The gender of the participant was related to the level of fear of unwanted touching occurring  $F(1,171) = 50.35, p = .00$ . Women ( $M = 2.93, SD = 1.43$ ) were more fearful experience unwanted touching than males ( $M = 1.38, SD = .82$ ). The gender of the participant was related to the level of fear of any unwanted act occurring upon them  $F(1,171) = 44.37, p = .003$ . Women ( $M = 3.17, SD = 1.59$ ) were found to have higher levels of fear than males ( $M = 1.5, SD = 1.11$ ), regarding experience of any unwanted sexual act. Lastly, the gender of the participant was significantly related to the fear of being coerced to perform a sexual act  $F(1, 171) = 31.33, p = .00$ . This showed that females ( $M = 2.96, SD = 1.65$ ) were more fearful than males ( $M = 1.52, SD = 1.07$ ) of being coerced to perform a sexual act. There were no significant relationships between gender and the number of sexually abusive relationships participants have been in, nor the number of times they have been sexually penetrated without consent.

### **Race's Impact on Sexual Assault**

Results for race, indicate a significant relationship between three of the twelve conditions in this study (Table 2). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to conclude that the race of the participant was significantly related to the number of times they have experienced attempted sexual penetration by another individual  $F(4, 173) = 3.12, p = .02$  (Table 2). Next, a post-hoc LSD test was conducted, and indicated that African Americans ( $M = .50, SD = .84$ ) were more likely to experience attempted penetration than Hispanics ( $M = .10, SD = .39$ ) and Asians ( $M = .00, SD = .00$ ). The results of the post-hoc LSD test also indicated that whites ( $M = .31, SD = .64$ ) were more likely to experience attempted penetration than Hispanics ( $M = .10, SD = .39$ ) and Asians ( $M = .00, SD = .00$ ).

The race of the participant was also significantly related to the number of times participants have been sexually penetrated without consent  $F(4, 173) = 4.39, p = .002$  (Table 2). The results of the post-hoc LSD test, for race, indicated that African Americans ( $M = .50, SD = .84$ ) were more likely to experience penetration without consent than Hispanics ( $M = .06, SD = .24$ ) and Asians ( $M = .00, SD = .00$ ). The post-hoc LSD test also indicated that whites ( $M = .25, SD = .57$ ) were more likely to experience penetration without consent than Hispanics ( $M = .06, SD = .24$ ) and Asians ( $M = .00, SD = .00$ ).

The race of the participant was significantly related to the occurrence of any unwanted sexual act performed on them  $F(4, 173) = 2.80, p = .03$  (Table 2). The results of the post-hoc LSD test indicated that whites ( $M = .59, SD = .84$ ) were more likely to experience an unwanted sexual act than Hispanics ( $M = .19, SD = .56$ ) and other ( $M = .09, SD = .30$ ).

There was no significant relationship found between race and the prevalence of being in a sexually abusive relationship, being coerced to perform a sexual act, and being sexually touched

without consent. There were also no significant relationships found between race and fear of any type of sexual assault occurring to them during their college career (fear of: being sexually touched without consent, attempted sexual penetration without consent, sexual penetration without consent, being in an abusive relationship, any unwanted sexual performed on them, and being coerced to perform a sexual act).

*Table 1*  
*Frequency of sexual assault for males and female participants*

Variable	Participant Gender	
	Males <i>M (SD)</i>	Females <i>M (SD)</i>
Touched without consent	1.35 (.61)	1.90 (.99)
Attempted Penetration	1.03 (.18)	1.60 (.97)
Achieved penetration	4.66 (.72)	3.50 (1.50)
In an abusive relationship	2.90 (1.66)	1.50 (.97)
Coerced to perform a sexual act	4.45 (1.41)	3.10 (1.91)
Had any unwanted act occur to them	3.52 (1.53)	2.10 (.99)
Touched without consent	4.23 (1.48)	2.70 (1.06)
Attempted Penetration	3.13 (9.2)	3.50 (.71)
Achieved penetration	2.94 (1.61)	1.90 (1.60)

