

A Silent Epidemic: Sexual Violence on College Campuses

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Introduction

In March 2016, former Stanford student Brock Turner was convicted on three counts of felony sexual assault. On January 18, 2015, 19-year-old Turner raped 22-year-old Chanel Miller behind a dumpster while unconscious. Two Stanford graduate students intervened and held Turner in place until police arrived. Before Turner's sentencing, he wrote a statement to the court describing his actions as the product of a culture of drinking, peer pressure, and "sexual promiscuity" (Stack, 2016). Turner said the sexual encounter was consensual while admitting to "imposing trauma and pain" on Miller (Salam, 2017). Turner's father followed up with his statement, saying this case had ruined his son's life for "20 minutes of action" (Stack, 2016).

Turner's convictions included sexual assault of an unconscious person, sexual assault of an intoxicated person, and sexual assault with intent to rape. Turner was sentenced to six months in jail, followed by three years on probation (Stack, 2016). Additionally, Turner was required to register as a sexual offender for life. The sentencing was viewed as lenient by many, with the judge receiving threats to her and her family's life. Turner completed three months of the six-month sentence due to exemplary behavior. Following Turner's sentence, BuzzFeed released Miller's 7,137-word victim statement. The BuzzFeed article was the first time Miller publicly announced her identity. During the trial, Miller was called "Emily Doe" in court documents. The victim statement was read eleven million times in four days after publication (Stack, 2016).

In 2018, Brock Turner's lawyer filed a 172-page brief arguing that Turner had not received a fair trial. The brief had 60 pages that focused heavily on how intoxicated Chanel Miller was on the night of the attack (Salam, 2017). The court denied the appeal. Chanel Miller

published her book *Know My Name* in 2019, which became a New York Times best-selling list. A year following *People v. Brock Turner*, the #MeToo movement ignited with another high-profile case.

In 2006, social activist Tarana Burke coined the phrase "Me Too" to help women of color who had survived sexual violence and were healing. The movement showed the pervasiveness of sexual violence in society. More than ten years later, the phrase gained widespread popularity following multiple women coming forward against former American film producer Harvey Weinstein.

On October 5, 2017, The New York Times published an article detailing that Harvey Weinstein had paid off sexual harassment accusers for nearly three decades (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). This article led to the resignation of four of the Weinstein company's all-male board members and Weinstein's firing (Farrow, 2017). On October 10, 2017, The New Yorker published an article revealing further Harvey Weinstein sexual violence allegations. Investigative journalist Ronan Farrow, son of actress Mia Farrow and director Woody Allen, wrote the article. Farrow conducted a ten-month investigation, interviewing thirteen women who, between the nineteen-nineties and 2015, Weinstein sexually harassed or assaulted them (Farrow, 2017). Both articles detailed first-hand accounts from actresses, assistants, and employees. In 2020, Weinstein received 23 years for rape and sexual assault in New York. In 2023, Weinstein received an additional 16 years for rape and sexual assault in Los Angeles (Dellato, 2023). Variety says Weinstein will serve his 16-year sentence consecutively after serving his sentence in New York. Harvey Weinstein's case was the catalyst for the #MeToo movement.

On October 15, 2017, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted, "If you have been harassed or assaulted, write "me too" as a reply to this tweet" (Pflum, 2018). Famous figures like Lady Gaga, Viola Davis, and Evan Rachel Wood responded with their own stories. Women and men who were not household names also spoke out. "Within 24 hours, her post generated thousands of replies, comments, and retweets and inspired thousands more original posts on social media, with women and men from around the world sharing personal stories" (Pflum, 2018). This online exchange was one of the first times people talked about sexual violence openly. Previously, laws such as Title IX existed to protect people from sexual violence. As a result, these crimes often were unreported, as many feared retaliation and humiliation.

Background

In 1972, Congress enacted Title IX, which President Nixon signed into law. Congress passed Title IX in response to women's education inequalities before the 1970s. For example, women were excluded from colleges and universities or specific programs and spaces within these schools (Powell, 2022). Women had higher admission standards than men, and female educators were denied tenure. Title IX filled in the gaps that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Title IV still needed to address.

