ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MOTHERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE MOVEMENT AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Kelsey J. Drotning
Doctor of Philosophy, 2023

Dissertation Directed by: Dr. Philip Cohen, Sociology

My dissertation examines how the #MeToo movement is changing generational understandings of sexual violence. Through this research, I examine how sexual violence is both a cause and a consequence of systemic gender and race inequality. Using eighteen in-depth semi-structured interviews of mothers with at least one child aged five-years or older, I investigate three sets of questions. First, how are mothers evaluating their own experiences with sexual violence post #MeToo movement? Second, how is sexual violence part of mother-child conversations about sexual behavior? Third, how do mothers' social location contribute to how they feel about the #MeToo movement and how they teach their children about sexual violence? My findings suggest mothers are transmitting new understandings of sexual violence to their children. Specifically, mothers are teaching their children that appropriate touch, sexual or nonsexual, cannot be determined using a binary yes or no standard of consent. Their approach to sex education is driven by their own experiences with sex that was violating and/or nonconsensual and consideration of their own and their children's social location. Overall, my findings demonstrate the #MeToo movement and other associated events have ushered in a change in mothers' rape consciousness which is facilitating change in children's sex education. If successful, mothers will have contributed to decreased prevalence of sexual violence as these children age into adolescence and adulthood.

MOTHERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE MOVEMENT AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE

by

Kelsey Jeanne Drotning

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology
2023

Advisory Committee:
Professor Philip N. Cohen, Chair
Associate Professor Dawn Dow
Assistant Professor Jessica Fish, Dean’s Representative
Professor Rashawn Ray
Professor Liana C. Sayer

© Copyright by Kelsey J. Drotning 2023

Dedication

To the mothers who shared their stories with me, thank you.

And, to every person who has yet to share their story, I believe you.

Acknowledgements

I brought the idea for this project to my advisor in February 2020, imagining hours spent in deep conversation in cozy coffeeshop corners. At that time, I had no way of knowing the bulk of my dissertation work, and all the data collection, would take place from a small desk in my home during a global pandemic.

It was not easy reading, thinking, talking, and writing about sexual violence for three years and I could not have done it without my incredible colleagues, friends, and family. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Philip Cohen, for letting me run with my ideas. I am grateful for the many comments on drafts, conversations, and support throughout my time in the program. To my mentor, Dr. Liana Sayer, thank you for being a constant presence in my life throughout the last five and half years, both in-person and online. I'm glad we have more papers to write together. This endeavor would not have been possible without my committee members and teachers, Dawn Dow, Rashawn Ray, and Jessica Fish. Thank you for your time, support, and feedback throughout my time in graduate school.

I'm grateful for the many colleagues, friends, and loved ones who kept me grounded and helped me find joy throughout this process. Chandra, I wouldn't have made it through this without you. I will be forever thankful for our many coffeeshop and zoom work sessions, your responses to my random texts, and all-around friendship; Jess, thank you for all the bike rides and for being willing to talk through writing challenges. To Han, thank you for many beers and dog walks, looking forward to many more. Justin and Polina, thank you for our weekly zoom work dates during the pandemic and for our continued foodie adventures; and to the many others who were an essential source of encouragement: Simone, Robyn, Danielle, Leigh, Kerry, and Marissa.

I wouldn’t be here without my family who have always encouraged me to pursue my passions. Mom, I don’t know how many times I called you during this process, but it was a lot. Sometimes multiple times a day. Thank you for always listening. Matt and Madalyn, thank you for always being interested and supportive. Neil, thank you for continuing to make it possible for me to chase this dream.

Table of Contents

Dedication ii

Acknowledgements iii

List of Tables vi

Chapter One: Introduction: Motherhood After #MeToo: Sexual Violence, Culture, and Inequality ... 1

Chapter Two: Deconstructing the "Gray Areas" of Sexual Violence 27

Chapter Three: How Mothers are Raising Sexual Citizens 51

Chapter Four: Feminism, #MeToo, and White Privilege 72

Chapter Five: Conclusion: Yes, We Can Talk About Sexual Violence 88

Appendix A. Mothers, their Children, and Demographic Characteristics 102

Appendix B. Virtual Interviews During the COVID-19 Pandemic 103

Appendix C. Background Survey 105

Appendix D. Interview Guide 107

Appendix E. Recruitment Flyer 111

References 112

List of Tables

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Table 2. Mothers, their Children, and their Demographic Characteristics

Chapter One: Introduction: Motherhood After #MeToo: Sexual Violence, Culture, and Inequality

This project explores how mothers are interpreting and navigating contemporary cultural conversations about sexual violence both personally and in conversations with their children. Experiences of sexual violence are common in the United States, with 1 in 5 women experiencing rape or attempted rape and nearly half experiencing contact sexual violence in her lifetime (Smith et al. 2018). Girls, women, and mothers have navigated the threat and experience of sexual violence for centuries, either in silence or behind closed doors. When #MeToo went viral on Twitter in late 2017, millions of people demonstrated how pervasive sexual violence is in our society and how engrained it is in our culture, ending the silence and opening the door for important conversations about sexual harassment and assault. But many wonder, as people accused of assault and harassment during the height of the movement return to the limelight, how has the #MeToo movement changed societal understandings of sexual violence?

In 2006, activist Tarana Burke coined the phrase ‘me too’ and founded the “me too.” Movement using the phrase on MySpace with the goal of supporting Black women and girls who had been victims of sexual violence. Then in the Fall of 2017, allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein led actress Alyssa Milano to bring the language to Twitter, tweeting “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” The hashtag went viral, with thousands of people sharing their experiences with sexual violence on social media websites. This cultural moment included prominent men, and some women, being accused of sexual harassment and/or assault on a public stage (e.g., Bill Cosby, Louis C.K., R. Kelly, Kevin Spacey). The #MeToo movement led Christine Blasey Ford to read the 2016 anonymous victim impact statement in the 2015 Stanford sexual assault case against Brock

Turner, which contributed to her decision to testify against then Supreme Court Justice Nominee Brett M. Kavanaugh in 2018. It was Blasey Ford's testimony that gave Chanel Miller, author of the impact statement, the courage to publish her memoir under her own name (Felton 2022).

These interwoven narratives demonstrate the collective power of the #MeToo movement and the cascading effect it had in the public sphere. But has it changed how women think and privately talk about sexual violence? Has it changed how they talk about sex with their children? This project seeks to understand how cultural understandings of sexual violence have changed post #MeToo movement through the lens of motherhood. I have chosen to focus on mothers because they are more likely to have experienced sexual violence than fathers and mothers provide most parental sex education (Flores and Barroso 2017; Smith et al. 2019). Understanding how mothers' legal consciousness has changed as cultural conversations have evolved and how they are socializing their children related to sexual behavior will illuminate how mothers are thinking about sexual violence today.