*Table 2**Frequency of sexual assault for each race of our participants*

Variable	Participant Race				
	African American <i>M (SD)</i>	Hispanic <i>M (SD)</i>	White <i>M (SD)</i>	Asian <i>M (SD)</i>	Other/ Mix <i>M (SD)</i>
Touched without consent	1.00 (1.26)	.40 (.77)	.88 (1.01)	.48 (.67)	.55 (.86)
Attempted Penetration	.50 (.84)	.10 (.39)	.31 (.64)	.00 (.00)	.08 (.30)
Achieved penetration	.50 (.84)	.06 (.24)	.25 (.57)	.00 (.00)	.09 (.30)
In an abusive relationship	.00 (.00)	.09 (.32)	.16 (.37)	.04 (.21)	.09 (.30)
Coerced to perform a sexual act	.17 (.41)	.15 (.52)	.44 (.76)	.13 (.46)	.00 (.00)
Had any unwanted act occur to them	.50 (1.22)	.19 (.56)	.59 (.84)	.35 (.71)	.09 (.30)

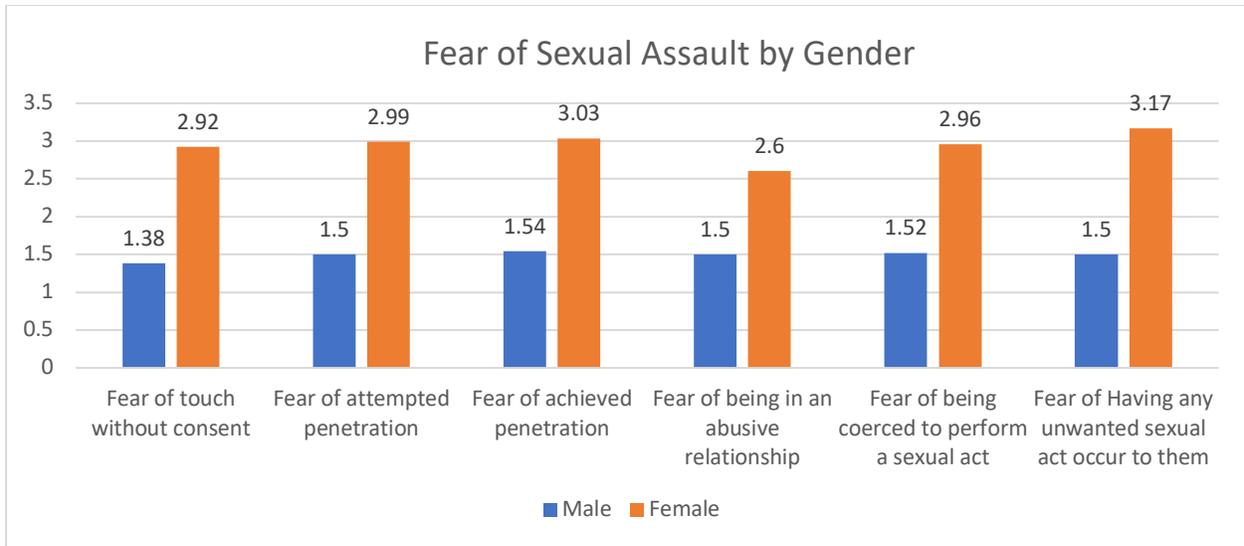


Fig. 1

This chart shows the average levels of fear of each category of sexual assault for men and women. This chart shows that women have higher levels of fear in each category.