Title VII prohibited sex discrimination in employment but did not extend to education. Title IV prohibited discrimination in federally funded entities but did not cover sex discrimination (Powell, 2022). As a result, Title IX bans sex discrimination in any educational program or activity receiving federal financial aid ("Campus Sexual Violence" | RAINN 2023). In the 1990s, the federal government explicitly declared Title IX covered sexual harassment and

sexual violence. A decade after Title IX, another federal law was passed to protect college students further.

On April 5, 1986, 19-year-old student Jeanne Clery was raped and murdered in her residence hall by fellow student Joseph Henry. Clery and Henry had no previous histories. Henry lost the student election at Lehigh University that night, drinking excessively. Henry walked around campus to steal. Clery had left her door propped open with a box to let her roommate in, who had misplaced their key. Students at the university often left doors unlocked. Clery woke up to Henry burglarizing her room. Henry then beat, cut, raped, sodomized, and strangled her. Prior to Clery's murder, thirty-eight violent crimes occurred on the Lehigh campus from 1983 to 1986. Jeanne's parents, Connie and Howard Clery believed disclosing this information was crucial. They championed legislation requiring universities to disclose campus crime statistics.

In 1990, Congress enacted the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy, and Campus Crime Statistics Act, commonly known as the Clery Act (RAINN 2023). President George Bush signed the Clery Act into law as the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990. The Clery Act requires public and private colleges and universities to disclose information about specific crimes on or near campus ("Clery Act | RAINN"). In 2013, Campus Save amended the Clery Act. The Campus Save Act provides additional transparency and requirements for institutions to address and prevent sexual violence on campus ("Campus Save Act" | RAINN). Although more established standards protect college students, sexual violence is still a significant issue nationwide.

RAINN says college women are more likely to become victims of sexual assault than robbery victims. The "red zone" is the period between the start of the first semester and Thanksgiving, where students have a heightened risk of sexual violence ("Campus Sexual Violence" | RAINN). During the academic year, 50% of college sexual assaults occur during the red zone ("Campus Sexual Violence" | RAINN). Sexual violence at the collegiate level is usually linked to undergraduate students but may also affect graduate students. Among undergraduate students, 26.4% of females and 6.8% of males experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation ("Campus Sexual Violence" | RAINN). Among graduate and professional students, 9.7% of females and 2.5% of males experience sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation ("Campus Sexual Violence" | RAINN). Sexual violence is a common crime but the most underreported crime.

RAINN says less than 20% of female victims report assaults to the police. Many women believe universities cannot help them. Moreover, 40% of college students were sexually victimized and reported institutional betrayal experiences ("About Sexual Violence | It is on Us). Sexual violence conversation has evolved in the years following the #MeToo movement and high-profile cases like Harvey Weinstein, Brock Turner, and Bill Cosby. Regardless, there is distrust in the system that is not being addressed, with many believing they are alone. The COVID-19 pandemic further enabled factors associated with sexual violence—one of the main factors being isolation.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to worldwide lockdowns. Schools transitioned to online learning. After a year and a half after the pandemic, students were safe to return to campus. Universities welcomed two groups of students to campus in 2021. First-year students and

students who had to take online classes during the lockdown. Organizations were concerned that because of the lockdown, students would have more desire to socialize, and alcohol consumption would rise. This is often a contributing factor to sexual violence cases on campus. There were nationwide protests following the return to campus report.

College students demand universities address sexual violence. Since this is a complex issue, we will focus on prevention efforts. The goal is to see how Texas Tech students learn about sexual violence. In addition, it is to see if the material framing hinders that. The Risk Intervention & Safety Education (RISE) office at Texas Tech focuses on student wellness and offers presentations and workshops for the Texas Tech community. In addition, RISE oversees the modules first-year students must complete before the academic year begins. That includes first-time undergraduates, graduates, and international students. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How can Texas Tech University improve sexual violence training materials?

RQ2: How is Texas Tech University framing information about sexual violence in their training materials?