Note on Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I use several different terms including sexual violence, sexual assault, and rape. Sexual violence is a broad term that encompasses rape, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact (Smith et al. 2018). Following Hirsch and Khan (2020), I define sexual assault as "unwanted nonconsensual sexual contact," and rape as "oral or genital assault" (pg. xxviiii). Sexual coercion describes "verbal or physical tactics to engage in sexual activity with someone who is unwilling" (Jeffrey and Barata 2017). A person may consent to sexual activity following sexual coercion because they are tired of saying no, feel guilty or like they owe a partner, or felt threatened. It is important to understand how the terms differ, but this project examines and makes room for mothers to discuss their experiences and understandings of all forms of sexual violence and I do my best to respect and use the terminology they use to describe their experiences.

The use of “victim”, “survivor”, or “victim-survivor” is contentious in both the research literature and the public discourse (Harding 2020). People who have experienced sexual or intimate partner violence often differ on what term they prefer to reference themselves, though advocacy organizations have largely shifted to using the term “survivor”. This question was outside the scope of my study, though future research should investigate whether the #MeToo movement has changed preferred terminology. When discussing previous research, I use the terms used by the researchers in their articles. When discussing mothers in my sample, I use the language and terms they use. See Harding (2020) for discussion.

I also want to acknowledge there are different ways of referencing the #MeToo movement. The AP Style Guide recommends referring to the movement as the “#MeToo movement.”. Burke refers to the movement as the ‘me too.’ Movement. I chose to use the AP Style Guide version because #MeToo captures important context related to contemporaneous events after the hashtag went viral on social medial, such as the allegations against Harvey Weinstein, the creation of the Times Up movement, Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony, and USA gymnasts allegations against Larry Nassar. In quotations from participants, I use “MeToo movement” without the hashtag because they don’t say “hashtag” out loud.

In the remainder of this chapter, I build a case for why we should care about how mothers are thinking about sexual violence today. First, I provide important background information regarding sexual violence in the United States. This includes the history of how sexual violence has been defined by law, prevalence of sexual violence in the United States, and how sexual violence is intertwined with culture to establish the context for these interviews. I describe sense-making strategies victims and survivors of sexual violence use to navigate their experiences and review previous research on parent-child conversations about sexual behavior. Second, I lay out the theoretical framework that guides my research and situate my research questions within the framework. Third, I describe my methodological approach to answering these questions and provide a road map of my dissertation findings.

Sexual Violence as a Social Problem

How Understandings of Sexual Violence Have Changed

Like history, definitions are written by those in power. Despite being revised because of political struggles, sexual violence has been defined by those who decide which kinds of violence are legitimate and which are reprehensible, with generally sexist, racist, and heterosexist consequences (Collins 1998; Freedman 2013, 3). Understanding definitions of sexual violence is essential because legal definitions and cultural discourses shape public perception, the criminal justice response, and victims' sense-making of their experiences (Lira, Koss, and Russo 1999; Phillips 2000).

North American colonialists imported the first laws against rape in the United States from fifteenth and sixteenth century English statutes (Collins 2005; Freedman 2013). Women were first considered the property of their father, and then the property of their husband. Rape was understood to be a violation of another man's property and was not about the bodily autonomy of women (Freedman 2013). Under this definition, marital rape was unfathomable, and child sexual abuse perpetrated by fathers and other relatives was rarely prosecuted. Women had to prove they resisted. Marital rape became a crime in all 50 states only in 1993 (Bergen 2006). However, all but four states have provisions for at least one type of marital exemption, such as statutory rape (Aequitas 2019). These laws were constructed under the social guise of protecting women's chastity, but in practice, only protected white women in higher social classes. Black women, immigrant women, and poor women generally did not have the same legal options (Freedman 2013).

Not only were early conceptualizations based on defining women as property, they were also predicated on a white female victim being raped by a Black perpetrator who is a stranger, reflecting white men's efforts to regulate white women's sexuality and to justify the lynching of Black men (Crenshaw 1991; Mahan 2017). This conceptualization erases the racist and sexist exploitation of Black women that made them both vulnerable to rape – including while enslaved and during Jim Crow – and unable to seek justice in a judicial system that rarely prosecuted white men for crimes against non-white people (Crenshaw 1989). It is also the foundation of rape stereotypes including where rape happens (e.g., at a party), how women feel about rape (i.e., ashamed), and how rape happens (i.e., violently). This shapes how women make sense of their own experiences because if what they experience does not match their expectations, they struggle to label the experience (Littleton, Breitkopf,and Berenson 2007).

Beginning in the 1970s, feminist activists successfully pushed for some reforms within state legislatures, including eliminating the spousal rape exemption, expanding protection to men and single women, and criminalizing domestic violence and non-penetrative unwanted sexual contact (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; Bumiller 2008; Estrich 1987; Russell 1990; Spohn and Horney 1992). However, the federal government did not revise the 1927 legal definition of rape until 2013. Rape is now defined in the federal criminal law as "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (US Department of Justice 2014).

The legal system has expanded to recognize other forms of sexual violence beyond rape, such as sexual harassment and rape as a form of gender discrimination on college campuses (Simon 2004). Yet other experiences are not covered by existing law at a federal level. The nonconsensual distribution of sexually explicit images, also known as revenge porn or nonconsensual pornography, is currently illegal in 46 states and several countries (Without My Consent 2019). A bill was introduced to the House in July 2016, but has not yet been passed, forcing survivors to depend on states for legal redress (Nisttáhuz 2018). This may be of particular concern for mothers as children and adolescents have more regular access to the Internet. Additionally, feminists and sexual assault advocates are also pushing for changes in the statute of limitations which determines the amount of time survivors have to report their experience to law enforcement and have it be eligible for prosecution. The backlog of sexual assault forensic kits results and the expiration of the statute of limitations in some cases, precludes prosecution even with a DNA match (Wells et al. 2016). As definitions and understandings of sexual assault change, some survivors may wish to report years or decades later, particularly if they are child victims of sexual assault (Shinton 2017).

Victims, Survivors, Perpetrators

Despite progress in the legal arena and victim services, experiences of sexual violence are still common in the United States and frequently go unreported. Any person can experience or commit sexual violence, but some groups are at greater risk of experiencing sexual violence while other groups are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence than others. In the United States, one in five women will be raped or experience attempted rape during her lifetime while one in three women will experience some form of unwanted sexual contact compared to one in fourteen men who will be forced or almost forced to penetrate someone else (Smith et al. 2018). This varies by race and sexual identity. Compared to white women, Black, multiracial, and Indigenous women are disproportionately vulnerable to sexual violence (Richie 2012; Ritchie 2017; Tjaden and Thoennes 2006; Wahab and Olson 2004). Cisgender LGBQ people are half as likely to experience sexual violence compared to transgender people, but more likely to experience sexual violence than heterosexual people (Langenderfer-Magruder et al. 2016). Bisexual women are 4 times as likely to experience sexual violence as lesbian women and 3 times as likely as heterosexual women (Walters et al. 2013). The prevalence of sexual violence is not known for all marginalized groups, but people with multiple marginalized identities appear to be at greater risk than others.

