**Final Draft**

**Current Study**

The topic that is being used for the study is the perception of sexual assault. This study goes answers the question of if people better perceive sexual harassment and harassment behaviors when perceiving a “prototypical woman” versus a woman that doesn’t fit that stereotype. This topic is of great importance because this phenomenon happens very often. People see the survivors of sexual harassment or assault and judge or deny that the event occurred. According to Ullman (2023), the survivors of sexual assault often go through what people call a “second assault”. This is an event where outsiders are aware of the assault occurring, but they do not believe the victim, or they start blaming what happened on something that the victim did. Along with this, there is an “ideal victim” idea that states that when talking about sexual assault, the credibility of women who aren’t a part of the social or societal “norm” is questioned and often doubted. This includes the reactions from the victims, stating that there are also doubts if they did not react in a socially common or accepted (usually violent) way (Randall, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to be able to observe the thought process between participants seeing pictures and hearing stories of possible sexual assault victims, and then seeing if they still fall into the category of “societal thinking” and only consider victims to be of a social norm.

**Methods**

**Design**

The study that is being conducted is an experiment that is examining a cause-and-effect relationship between the gender, social class, and age of a population and the way that they perceive sexual assault and sexual assault victims. The claim that Is being investigated is that the participants perceive sexual assault victims to be stereotypically “normal”, or very feminine in appearance and nature. The independent variables of my experiment are the pictures and the stories that the participants read/hear. My dependent variables will be the categories that the participants put the photos in and the ways that they answer the survey after.

**Participants**

The study will need around 300 or more participants. Their characteristics will be randomized (age, gender/sexual orientation, race, ethnicity). In the pretest, the participants will be screened for ages 25-55, with no prior sexual assault experiences. No one will be screened out for sexual harassment experiences. When it becomes physical (assault/rape), that is what people will be screened out for. The preferred samples will come from businesses with offices, but any kind of job title (team member, manager, supervisor, CEO, etc.) or expertise (marketing/sales, accounting, journalism, etc.). There will be emails sent to the higher ups of these businesses to prepare them to make multiple announcements to their employees about the study. There will also be flyers placed inside and outside of the businesses, in break rooms, or at nearby places so the preferred participants can see them and want to participate.

**Materials**

The study being carried out is an observational experiment that will expose participants to different pictures of multiple people of varying appearances and backgrounds (the study used six pictures), as well as recordings of different situations in which sexual assault did or did not take place. The pictures will be of different people with varying demographics (age, race, gender, etc.). Next, the participants will sort these pictures and decide whether or not they believe that they have been victims of sexual assault. The second part will take the same participants and have them read about different stories and then record their reactions.

The questions that will be tested are: “Who do you think has been a victim of sexual assault in the workplace?” “Which of these scenarios do you consider to be sexual assault?” “What is your definition of sexual assault?” “Do you have any doubts about the claims of this person (or these people)?”

**Procedure**

First, I will be hanging up flyers outside (and inside if I have permission) of the office buildings that I would like to get participants from. If I could place them inside the building as well, I would want to put them near the elevators, stairs, on a common space bulletin board if they have one, and in the break room. I will also be emailing the businesses to ask for them to send mass emails to their employees, as well as giving in person announcements to the office to remind them to review the email and the posters that are there. The participants will scan the QR code on the flyer that takes them to a survey. The survey is about their demographics (age, gender, race) as well as the experiment itself. There will be a description of the purpose of the experiment and a disclaimer about the confidentiality of their information, as well as a section to express any concerns for the process. Once completed, the appropriate participants will be contacted through an email disclosing the where the experiment will take place and a number to call for further confirmation (this will be like a check-in; to confirm their name and email to make sure they are in the records). Cash would be better than anything, but if not cash then gas gift cards, Walmart cards, or get a list of places they can get gift cards and let them choose the one that they would like the most. Another incentive that I am considering is free or reduced cost therapy sessions. Since this is a heavy topic to review, I want to make sure that the participants are not triggered or anxious after the study is completed (I am screening for participants that aren’t sexual assault survivors, but there could still be an emotional imbalance after hearing the stories).

Then, I will split the participants into two randomly selected groups with an even number of participants. Group A will receive pictures of different people, varying in age, gender, race, etc. while group two will listen to multiple different stories of possible sexual assaults or harassments. These stories will take place in different places (in the workplace building, outside in parking lots, in clubs or bars, etc.). Group A will organize the pictures into two different categories: sexual assault victims and non-victims. Group B will listen to the stories that they are given and decide if they consider them to be circumstances of sexual assault/harassment or if they are not. Next, I will have the groups switch tasks, so group A will be listening to the stories and group two will be reviewing the pictures. Both groups will have 5 minutes for the picture activity and 10 minutes for the story activity. I will compare the results between the groups to see if they answer similarly or if they are vastly different.

After the study is done, I will provide a debriefing session where the study is explained, and they can ask any questions they have about it. I will also explain the results that collected (in case they did not understand), the hypothesis for the experiment, and reassure that their confidentiality is secure. I will also offer resources for therapy and counseling, and an opportunity to have 1-on-1 conversations if they need to. I may offer an additional reward for participants that stayed and completed the entire study.