Literature Review

"Teaching women how to defend themselves against male rapists is not the same as working to change society so that men will not rape."

— bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*

This study will use framing theory and critical feminist theory as a lens to conduct thematic analysis. This section will focus on prevention programs other universities have previously implemented. It will also focus on the framing of college sexual violence crimes in the media and the impact sexual violence has on minorities. There is scarce research on prevention programs on college campuses, underscoring the need for more attention among communication scholars.

Framing Theory

Framing theory extends agenda-setting theory, "based on how media base an event or an issue within a particular field of meaning, which plays a crucial role in people's decision-making procedure" (Communication Theory, 2023). Framing highlights particular aspects of a story by eliminating others. Readers' perceptions of an issue can be positively or negatively affected by a specific framing. Framing has evolved to apply to several forms of communication. However, framing theory is the primary theoretical framework in this study. This is because it deals with the effects on an audience when presented with the same information told differently.

Sexual violence cases gain media exposure, like *People v Brock Turner*. Coverage can raise ambiguities about the "true victims," which might deter survivors from coming forward. During the Brock Turner case, Turner's collegiate achievements were highlighted. The media covered him as a student at Stanford and part of the swim team. According to a previous study that examined news coverage of sexual violence cases, 81.19% of the articles gave life details about the perpetrator. Most writers covering these cases were overwhelmingly male, while most victims were female (Siefkes-Andrew, Alexopoulos 2019). Turner's defense team argued that this case was "ruining his life," which is something perpetrators often argue about

after committing sexual violence. The media emphasizing the perpetrator's accomplishments can sway a person's perception of the perpetrator.

Media can use euphemisms in their coverage. For example, sexual assault and rape mean different things but are used in the media interchangeably. RAINN defines sexual assault as any form of contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the victim. Rape is a form of sexual assault, but not all sexual assault is rape (RAINN | Sexual Assault). For example, when the Brock Turner case was covered, publications like the Washington Post included his swimming accomplishments. However, they called Turner's actions "sexual assault" in their articles (Miller, 2021). Additionally, Turner's picture was not a mugshot but a professional headshot.

One study categorizes media coverage as an "authoritative" and "non-authoritative" responsibility viewpoint, focusing on community structure theory. Community structure theory is an inverse of agenda-setting theory that believes community characteristics shape the news. The authoritative perspective empathizes with rape victims on college campuses. It illuminates the role of formal, official institutions such as governments and colleges and universities in acting in areas they might otherwise ignore. Non-authoritative suggests that sexual assault allegation statistics may be inflated and inaccurate and that, in any case, the issue is best left to "society." (Pollock, Richardella, Jahr, Morgan, and Cook 2018, p.230). The results were that coverage of rape and rape culture on college campuses resonated in the media as issues of public health and hate crimes. This contrasted with the concept of rape as a women's issue.

Awareness of sexual violence has increased among college students. Many students call for trigger warnings and safe spaces on campus. The media argues that trigger warnings and

safe spaces coddle students and inhibit them in the classroom (Byron, 2017). Supporters argue that discouraging trigger warnings and safe spaces minimizes "the lived reality of a student's trauma and reinforces shame" (Byron, 2017, p.118). A commonality found in all the literature was the conclusion that there is no single solution to tackling sexual violence on college campuses. Universities must create a comprehensive approach that uses various methods to address sexual violence effectively. Previous prevention methods have proven effective. Nonetheless, every university will be different and have different things that work best for its student body.

Multi-layered Identities and feminist politics

Another issue is that many prevention efforts do not target students with multi-layered identities, such as being a minority or a member of the LGBTQ+ community. There is little research on minority or LGBTQ+ students exist. As a result, it is difficult to determine how these communities are affected differently than white, heterosexual, or cis-gendered students. Students with other identities tend to grow up in households with different cultural expectations. For example, Latinx women attending larger state institutions are less likely to report sexual assault or seek legal services. Latinx culture prioritizes family and cherishes virginity (Christensen, Caswell, and Hernandez, 2020). If universities want to address the student population in general, it is essential to acknowledge all communities within the population. Another community that often remains unnoticed is international students.