Contrary to popular belief, 78 percent of perpetrators are known to the victim. More than a third are former or current intimate partners, 6 percent are family members, and 38 percent are friends or acquaintances (Planty et al. 2013). Most perpetrators of sexual violence are men and tend to have social networks that include others who commit sexual violence (Mellins et al. 2018; Swartout 2013). White men commit most sexual assaults that are reported to law enforcement (Planty et al. 2013). While not all people with identified risk factors go on to perpetrate sexual violence, researchers have identified several risk factors that increase the likelihood someone will commit assault, including childhood abuse, early exposure to sexual behavior, low levels of self-esteem and empathy, and parental substance use and criminal behavior (Tharp et al. 2012).

Survivors frequently choose not to report their victimization to the police. In 2018, only 24.9 percent of rape or sexual assault victimizations were reported to law enforcement, a significant decrease from 40.4 percent in 2017 (Morgan and Oudekerk 2019). The most common reason survivors chose not to report was due to fear of retribution, of getting the offender in trouble, or for several different reasons (Langton, Berzofsky, and Smiley-McDonald 2012). Victims are more likely to report sexual violence to law enforcement if the perpetrator was a stranger, used a weapon, or felt their life was in danger (Chen and Ullman 2010). Despite decades of improvement in law and greater awareness of sexual assault, many survivors choose not to report because their experience doesn't match the archetypal rape (Chen and Ullman 2010; Estrich 1987). The disconnect between what survivors experience and what they identify as a crime is tied to a culture in the United States that values masculinity, perpetuates rape myths, and only values survivors with privileged, "credible" identities.

Sexual Violence and Culture

Despite a great deal of work by feminists and activists and the myriad of research that disproves rape myths, sexual violence remains a prevalent component of our culture (Hayes et al. 2016). Stereotypes of sexual violence victims and perpetrators perpetuate false narratives and often prevent self-identification of victimization because an individual's experience doesn't fit the archetypal sexual assault, which several participants in my study describe (Cleere and Lynn 2013). Sexual violence is a common plot device in novels, movies, and TV series (Projansky 2001); a common component of workplaces (Kantor and Twohey 2019); and a recent fixture of news and social media discourse (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018). False beliefs about rape and sexual violence, called rape myths, contribute to the stickiness of rape culture. Rape myths, also understood to be stereotypes, are "attitudes and generally false beliefs about rape that are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). Rape myths include: 1) women's behavior, such as dressing provocatively and drinking, can lead to sexual assault; 2) consent at a previous time provides consent for a later time; 3) most sexual assaults are committed by strangers (see previous section); 4) only “pretty” women can be victims of sexual violence; and 5) false allegations are common (Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault nd; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994). Rape myth acceptance is higher among men than women and strongly associated with sexist attitudes and behavior (Suarez and Gadalla 2010).

Women seeking justice for rape are often scrutinized for their own behavior. Rape victims are considered more credible if their previous sexual conduct fits within a narrow definition of morally acceptable behavior and they attempted to physically resist the rapist (Crenshaw 1991). Alcohol and college parties are also intertwined with rape culture (Hayes et al. 2016; Hirsch and Khan 2020; Wade 2017). Among college students, acceptance of rape myths is highly correlated with regular binge drinking, particularly for men (Hayes et al. 2016). Fraternities and college athletics foster a masculine culture where rape culture thrives by conveying higher status to members of these clubs (Hirsch and Khan 2020; Martin 2016). Victims and survivors who were drinking or at a party prior to the assault are frequently blamed for their own victimization. Rape myths inform how survivors interpret their own experiences (Kahn et al. 2003; Littleton et al. 2007; Wilson and Miller 2015), reporting decisions (Du Mont, Miller, and Myhr 2003), police investigations (Shaw et al. 2017), and jury decisions (Dinos et al. 2015). Understanding rape myths is essential to understanding sense-making strategies used by victims and survivors of sexual violence.

Sense-Making Strategies

Victims and survivors often struggle to place their own experiences within the context of dominant cultural depictions of rape and sexual violence. Previous research has shown that many survivors employ different sense-making strategies: normalizing and minimizing violence, managing status violations, and evaluating how their social position will influence how others perceive a disclosure of sexual violence (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018).

For some victims and survivors, taking back control of the narrative is an important coping strategy, but this can also lead to minimizing and normalizing personal experiences with sexual violence. In her research on college-age women's intimate relationships, Phillips (2000) found that many women were comfortable labeling other people's experiences as victimization but not their own. Many felt their experiences of victimization didn't count as "real rape" (Phillips 2000). Research from the 1980s found that women were less likely to report their victimization to law enforcement if they didn't fit the "real victim" and "real rape" stereotype, typically understood as a white woman by a stranger and violent, physical force (Williams 1984). However, more recent research found no difference in the demographic characteristics of women who reported their assault and women who didn't. Women were more likely to report if they had visible, physical injuries and experienced physical force, indicating some components of the "real rape" stereotype still shape reporting rates and conceptions of sexual violence (Du Mont, Miller, and Myhr 2003). Survivors also frequently shifted the blame from the perpetrator to themselves, minimizing the behavior and choices of perpetrators. Those who experienced abuse as children sometimes blamed non-abusive parents (Reavy and Gough 2000). Some women made excuses for partners, suggesting their partner's behavior was forgivable because of insecurity and a history of childhood abuse (Phillips 2000).[1]

The widespread practice of minimizing experiences contributes to the misperception that sexual violence is endemic to society. Some girls view sexual violence as normal, expected, and the result of men's sexual desires (Hlavka 2014). Several studies have shown that survivors frame their decisions as “giving in” to pressure because it was easier than continuing to resist, rather than a calculated strategy for staying safe and avoiding further violent behavior (Hlavka 2014; Menning and Holtzman 2014). Normalizing sexual violence and minimizing its harmful effects is inherently tied to cultural understandings of gender, gender roles, and heteronormativity (Hlavka 2014). People breaking their silence and speaking about experiences with sexual violence, such as Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court nomination hearings, and Bill Cosby’s trial, may lead to changes in cultural understandings of sexual violence. The large number of women who came forward together made it difficult for people to not believe the allegations.