### Discussion

Overall, the data yielded some correlations between gender, race, and one’s risk of being sexually assaulted during their college career. Similar to previous research, the results showed that the risk of being sexually assaulted was significant if one is female. Being female increases the risk of attempted penetrated without consent, coerced to perform a sexual act, any unwanted sexual contact, and being touched without consent. The results also showed that being female influenced one’s level of fear for every category of sexual assault (Fig. 2). Women in this study experienced more sexual assault than men. However, even though women’s level of fear of sexual assault for every category was higher than it was for men, it was not significant. From the data that was collected, African Americans were more likely to experience any sort of sexual assault. Results were significant for African Americans regarding attempted penetration and achieved penetration and being African American. Whites were more likely to experience any unwanted sexual act than other groups. For those who identified as white there was also a

significant relationship between attempted and achieved penetration. The groups that seemed to be less effected by sexual assault in all categories were the male and the Asian groups. The results of this research proved to be similar to previous studies because it did not find that one racial group is more fearful than another of sexual assault. The conclusions gathered through this research were also similar to previous studies because Hispanics were not found to be related to a specific type of sexual assault. One difference that was found was that African Americans and whites did not have equal chances of being victimized. In the results, African Americans and whites only had equal chances of experiencing attempted and achieved penetration, not every single type of victimization.

The hypotheses in this study were that: 1) men across all levels would have low rates of sexual assault compared to women, 2) it was predicted that sexual assault would be greater among females who belong to a racial minority, and 3) that males belonging to any race would have lower levels of fear than women. The data did support all three hypotheses. Our data showed that men across all levels did indeed have lower rates of sexual assault. Most respondents who did experience any type of sexual assault were women. The data also supported the hypothesis that females who belonged to a racial minority will experience more sexual assault than those who did not. As discussed before, African Americans experienced the most sexual assault from all participants. However, only one minority group's victimization (African Americans) was greater than the victimization of whites. Out of all the African American respondents, 66% were also females. There was no significant relationship between gender and levels of fear of each type of sexual assault to make a generalization, but the means show that women, on average, have higher levels of fear of sexual assault than men do.

### **Limitations**

This research faced a few limitations. First, it was difficult to produce equal groups for each category, or at least to be representative of the population. This could have skewed results because if only 2 people were gathered for one racial group and one was victimized, the results would show that 50% the demographic is affected and yield significant values compared to others. The results would not be able to be discussed in context because the results would be inaccurate.

A second limitation is that the data gathered was collected through a convenience sample. A convenience sample of university students was a good starting point, given the population that was targeted. However, a drawback is that since an email was sent to students in the researcher's classes, the data gathered may not have been very representative of the whole university population in regards to age and major. By using this method of recruitment, it could have excluded certain populations; such as year in school and student organizations.

Third, respondents can easily falsely respond to the survey. The survey was online, so it made it impossible to determine if students were only selecting random answers in order to enter their name into the raffle. The survey was too short to include an attention check. By entering incorrect information, results could have been skewed and yield a relationship, or no relationship, within each or any category. All the limitations discussed will be taken into consideration when conducting any further research.

### **Further Research**

Future research, should focus on external (social) factors increasing the risk of sexual assault, such as being in a fraternity or sorority. Levels of fear could also be measured in different social contexts, such as being at a party, being in a supermarket, or walking down the

street. One could also study students' perceptions of consent to see if the misunderstanding of what consent means is contributing to the rising numbers. Future research could also include a free response section to examine what factors influenced the amount of fear one had.

Additionally, research could focus on what characteristics make up perpetrators of sexual assault.

Future research can also focus on attaining a sample that is representative of the college population or the general population in the United States for more accurate and generalizable results. Future research could also use previously established data such as the General Social Survey (GSS) data. This way, it would be easier to include multiple conditions, but the one problem is that the survey would only be generalizable to the whole population, not just college students.

### **Conclusion**

The current study was one of the first to examine sexual assault without analyzing social context. The results from this research cannot be generalized to other college populations because as it was previously stated, equivalent groups for race were not selected nor were they representative of California State University, Fresno. The implications of this research are that there are certain demographic characteristics that can make an individual more likely to experience sexual assault during their college career. Data from the current study can help students become more aware of the reality of sexual assault. This current study can inform students to be more careful and aware, knowing that being in college can increase your risk of victimization. The results found could be helpful in developing programs to prevent victimization or reduce the likelihood that one will sexually assault others. Assessing what factors contribute to one's victimization are important because programs that help survivors

could learn about which populations are affected and then do research on the cultural differences or accommodations they would need in order to better help victims recover.

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