International students come from different countries and cultures, giving them a different understanding of the world than people who grew up in the United States. As a result, their awareness of broader community norms (e.g., rape myths) and how they impact violence may

differ (Scholl, Cogan, Micol, Steward, Hancock, and Davis, 2021). International students might come from countries that place significant importance on community harmony, leading them to engage in more bystander behavior (Scholl, Cogan, Micol, Steward, Hancock, and Davis, 2021). To effectively address sexual violence in college, an integrated and comprehensive program needs to be established (Orchowski, Edwards, and Gidycz, 2018).

Sexual Assault, the bystander effect, and Prevention

Sexual assault prevention approaches often center around brief psychoeducational programs, which typically lack research evaluation and change attitudes for short periods (Orchowski, Edwards, and Gidycz 2018). Universities require first-year students to complete modules or view presentations on the topic. These presentations are the first and often the only time students get exposed to this information. Students can click through the modules quickly without considering the material.

Standard education programs include risk reduction, resistance education, and empowerment-based self-defense. Some interventions get taught in isolation which is problematic (Orchowski, Edwards, and Gidycz, 2018). Risk reduction and resistance education programs for women have some of the most robust evidence for reducing sexual assault (Orchowski, Edwards, and Gidycz, 2018). Men are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence, but fewer than one-third of the existing programs are for men. Theater programs are popular.

Students' Challenging Realities and Educating Against Myths (SCREAM) is an interactive theater program that engages students in sexual assault prevention and bystander intervention. SCREAM can be a one- or three-session program (McMahon, Peterson, Winter,

Palmer, Postmus & Koenick 2015). The students that participated showed positive indirect effects on behavior through intentions and self-efficacy. The conclusion was that changing student behavior to prevent sexual violence on campus will require more than just teaching students how to intervene (McMahon, Peterson, Winter, Palmer, Postmus & Koenick 2015).

Another theater production was called Roleplay. Roleplay was a collaboration between university theater and local theater created by students. The production included five separate scenarios based on real-life examples. Topics included sex, racism, homophobia, and mental health (Fleckman, Brown, Lederer, Stoltman, & Craft, 2022). The results were decreased acceptance of myths and heteronormative attitudes and beliefs. There was also an increase in perceived racism on campus after viewing Roleplay (Fleckman, Brown, Lederer, Stoltman, & Craft, 2022). The theater is a promising intervention method.

The Risk Intervention & Safety Education Office (RISE) at Texas Tech University focuses on different methods of prevention to address mental health, substance use, violence prevention, sexual health, and healthy relationships. Their efforts include digital and campus-wide outreach. For this analysis, our focus will be on the university's efforts to prevent sexual violence. Texas Tech requires all incoming first year and transfer students to complete the *Voices for Change* course. According to the RISE website, *Voices for Change* covers alcohol use, consent, and bystander intervention. Students that do not complete the course will have a hold placed on their account. The *Voices for Change* course is required for all first-time students including undergraduate, graduate, and international students.

Methods

Approach to Data Collection

This study, consistent with Braun and Clarke (2006), used thematic analysis in an open-ended way, to investigate how RISE frames sexual violence in their training materials. As stated, these modules are given to first-year students and are not limited to undergraduates. If the student fails to complete the program, a hold is placed on their account. Under Texas law, prevention education is required surrounding Title IX, The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, The Clery Act, VAWA, and Campus Save (RISE 2023). I was granted permission and access to the complete *Voices for Change* course by the RISE office.

The decision was made to proceed with an inductive approach to the analysis. This is given that my research questions are exploratory in nature and there is little existing research on this topic. I also wanted to acknowledge the complexities of sexual violence, and I felt that the most appropriate way to capture that would be through a thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This required transcription of the online modules and subsequent coding stages. The coding stage was done individually and manually. After the initial codes were created, I reviewed them and eliminated any that I felt could not provide clarity to my research questions. The codes kept were the ones I identified best as representing the overarching themes. At the third stage, I identified quotes congruent with the overarching themes. Next, I reviewed the themes to begin defining and naming them. Once the themes were finalized, the drafting of the report began.