---

[1] Gay men also tend to blame themselves, but rather than focusing on their own choices, focus on their feelings of low levels of self-esteem, shame, and high levels of guilt (Menning and Holtzman 2014).

Victims and survivor’s social location and identity effects how they interpret experiences of sexual violence (Crenshaw 1991). Race and ethnicity (Ahrens, Isas, and Viveros 2011; McGuffey 2010; 2013), social class (Phipps 2009; Temkin 1987), sexual orientation (Menning and Holtzman 2014; Sigurvinsdottir and Ullman 2015), being transgender (Landgenderfer-Magruder et al. 2016; Yavorsky and Sayer 2013), and immigration status (Kim et al. 2017) shape the systemic barriers and cultural stigma survivors must navigate. McGuffey (2010) suggests that survivors create “stratification accounts,” a cognitive process in which they interpret “how others value them in a hierarchical society” within the context of their own social identities. He lays out three controlling images Black women, specifically African Americans, must negotiate: Black Promiscuity, the Black Superwoman, and Cultural Protectors. His research finds that Black women often deploy narratives that utilize these controlling images in order to understand their victimization, with many choosing not to disclose their assault due to a belief they would not be believed (McGuffey 2013).

Latinas are also less likely than white women to disclose sexual assault to law enforcement or crisis centers (Campbell et al. 2001; Lira, Koss, and Russo 1999). In Latinx families, several cultural norms influence whether or not Latinas identify and disclose experiences of sexual and intimate partner violence including traditional gender roles and beliefs about marriage, attitudes toward sexual assault and intimate partner violence, against sharing personal information with strangers, and norms against sharing family secrets. The subordinate position of women within Latinx families due to traditional gender roles and fear of the repercussions such as being blamed and feelings of shame, lead many women to avoid disclosure, particularly if the perpetrator is someone in a position of authority (Ahrens et al. 2010). This is compounded by immigration experiences. Immigrant women from Mexico, for example, face the controlling images of the "virgin-whore dichotomy." Women who experienced sexual violence as children often had to leave their children behind with family members who had abused them, in hopes of securing a better life for their whole family in the future (Kim et al. 2017). However, attitudes towards sexual violence varies greatly among Mexican immigrant women and varies with education and experience with urban culture (Lira, Koss, and Russo 1999).

Social class also filters perceptions of sexual violence and shapes the context in which it happens, particularly for non-white survivors (McGuffey 2013). Many low-income women conceptualize rape in highly stereotypical ways, understanding rape to be violent and committed by a stranger (Littleton, Breitkopf, and Berenson 2007). Phipps (2009) suggests that conceptions of femininity differ by social class which alters how juries and law enforcement respond to victims of sexual violence. Victims of sexual assault who are white and middle class are viewed as more credible because they are associated with "respectable" employment, not welfare, and assumed to have good “moral” character (Phipps 2009). This can increase the additional trauma survivors face during court procedures and decrease the likelihood of reporting sexual violence to law enforcement (Temkin 1987).

People who identify as LGB and/or are transgender face an increased risk of sexual violence (Langenderfer-Magruder et al. 2016), greater fear (Yavorsky and Sayer 2013), and additional barriers to reporting (Stotzer 2014) compared to heterosexual and cisgender people. However, sexual minority men and women interpret these experiences differently. Men who experience unwanted sexual contact describe feeling pressured to give in to the perpetrator because of feelings of guilt and low self-worth. Women with similar experiences describe giving in because it’s easier than resisting (Menning and Holtzman 2014). After a sexual assault, bisexual women were more likely to be depressed and to show symptoms for PTSD than heterosexual women (Sigurvinsdottir and Ullman 2016).

As the previous section has shown, sense-making regarding sexual violence is greatly shaped by culture and social marginalization. Over the last several years, sexual violence has been widely discussed by global media as the world grapples with how men in power have abused their authority. But these stories about celebrities don’t capture how ordinary women are grappling with these cultural conversations. It is vital that we capture how mothers are thinking about sexual violence in contemporary settings because their views shape how they parent and prepare their children for sexual experiences.

Parent-Child Conversations About Sexual Behavior

Mothers are widely considered to transmit cultural values to their children through parenting and socialization processes (Martin 2009; Hays 1996). They are also more likely to talk about sex and sexuality with their children than are fathers (DiIorio, Pluhar, and Belcher

2003; Flores and Barroso 2017). Rossetto and Tollison (2017) suggest that families are key to eliminating sexual assault by changing how children are socialized into sexual scripts. At younger ages, conversations between mothers and their children about sexuality tend to be limited to romance discourses that assume their child is heterosexual. Most mothers of children ages 3 to 6, describe love as happening between a man and a woman, a certainty in their future, and that love leads to marriage, but most do not discuss sex (Martin 2009). Between ages 11 and 18, many parents report discussing sex, in addition to menstruation, birth control, and reproduction, though topics differ for sons and daughters. Parents tend to discuss more protective behaviors related to pregnancy and STD's with daughters, but focus on physical development with sons (DiIorio, Pluhar, and Belcher 2003).

Many parents explain how they teach their children about sex as being in direct contrast to how they were taught about sex by their parents who they remember as being unwilling to talk about sex (Frankham 2006). They emphasize sex as natural and respond to questions as they arise organically from children (Flores and Barroso 2017; Frankham 2006). This can lead to an overemphasis of sex as heteronormative and devoid of pleasure because questions tend to originate with "Where do babies come from" and focus on the physical mechanics of sex. Despite claims to openness, many parents provide cursory answers that do not invite further questions from their children (Frankham 2006). When discussing healthy relationships and relationship behaviors, parents tend to be more concerned for the safety of their daughters than their sons. They teach daughters to say no and sons to hear no. The gendered stereotypes conveyed in sex education messaging leave some adolescents unprepared to understand or respond to victimization, particularly boys who are victimized and teens who identify as LGBTQ (Akers et al. 2011).

Parents who have personally experienced sexual victimization or know someone who has are often motivated to discuss violence with their children because of their own experiences (Akers et al. 2011; Deblinger 2010; Flores and Barroso 2017). In a survey of 63 mothers with children ages three to seventeen living in the urban Midwest, Woody, Randall, and D’Souza (2009) found that mothers who experienced some form of sexual abuse as children or adults were more likely than other mothers to prepare for providing sex education to their children by reading education materials and consulting with relevant professionals. Mothers in this study were mostly white and from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. However, these mothers were also less likely to speak explicitly with their children on these topics. Interestingly, mothers’ own experience with sex education growing up did not influence how they talked to their kids about sex (Woody, Randall, and D’Souza 2009).