To answer my research questions, I will be using the responses that the participants gave for the story activity, and I will compare those results to their own demographics (race, age, gender, etc.). I will also take the results from the photo activity to tell me if the appearance of the victim changes the way that the public (in this case the people in the study) view them and if they have any doubts about the validity of the claim of sexual assault or harassment.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study are the self-selection bias, limited range of race and gender, order bias, the available sample size, as well as generability. For self-selection bias, since people are signing up for it instead of directly being put into the study (with consent), this could affect the results because of the presence of a certain type of people who decide to sign up. For limited range of race/gender the population that I am studying will be from office buildings/businesses, and that is a white male dominated field. There could be a lack of female participants altogether or a lack of male participants because of the subject matter. For the results being affected by order since I am having them completing both in a different order, doing task A could affect the way they complete task B and vice versa. For the sample size I am using 300 or more participants, but for two activities that is a limited amount of people for each activity. There could be skews in the results since there aren’t many people to even it back out. Finally, for the generability, my sample might not be fully representative of the population that it needs to be.

**References**

Goh, J. X., Bandt-Law, B., Cheek, N. N., Sinclair, S., & Kaiser, C. R. (2021, January 14). Narrow Prototypes and Neglected Victims: Understanding Perceptions of Sexual Harassment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000260

Randall, M. (2010, December 21). Sexual Assault Law, Credibility, and “Ideal Victims”: Consent, Resistance, and Victim Blaming. *University of Toronto Press.* [**https://doi.org/10.3138/cjwl.22.2.397**](https://doi.org/10.3138/cjwl.22.2.397)

Ullman, S. E. (2023). *Talking about sexual assault: Society's response to survivors* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0000360-000](https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0000360-000)

**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Materials**

There will be fliers that are placed inside and outside of office buildings, including in the break rooms, near the stairs and elevators, and outside near the doors as well as near surrounding businesses. On the fliers, there will be a QR code that takes participants to a survey where they fill in their information (email address for contact, name, age, race, gender). There will also be an email sent to the businesses with an online version of the flier and a link to the survey.

**Appendix B: Survey Questions**

Task 1: Picture Sorting

Victims of Sexual Assault: [place photos here]

Non-Victims of sexual assault: [place photos here]

Why did you make this decision? Why do you believe that they are or are not victims?

Task 2: Listening and Sorting

(For each of the four audio excerpts, choose ONE answer): [This is sexual assault] or [This is not sexual assault]

Why do you think that this is or is not sexual assault?

A debriefing statement which would be provided (written or verbally) to participants at the end of participation, if you would plan to include that as part of your study due to any deception or risks.

**Appendix C: Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for participating in this study. This study was about how the public perceives sexual assault victims and how societal perceptions can affect the way that people “choose” who can or cannot be victims of sexual assault. If this topic was sensitive for you, there is a mental health therapist available for you to talk to. If you would like a chance to talk 1-on-1 about any questions or concerns that you have, that can be arranged as well.

Appendix D: Informed Consent Document

**Informed Consent to Participate in Research**

**Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.**

**Title of Research Study: Social Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Harassment Victims**

**Principal Investigator: Tamia Lucas (Person in Charge of this Study)**

**Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University**

**Address:**

**Telephone #: 919-631-8433**

**Participant Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Please PRINT clearly**

**(If you are a patient at ECU or Vidant, a copy of this form will be placed in your medical records.)**

**Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.**

**Why am I being invited to take part in this research?**

**The purpose of this research is to observe societal perceptions of sexual assault, harassment, and how those perceptions can affect the way that others perceive or “choose” sexual assault victims. You are being invited to take part in this research because you have shown interest in this study, and you are a healthy volunteer. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how society can alter the way that people view sexual assault victims, as well as the way that society can deem certain people “not likely” sexual assault victims.**

**If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about \_\_300\_\_ people to do so.**

**Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?**

**I understand I should not participate in this study if I am: not between 25-55 years of age, a victim of a sexual assault or rape, and do not work in a business office or office building.**

**What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?**

**You can choose not to participate.**

**Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?**

**The research will be conducted at East Carolina University. You will need to come to the Rawl Building one time during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is two hours over the next one day.**

**What will I be asked to do?**

**You will be asked to do the following:**

**• Look at a group of pictures of individuals from varying backgrounds and sort them into categories: assumed victims and non-victims**

**• Listen to audio descriptions of scenarios in which sexual assault/harassment could or could not be occurring, and answer either “yes” or “no” when asked if these situations seem like possible sexual assault or harassment.**

**• There will be no photos or videos taken before, during, or after the study.**

**• When the study is done, there will be a debriefing session to review the purpose of the experiment as well as any questions that you, the participant, have about it. If any therapy or counseling is needed, an on-site mental health therapist is provided to you.**

**What might I experience if I take part in the research?**

**We don’t know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.**

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

**We will be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study. Any parking fees will be taken care of. After the study is complete, all participants will receive a $50 Visa gift card.**

**Will it cost me to take part in this research?**

**It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.**

**Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?**

**ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:**

**• Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.**

**• The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.**

**• People designated by East Carolina University**

**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

**Any personal information will only be kept until the results of the study are finalized. Names and emails will be deleted after the study is initially done. Age, race, and gender will be included in the results, but they will be kept anonymous.**

**What if I decide I don’t want to continue in this research?**

**You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.**

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

**The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 919-631-8433 (days, between 11 am – 6 pm Monday through Friday).**

**If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.**

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

**The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:**

**• I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.**

**• I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.**

**• I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.**

**• By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.**

**• I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Participant's Name (PRINT) Signature Date**

**Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person’s questions about the research.**

**Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) Signature Date**