Results

The analysis produced two themes and two subthemes. Originally, four themes had emerged but due to the themes being similar and overlapping, two themes had to become subthemes.

Theme 1: *“It's up to each of us to combat rape culture by believing and supporting survivors of sexual violence (Voices for Change 2023).” Engaged Bystanders.*

Texas Tech has a prevention strategy focused on bystander intervention. Universities often implement bystander intervention. In contrast to the bystander effect, the theory that states that individuals are less likely to offer help in the presence of others, bystander intervention is recognizing a harmful situation and reacting in a way that positively influences the outcome. Voices for Change teaches strategies for when and how to intervene. The modules emphasize throughout that not everyone will respond in the same way for various reasons. The STOP method offers four ways of intervening depending on the person's preference:

Shift Focus. Sometimes, it is advisable to calm the situation by taking attention away from it. By drawing attention to another topic, you can stop harm from happening.

Talk. Other times, you might be able to talk about what's happening by confronting the situation calmly and directly.

Object. If the situation escalates or is immediately harmful, simply object to what is happening to stop.

Partner. Maybe you're not the most qualified person to intervene, but by getting someone else's support, you can act in this situation.

The Bystander intervention method is a popular prevention method because it applies to all students regardless of gender, sexuality, etc. Bystander intervention acknowledges that everyone will approach intervening, but the critical thing is to act:

“We all assume someone else will act, but often nobody does. This is why it is so imperative that we all become engaged bystanders, people who are empowered to do something about the harmful situations that we witness (Voices for Change 2023).”

The general assumption is that people will not react to situations they witness. Therefore, the reader is told to venture further than most. Students are given options for intervening depending on the person.

“Not every situation calls for the same type of intervention, and depending on your personality or identities, you might choose to intervene differently than someone else (Voices for Change 2023).”

Bystander intervention offers a broad intervention method. The university values diversity and that is evident throughout the modules. The bystander intervention method offers an approach that can be adapted to multiple people on campus.

Subtheme 1: *“We each have a responsibility to speak out to our friends, classmates, and anyone else who could harm our campus community (Voices for Change 2023).” Texas Tech is a community.*

Voices for Change emphasizes to students that Texas Tech is a university and a community. As members of the community, each student contributes through their actions.

Those actions can have a positive or negative influence on the community. Therefore, each student is responsible for intervening in a situation that could harm other community members.

“The most rewarding thing about being a part of something like this is that every individual member gets to contribute to the well-being of the whole community (Voices for Change 2023).”

In a community, everyone is valued and contributing. The modules have reflection portions and short quizzes related to the topics covered. The modules acknowledge that people have different upbringings which perpetuates hateful rhetoric. The university encourages students to expand their minds and challenge those thoughts.

“We are likely all guilty of stereotyping, biases, or microaggressions. Going forward, try to catch yourself if you do any of these things and challenge yourself to think differently. We all play a role in creating a safe and inclusive environment for our friends, peers, and classmates (Voices for Change 2023).”

Stereotyping, microaggressions, and biases are all examples of hateful rhetoric. These terms are worth addressing because they contribute to the hate and discrimination that minorities and people in the LGBTQ+ community face in their everyday lives. The modules seem to minimize how damaging and dangerous this rhetoric can be.

Theme 2: *“Mutually understandable words or actions, actively communicated both knowingly and voluntarily, that clearly convey permission for a specific activity (Voices for Change 2023).”*
Mutual Consent.

Consent is crucial to any relationship. Consent cannot be given under the influence of a substance, while incapacitated, or under pressure from others. Consent is also not limited to relationships or friendships. Organizations that conduct hazing are not given consent by those they haze.

“Healthy relationships look different for everyone, but they have some things in common. They’re respectful and mutually beneficial, and each person involved wants to be a part of the relationship (Voices for Change 2023).”

The modules discussed what healthy relationships should look like at their core. A healthy relationship looks different for everyone, but it should be a relationship that both people want to be part of.