Over time, the number of parents talking to their kids about sexual violence and abuse has increased, though the content of these conversations still tends to adhere to stereotypes of abuse. In a survey of 289 parents and guardians of children in kindergarten to third grade in southern New Jersey, Deblinger et al. (2010) found that 79 percent of all parents and 93 percent of parents who had experienced abuse had talked at least briefly with their child about sexual abuse. Parents typically warn children about danger from strangers, instruct them to tell a parent, and to fight back (Deblinger et al. 2010). While both studies have similar results, neither were able to analyze how these conversations might vary by race. In a study of 152 African American parents and adolescents in Pennsylvania, Akers et al. (2011) found that a family history of child sexual abuse often leads parents to discuss healthy relationships and behaviors with their children. Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire and to participate in a focus group. The authors found that discussions about healthy relationships and sexual safety were highly gendered, with parents focusing on safety, self-esteem, and familial love with daughters and respect for women with sons (Akers et al. 2011).

Given the recent #MeToo movement, and contemporary conversations in the news and on social media about sexual assault and harassment, parents and mothers in particular may feel increased pressure to adequately address issues of sexual violence when discussing sex with their children. In their book *Sexual Citizens*, Hirsch and Khan (2020) argue that parents should have nuanced, age-appropriate conversations with their children about consent throughout their childhood to develop children's understanding of both their own and others bodily autonomy. I will return to this idea in Chapter 3.

Sexual Violence as a Theoretical Problem

For decades, social scientific research on sexual violence was almost non-existent. But over the last 35 years, the literature has expanded, begun grappling with omissions, and taking stock of what remains to be done (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; Collins 1991, 2004; Hirsch and Khan 2020; Mardorussian 2002). Feminist theory suggests that sexual violence is the result of gendered power relations, specifically the dominance of men over women (Connell 1987; Hamilton et al. 2019). This is the crux of gender inequality (MacKinnon 1982). MacKinnon (1982) argues that gender stereotypes are based on sexuality and men's efforts to assert dominance over women's sexuality, like women's perceived vulnerability and physical weakness is taken to mean they are sexually accessible, receptive, and need men for survival and pleasure. These assertions are predicated on the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural state of gender relations, leaving no room for gendered power dynamics in non-heterosexual relationships (Connell 1987).

Additionally, while MacKinnon (1982, 1983) engages with social class and Connell (1987) with masculinities, both fail to interrogate how racism shapes gendered power relations. MacKinnon engages this critique, arguing that it's not because race doesn't matter, but because race is widely accepted as a concept and gender is not. In her view, women are women by nature of being oppressed by men (MacKinnon 1991). In a response, Mahoney suggests that while MacKinnon's theorizing on gender has been essential to feminist progress, it also trivializes the relationship between white and Black women and fails to recognize how white women contribute to the oppression of other women (Mahoney 1993). This is exemplified by the response to Anita Hill's testimony during the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas (Hirshman 2019).

White feminist research on sexual violence has a tendency to set aside race to focus on gender (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018). Sometimes this is done explicitly and intentionally (Corrigan 2013; Estrich 1987; Martin 2005), other times it is an oversight driven by inattention to scholarship by women of color (Mardorossian 2002). Other researchers (e.g., LaFree 1989), who study both gender and race fail to acknowledge how they are overlapping systems of subordination, not separate ones (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; Crenshaw 1991). While this research has pushed anti-rape legislation forward, such as criminalizing marital rape and the Violence Against Women Act, it fails to account for differences in the impact of sexual violence on non-heterosexual women, immigrant women, and women of color.

Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (1991; 2005) demonstrate why sexual violence must be examined using an intersectional approach. The outcome of sexual assault criminal trials is often determined by how credible the court finds the victim (Crenshaw 1991). Credibility is largely based on the victim's behavior and choices immediately prior to the assault, their past sexual conduct, and participation in the law enforcement investigation. However, controlling images of Black and Latina women as erotic and sexual have created a context in which they are seen as less credible than white women (Collins 1991, 177; Vasquez 2014). Black women may also hesitate to report rape if the perpetrator is also Black, knowing that this will potentially subject them to police violence and racially biased criminal justice system (Collins 2005). Sexual violence must be analyzed within the context of the overlapping systems of oppression Black, Latina, Asian, and Indigenous women experience as women of color in the United States.

One of the ways these powerful structural systems of race and gender are reproduced is through socialization. Socialization has largely fallen out of favor as a broader sociological theory due to criticism that the concept ignores how history, agency and power influence socialization (Guhin, Calarco, and Miller-Idreiss 2020). However, socialization has remained a popular concept in sociological subspecialities, including race and gender. While children are able to make choices, their cognitive framework for understanding race and gender structures is learned through socializing institutions. I examine parent-child conversations about sex and "the sex talk" as a way to interrogate how understandings of sexual violence are communicated through gendered and racialized norms and institutions. This does not mean that individuals do not have agency in their decisions regarding sex, but that they make these choices within the gendered and racialized hierarchy they were socialized in. I will return to this idea in Chapter 5.

Structural perspectives of gender argue that gender is an institution (Lorber 1994; Martin 2004). This differs from theories that emphasize socialization into gender roles because it allows for changes in understandings of gender, rather than a static set of behaviors. At the individual level of analysis, people are socialized by their parents into their gendered selves and an understanding of how gender operates within society (Risman and Davis 2013). Socialization is also vital to understanding how parents prepare Black children to live in a racist society. Most relevant and similar to this project due to the nature of planning an intentional conversation is the emerging literature on "the police talk" that Black parents have with their children to prepare them for encounters with law enforcement (Gonzalez 2019; Dow 2016). These talks are a form of racialized socialization as the talk is necessitated by the disproportionate violence against Black people by police (Edwards, Lee, and Esposito 2019). This process is also gendered. Parents emphasize the danger their Black sons face in police encounters (Dow 2016), while those who do talk to their daughters about police violence focus on the risk of sexual violence (Gonzalez 2019).

When examined in the context of power, sexual violence emerges as a key component of perpetuating gender and racial inequality in the United States (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018). The way mothers understand their own experiences with sexual violence is limited by the language they have to think of their experiences. The #MeToo movement challenged previous silences around sexual violence and illuminated how sexual violence is more complicated than a yes or no. Mothers have the opportunity to further social change spurred by the #MeToo movement by talking to their children about consent and giving them the tools to navigate sexual relationships and understand sexual experiences in ways they weren't able to.

Methods

To investigate how mothers are interpreting and navigating contemporary cultural conversations about sexual violence, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 18 mothers of children aged 5 or older living in the United States. Through these interviews I examined how mothers' socialization contributed to their understanding of sexual violence, how their own experiences impact how they talk to their kids about sex and sexual behavior, and how the #MeToo movement is changing individual sense-making and parental sex education.