“Consent can look different depending on the situation, but it's always helpful to remember that the absence of a no doesn't mean a yes. That someone can't consent if they're incapacitated, and that a yes to one activity doesn't mean a yes to another activity (Voices for Change 2023).”

Voices for Change understands that consent is complex and goes beyond saying yes or no. Consent cannot be given if the person is incapacitated or pressured into saying yes. If the person is pressured, that is considered coercion.

Subtheme 2: *“The root causes of sexual violence are tied to the idea that we live in a culture that condones or ignores sexual violence (Voices for Change 2023).” Power Imbalances.*

The modules name lack of consent and power imbalances as the root causes of sexual violence. The modules also criticize our culture. If our culture continues to ignore and shame

victims when they speak out, these problems will only intensify. Power imbalances do not just occur in romantic relationships but also in organizations that haze their members:

“A lot of people try to explain away hazing as something else, but hazing is just another form of abusive power and control. Power and control have no place in any type of relationship - even friendship, teammates, brotherhood, or sisterhood (Voices for Change 2023).”

The modules stress the importance of these topics being applicable to different kinds of relationships. Regardless of the relationship, power, and control do not make a healthy relationship. Comparison is made to hazing and its effects on mental health:

“The truth is that hazing builds fear and creates uneven power dynamics, not organic commitment, or friendship. It separates classes of students rather than building community between them. It isn't hazing if they volunteer for it (Voices for Change 2023).”

Hazing can harm a person and isolate them from the community. Community is a vital aspect of the module. The word carries more meaning than just referring to a group of people.

“Community” in this context seems equivalent to "brotherhood" or “sisterhood.” The issues covered in the modules are framed as a community issue and an issue that not only affects a singular person. Any violence or harm to community members detracts the community.

Discussion

The purpose of this project was to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How can Texas Tech University improve sexual violence training materials?

RQ2: How is Texas Tech University framing information about sexual violence in its training materials?

Bystander Intervention Method & Community

To answer *RQ2*, an analysis of *Voices for Change* found that Texas Tech University's prevention efforts focus heavily on bystander intervention. Additionally, sexual violence is framed as a community issue. That means that everyone who attends Texas Tech joins a community. Students can contribute to community wellness through their actions. As community members, students hold others accountable for their actions. Any harm that occurs to community members is a detriment to the community.

The bystander intervention method is a popular prevention method because it applies to all students regardless of gender, sexuality, or other identities. There has not been enough research conducted to know if this method is the appropriate approach to prevention. "No rigorous evaluation of bystander-focused prevention initiatives has documented reductions in sexual violence among college students, although they have found increases in positive bystander action (Banyard et al., 2007; Coker et al., 2015; Moynihan et al., 2015)." The issue with the bystander method is that it does not target those more likely to fall victim to sexual violence directly. Furthermore, it does not acknowledge those more likely to perpetuate sexual violence.

Research in the past has found that theater programs are an effective way of training students on sexual violence. Texas Tech could adopt a theater program to go alongside the *Voices for Change* modules. This theater program could give the university the opportunity to

acknowledge the marginalized communities that come from different cultural backgrounds. International students and Latinx students are perfect examples of students that come from different cultural backgrounds.

The number of Latinx students receiving undergraduate degrees has increased in the past couple of years. Between 2000 and 2015, Latinx enrollment in colleges and universities increased by 126% (McFarland et al., 2017). At Texas Tech, the Hispanic population makes up about 29% of the student body. Notably, Texas Tech was named a “Hispanic Serving Institute” in Fall 2020.

The conflict between educational goals and traditional, cultural gender roles and expectations creates an environment that prevents Latinx college women from seeking help should they experience sexual violence (Romero, 2012). The reason is that Latinx culture prioritizes family and prizes virginity. Machismo is male behavior that is strong and forceful, and shows very traditional ideas about how men and women should behave. Machismo is synonymous with sexism and misogyny but differs in the sense that it is a deep-rooted belief in the Latinx community. The belief is that men are superior to women in all aspects of life. Machismo is not only detrimental to the women that grow up with it, but the men that have certain expectations for how they should behave.

In the United States, Latinx college women describe how the desire to explore their sexuality conflicts with cultural and religious values focused on maintaining one’s virginity (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; Stephens & Thomas, 2011). The Bystander intervention method cannot contextualize the complexities of growing up in the Latinx community.

International students are another group that often goes unacknowledged. International students had a greater perceived effectiveness to intervene in potentially risky situations than domestic students. Students who come from cultures that place greater importance on community harmony may be more likely to intervene (Scholl, Cogan, Micol, Steward, Hancock, Davis). Another study found that international students are less likely to report their sexual assault due to feelings of shame or not knowing if the behaviors are part of the host culture (AHRC, 2017; Forbes-Mewett et al., 2015). At Texas Tech, international students make up about 5.2% of the student body.

Consent, Abortion, and Sex Education

Lack of consent and power imbalances are the root causes of sexual violence. Consent is therefore a major part of the module. In the legal sense, consent is crucial for sexual intimacy. Consent shows students how not to commit crimes against their partners. Consent does not empower a student beyond approving and refusing advances. Students that grow up in the Texas public school system already have a poor background in sexual education. This is because of the state's handling of these programs.

The Texas public school system has one of the poorest rates of proper sexual education in the nation. "Texas is one of just five states requiring parents to opt children into sexual education, and the only state requiring abuse prevention (Texas Is Ready for 2023)." According to a 2016 study from the Texas Freedom Network, 58.3% of Texas public schools teach *an abstinence-only* curriculum. Additionally, Texas has some of the strictest abortion laws in the nation. In 2022, Texas completely banned abortions other than life-saving ones by passing a trigger law. "This is a law that criminalizes abortions. It comes with five years

to life imprisonment, as well as civil penalties of \$100,000 for abortion. It also comes with administrative penalties in the form of mandatory revocation of a license to practice medicine, nursing, pharmacy, etc. (Sepper 2022). For women to receive an abortion, they must travel outside the state. To expand students' minds, sexual education should teach more than a simplistic, binary view of sexual intimacy. To implement the bystander method effectively, students should be taught how to speak for themselves first. Students cannot be expected to have the confidence to speak for others or intervene when they live in a state that wants to punish them for engaging in sexual activity.

The modules cover stereotypes, biases, and microaggressions. The modules frame the information to minimize how damaging and dangerous these things are to LGBTQ+ and minorities. An example would be when the modules talked about racial disparities in healthcare in the identities portion of the course. “One study showed that when Black and Latino men came to the hospital for a broken leg, they were less likely to receive pain medication than white patients. Also, Black, and Latino patients were more likely to have their legs amputated than white patients (Voices for Change 2023).” It is difficult to consider this example as just "personal bias" when patients get unnecessary amputations in the American healthcare system. The personal bias frame minimizes what others would most commonly consider racism.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has two main limitations. The first limitation is that no students were interviewed or surveyed. No students were interviewed or surveyed due to time constraints and because I am a fully online student located in San Antonio. A thematic analysis was conducted because I felt it was the most effective way to capture the complexities of sexual violence.

It could serve as a reference in future research where students are interviewed or surveyed. The second limitation is that this study was conducted individually. Ideally, any future research would have more than one person to have multiple perspectives and help organize interviews and surveys more efficiently.

Conclusion

Sexual violence is common on college campuses. In Texas, universities are required to provide prevention training covering topics like sexual violence, alcohol and drug abuse, mental health, etc. Texas Tech University first-time students must complete the *Voices for Change* modules before the academic year. *Voices for Change* teaches students the bystander intervention method, showing them how and when to intervene in a harmful situation. Additionally, the program emphasizes the bystander intervention method by framing sexual violence as a “community issue.” The students are considered part of a community and as such, they contribute to the community through their actions. The bystander intervention method has been shown to increase positive bystander action (Banyard et al., 2007; Coker et al., 2015; Moynihan et al., 2015). To improve *Voices for Change*, portions should be rewritten with a more mindful approach to intersectionality. Future research should involve student input through surveys or interviews.

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