I chose semi-structured interviews as my data collection method because they allow for open-ended responses, flexibility for understanding processes, and follow-up questions as new themes emerge. Interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom between January 2021 and May 2022. Prior to the interview, respondents completed a background questionnaire (via Qualtrics) to capture demographic, household, and family of origin information. At the start of each interview, I verified each mother was in a comfortable and safe location and asked if they had any questions. I started the interviews with questions about their family and homelife and then transitioned into questions about how they were socialized related to sex and sexual behavior. I then asked mothers about their experiences with sex and sexual violence, how they are talking to their kids about sexual behavior, and their feelings about the #MeToo movement and related contemporary events.

Recruitment efforts included sharing the recruitment flyer with my personal social media networks (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Reddit), asking organizations to share my recruitment information with their staff and constituents (100+ Parent-Teacher Associations located in Virginia and Maryland, all statewide domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, and dozens of Mom's groups), and asking friends to post the flyer at their workplaces. Additionally, at the end of each interview, I asked participants to share my flyer with their network generally and personally with anyone they thought would be willing to participate.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to work, family, and social routines and has resulted in long term shifts in social behavior. After significant recruitment efforts, I interviewed 18 mothers from varying backgrounds. While mothers are generally not considered a vulnerable population that may be difficult to recruit, there is some evidence that mothers of young children have fewer opportunities to participate in research and these opportunities are constrained by the gendered role of motherhood. In a study of mothers with preschool age children in Australia, Lauren Hansen was only able to recruit 8 mothers (2019). She suggests this was for two reasons: 1) mothers of young children lack the time to participate in research; and 2) mothers may hesitate to participate in research due to the belief that they will be evaluated against intensive mothering ideologies. She suggests snowball sampling and insider status may enhance recruitment (Hansen 2019).

There are both similarities and differences between my sample and Hansen's sample, but her experience highlights some of the challenges I faced during recruitment. Unlike Hansen, my sample was open to mothers with at least one child aged five and older, snowball sampling was part of my recruitment strategy, and I was unable to claim insider status as I am not a mother. However, I believe a lack of time to participate in research did contribute to my small sample. There is a growing body of research that documents the challenges parents, in particular mothers, have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, mothers disproportionately decreased their hours of paid work compared to fathers (with some leaving the workforce completely) to provide childcare following the closure of childcare centers and shift to virtual schooling (Petts et al. 2021; Calarco et al. 2021).

In addition to limiting time availability for participating in research, the pandemic led to an increase in stress and worsening mental health, likely leading to a lower tolerance for discussing difficult issues such as sexual violence. The topic of my dissertation also likely hindered recruitment via snowball sampling. My recruitment materials explicitly stated I would ask participants questions about sexual violence, which likely reduced the number of mothers willing to participate in my study (see Appendix E). All but three mothers had been raped at some point in their lifetime. However, the three who did not recall experiences of rape described experiences of touch that made them uncomfortable or experiences where they narrowly avoided rape. Several participants told me I was the first person they talked to about experiencing sexual violence and several others had only ever discussed their experiences with a therapist. They may have felt uncomfortable suggesting my study to others for fear they would make assumptions about why they participated in the study or that it would lead to an uncomfortable conversation.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 and-a-half hours, with an average of 90 minutes. Table 1 presents the overall sample characteristics. Table 2 (Appendix A) shows each mothers individual pseudonym, their children’s age and gender, and demographic characteristics. The mothers in my sample ranged in age between 27 and 50 and had an average of 1.7 children who ranged in age between 5 and 19. Mothers of only sons were more common than mothers of only daughters. Two-thirds of the sample is white, heterosexual, and had a spouse or partner in the household. The sample is highly educated and has a high household income; 14 mothers have a master’s or higher degree and 11 have a household income greater than $100,000 a year. Because interviews were conducted virtually, mothers lived in a variety of

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	N	%
Age	18	27 - 50
Race		
White	12	67%
Non-white	6	33%
Sexual Identity		
Straight	12	67%
Something else	5	28%
Spouse/Partner in HH		
Yes	12	67%
No	6	33%
Highest Degree Earned		
Some college	2	11%
College	2	11%
Advanced degree	14	78%
Household Income		
Less than $49,999	4	22%
$50,000 to $99,999	3	17%
$100,000 to 149,000	3	17%
$150,000 and over	8	44%

locations throughout the United States, with the majority living in an urban area in states on the East or West coast.

Interviews were initially transcribed using the Zoom auto-transcription feature. While the feature is useful, it is not completely accurate so I re-listened to each interview and revised transcripts as necessary. After transcriptions were cleaned, each interview was coded using NVivo12 following flexible coding techniques. Flexible coding builds on existing theory while allowing space for emergent and new themes (Deterding and Waters 2018). After initial coding of interviews, I returned to the literature to evaluate how my findings fit within the existing literature. I then returned to coding, integrating what I learned from the literature in an iterative process.

I developed the themes discussed in Chapter 2 after I noticed that many of the mothers in my sample described experiences with unwanted sexual contact (coded as unwanted sexual contact) but they refrained from using the terms rape (code rape) or sexual assault (code sexual assault). They struggled to find the language to talk about their experiences. I searched for literature related to naming experiences of sexual violence and found the theoretical discussion of gray areas. For Chapter 3, I found that most mothers with young children used nonsexual touch examples (coded as nonsexual touch examples) and frequently mentioned talks about sex and sexual behavior were age appropriate (code age appropriate). Having read Sexual Citizens to prepare for this project, I explored how what I was finding fit or did not fit within Hirsch and Khan’s (2020) conceptual framework. Chapter 4 developed from noticing that several mothers mentioned their sons white privilege (code privilege) – unprompted – when I asked about gender differences between sons and daughters or at the end of the interview when I asked if they had anything else to share. This prompted me to examine how mothers responses to the movement differed by their varying social locations.

Positionality Statement

According to standpoint theory, researchers must be placed within the context of their social location (Harding 2004; Jacobson and Mustafa 2019). As a white, heterosexual woman who is not a mother, my particular social location influences my worldview and the way I conduct my research. I worked reflexively throughout the research process by being conscious of my identity when conducting interviews, considering how my own identity and the identity of participants may affect interview responses, and carefully checking for biases in my coding analysis. None of the participants in my study asked me about my identity, though some did ask about my motivations for conducting this research. Additionally, prior to working in graduate school, I worked in victim services. I have been trained to support victims and survivors of crime, navigate emotions, explore resources and options, and navigate barriers to seeking support.

Road Map

Given previous research on how people make sense of sexual violence, the role mothers play in their child's sex education, and the major cultural disruption caused by the #MeToo movement, my overarching research question is: how has the #MeToo movement changed generational understandings of sexual violence? In answering this question, I ask several smaller questions. How are mothers evaluating their own experiences with sexual violence post #MeToo movement? How is sexual violence part of mother-child conversations about sexual behavior? How do mothers social locations contribute to how they feel about the #MeToo movement and how they teach their children about sexual violence?

In Chapter 2, I examine how the #MeToo movement created space for women to talk about the “gray area” of sexual violence. Feminist theorists and advocates have long disagreed on the existence of gray areas, with advocates arguing sexual activity is either consensual or nonconsensual while other theorists say some experiences can be both. Mothers in my sample are relabeling previous experiences as sexual assault and/or rape. But they also highlight the need for language that does not minimize violating, but consensual experiences. Woodard (2022) provides a potential framework for understanding these experiences.

In Chapter 3, I explore how mothers are fostering sexual citizenship in their children from a young age in response to their own experiences with sexual violence and observation of the #MeToo movement. Mothers are trying to teach their children that they have a right to bodily autonomy and they must respect the bodily autonomy of others. As children get older, messages from mothers diverge in gendered ways though, with the intent of countering gendered societal messages. Mothers hope that by raising good sexual citizens, their sons will contribute to a future without sexual violence and their daughters feel empowered to express their desires.

In Chapter 4, I analyze how the mothers’ social location and the white feminism of the #MeToo movement differentially shapes which mothers identify with the movement while simultaneously urging mothers of sons to have conversations with their sons about both gender and racial privilege. Mothers from less privileged backgrounds expressed frustration with the movement for leaving out people with marginalized identities and some types of sexual violence (i.e., childhood sexual abuse). For the movement to have lasting impact, it must expand to ensure all voices and experiences are taken equally seriously.

In Chapter 5, I summarize the findings and conclusions from Chapters 2, 3, and 4 before drawing conclusions across chapters to show how my research contributes to the literature regarding sexual violence as a social, methodological, and theoretical problem. I consider the status of the #MeToo movement five years after it began and what the movement has done for the women in my sample. I discuss the state of sex education in the United States, primarily how the tension between parents and schools leaves adolescents underprepared for engaging in sexual relationships. I then discuss the responsibility of researchers who ask victims and survivors, including potential victims and survivors, to conduct research using an ethic of care that is prepared for first time disclosures.

Chapter Two: Deconstructing the "Gray Areas" of Sexual Violence[2]

Sophia is a white 40-year-old mother and a psychologist. Many of her clients have experienced sexual violence and sometimes she talked about this during our interview. When I asked her what she thought of the #MeToo movement, she paused, then explained that while she thinks the #MeToo movement has been positive overall, she also felt like it blurred the lines between what is consensual sexual activity and what is violence.

> "I think [the #MeToo movement] brought about a lot of positive change for women and how we are treated and what kind of microaggressions happen against us. One thing as a rape therapist, I feel like it kind of cheapened the experience of sexual assault…like somebody grabbing my ass in a bar is not the same as being sexually abused by my uncle, you know?"

Sophia felt like the #MeToo movement equated sexual abuse with being groped because #MeToo was used to describe a wide range of experiences, not just rape. While neither example she provides is clearly rape[3], both examples meet the definition of sexual assault. She feels some acts of sexual violence are worse than others. Sophia also described feeling Harvey Weinstein shouldn't face the same consequences as Aziz Ansari. At this point, I had already spent some time thinking about the "gray area" and whether it exists. So, I asked her directly if she thinks there are gray areas, and her response highlights the tension between consent education ("yes means yes") and people's lived experiences expressing their desires within a gender unequal society.

> "I think the gray area exists, and I think in the gray is where it could be really important to do good sex education on consent. I don't know if we should consider them all to be rape. I do know there is some, in my clients anyway, some sexual encounters where they sort of like go along with it because they don't want to be rude. And I guess like in those situations, whether or not I consider it to be rape has to do more with like power differentials and fear and consequences… Sometimes they're like well nobody held a gun to my head and threw me in the back of a pickup truck so it's not really a rape. And that's

---

[2] Content Warning: This chapter includes quotes from participants describing experiences with sexual violence.

[3] Sexual abuse may include rape but does not always.

> certainly not true… if you said yes, but not enthusiastically, whose fault is it if that sex continues? I don't know where the line is there."

Sophia explains that there are sexual encounters that cannot be clearly understood as either sex or rape, but in these situations, she thinks about power differentials. She says some of her clients don't want to be rude so they "go along with it" while others don't identify an experience as rape because the perpetrator wasn't a stranger with a weapon. The first situation references social pressures related to gendered sexual scripts. The second situation aligns with research that shows rape myths shape how victims label experiences with sexual violence (Canan, Kaplan, and Jozkowski 2022). While Sophia identifies power differentials as an important component of consent processes, she does not identify power differentials as inherent to heterosexual couples – something feminist theorists disagree with. But she also makes an important point, the "gray area" is where sex education could make a big difference.

In the public discourse (Stepp 2007) and among some feminist theorists (Cahill 2016; Gavey 2005), the "gray area" has come to represent experiences that are perceived to fall on a spectrum from consent to assault (Karlsson 2019). Experiences that have been characterized as gray in the public consciousness include sexual activity when alcohol is involved, coercion between romantic partners and acquaintances, when a partner changes their mind, consents only to specific sexual activities, or says yes but didn't feel comfortable saying no, among others. Advocates and other academics vehemently deny the existence of gray areas. They suggest this terminology is a form of victim blaming that contributes to rape myths (Boston Area Rape Crisis Center 2010; Brockbank 2019; ConsentED 2021).

Some of the stories that emerged from the #MeToo movement drew controversial attention for falling into this gray area. The #MeToo movement[4] in the United States erupted in Fall 2017 following the New York Times publishing allegations of sexual harassment and assault against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Around the world, people took to social media to share their stories with sexual violence using #MeToo. The movement drew attention to widespread experiences with sexual harassment, assault, and violence experienced by women and girls on college campuses, in the workplace, and in their everyday lives and was a direct continuation of the 'me too.' Movement started by Tarana Burke in 2006[5]. Stories like "Cat Person" and "I Went on a Date with Aziz Ansari" did not receive the same support as the stories related to Weinstein, Bill Cosby, etc. because many felt they were in the gray area or just bad sex, though thousands still found them highly relatable (Roupenian 2017; Way 2018).

This chapter investigates how mothers' legal consciousness has shifted in response to broader cultural conversations about sexual violence, revealing the gap in cultural understandings of sexual violence and the law. The #MeToo movement provided space for conversations about what consent means in a variety of situations and how power differentials between sexual partners can facilitate unhealthy and sometimes traumatic sexual experiences. Most importantly, the #MeToo movement challenged rape myths and allowed women who did not label their experiences as sexual violence to see other women with similar experiences who do apply the label of sexual violence.

I find that mothers are reclaiming experiences from the "gray area", newly labeling experiences as nonconsensual, and acknowledging the harm caused by those experiences. They are redirecting blame from themselves to the perpetrator(s) and have sought support for their experiences. Family, friends, medical professionals, and online social networks act as catalysts for change in legal consciousness by questioning, discussing, and supporting mother's understanding of their experiences. These experiences form the backdrop for mother's views about sex education and aspirations for raising children who will not perpetrate or experience sexual violence. This will be discussed in greater detail in other chapters.

---

[4] See Introduction for discussion related to referencing the #MeToo movement, called 'me too.' Movement by Tarana Burke.

[5] See Burke 2021; https://metoomvmt.org/.

Increasing Rape Consciousness

A person's legal consciousness is shaped by social forces and describes the way they interpret and engage with the law both formally and informally (Chua and Engel 2019; Ewick and Silbey 1998; Silbey 2005). People make choices based on their understanding of the law, including reporting perceived crimes, such as sexual assault, to law enforcement. A person's legal consciousness can change throughout their lifetime in response to events and experiences. This can be illustrated by Fesltiner, Abel, and Sarat (1980) discussion of how legal disputes arise through naming, blaming and claiming. First, someone *names* that harm has been done to them. Second, they *blame* someone else for causing that harm. Third, they *claim* the right to a remedy from the person that caused harm (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat (1980). For example, undergraduate students who recognize they have been sexually assaulted *and* that harm represents a rights violation under Title IX, report the assault to the school, and seek redress (Gronert 2019). For people who have experienced sexual assault, *naming* the harm they have experienced is particularly difficult due to the prevalence of rape myths[6] and fear of experiencing additional harm (Khan et al. 2018; Peterson and Muehlendhard 2004).

---

[6] Refer to Introduction for more information about rape myths.

In a study of college women, Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) found that women who report greater acceptance of rape myths are less likely than other women to label an experience as rape, even if it meets the legal definition. Rape myths are helpful for understanding how law leaves space for gray areas. Rape myths inform how survivors interpret their own experiences (Kahn et al. 2003; Littleton et al. 2007; Wilson and Miller 2016), reporting decisions (Du Mont, Miller, and Myhr 2003), police investigations (Shaw et al. 2017), and jury decisions (Dinos et al. 2015). Kristin Bumiller (1987) argues that law reinforces existing definitions of rape, hindering people's ability to recognize rape that falls outside of the "real rape" myth (Estrich 1987). For example, laws that require demonstration of non-consent reinforce beliefs that victims have to say no for something to be labeled as rape. This leaves out cases where victims were unconscious, afraid for their safety, or responding to sexual coercion. The way people understand the law and the rape myths they believe in structures how they interpret and label sexual experiences as consensual, nonconsensual, or somewhere in the middle (gray area).

Feminist social movements have long engaged in consciousness raising strategies, such as countering rape myths and encouraging women to recognize how their lives are structured by the patriarchy (Gleeson and Turner 2019; Ryan 1992). This includes pushing for changes in legal consciousness, such as recognizing rape *can* happen within a marriage (Bergen 2016). Despite efforts to expand definitions of rape and counter rape myths, an estimated 60 percent of people whose experiences legally constitute sexual assault or rape do not label the experience as such (Wilson and Miller 2016), called unacknowledged victims in the literature (Koss, Dinero, and Seibel 1988). If victims do not identify what happened to them as a crime, they are rendered unable to access legal, social, safety, and health services (Thompson et al., 2007).

In a recent *Violence Against Women* article, Oberwies and colleagues (2021) suggest an extension of legal consciousness that incorporates adherence to rape myths in their concept called "rape consciousness, in which survivors interpret and label their experiences against the [rape] scripts." People who experience assault may apply different labels to their experience based on their beliefs in rape myths and scripts and beliefs regarding how others will respond to their experience, including the law (Oberweis et al. 2021). This rape consciousness may lead women to label their experiences as "bad sex", "miscommunication" (Dardis, Kraft, and Gidycz 2021), or in the "gray area". This discussion of legal and rape consciousness provides background for the next section in which I discuss the conceptualization of gray areas in the public consciousness, empirical research, and feminist theories.

Considering Gray Areas

In the Public Consciousness

In 2007, Laura Sessions Stepp wrote, "A New Kind of Date Rape" in which she posited that there is a continuum of sexual violence. In her view, gray areas refer to "sex that falls somewhere between consent and denial… both parties are unsure of what they want" (Stepp 2007). Stepp described a series of sexual encounters that she felt, and her interviewees described, as falling into the gray area. However, Woodard (2022) asserts, and I agree, that all the stories include a woman saying no, sex happening anyway and should be defined as rape. Though the article was criticized by advocates and other writers as harmful and supportive of rape myths (Boston Area Rape Crisis Center 2010; Smith 2019), it went viral, and some people began using the term to describe their own experiences, including comedian and actress Amy Schumer (Schumer 2016).

The existence of gray areas is predicated on variation in definitions of consent and rape myths (Alcid 2013). Two other viral essays are helpful for illustrating both the gray area and the backlash to the movement. “Cat Person” is a short story that tells the story of Margot and her experience dating and having sex with Robert. The story describes Margot consenting to some sexual activities, changing her mind about having sex, but unable to tell Robert she wanted to stop because she felt she had already committed to having sex with him (Roupenian 2017). On babe.com, Grace describes communicating to Aziz Ansari that she was uncomfortable and wanted to stop engaging in sexual activity both verbally and nonverbally, signals which he either did not notice or chose to ignore. Ansari put out a statement saying he believed all sexual activity with Grace to be consensual (Way 2018). Both stories describe experiences where women didn’t verbally say yes or no, but they also didn’t want or enjoy the sexual activity and felt that they signaled discomfort and reluctance nonverbally and in Way’s case, verbally. They felt violated, but what happened to them could not be described as a criminal offense (Gray 2018; Smith 2019). Sexual assault advocacy organizations are clear, there is no such thing as “gray rape,” “gray sex,” or “gray area.” In a blog post regarding gray areas, the Boston Rape Crisis Center (2010) asserts whether verbal or nonverbal, there is consensual and nonconsensual sexual activity. When Grace was with Aziz Ansari, she gave clear verbal and nonverbal cues that she did not want to continue engaging in sexual activity. And, while Margot was with Robert, she didn’t say no, but she also didn’t say yes.

Similarly, media reporting and coverage of these gray areas reinforces the idea that consent is binary, an experience is either violent or nonviolent (Hindes and Filborn 2020). While both advocates and the media suggest consent and sexual violence are identifiably separate experiences, this makes it challenging for people to have the language to describe experiences that feel violating, even if there was some degree of consent involved. Critics of the #MeToo movement have suggested that publicizing sexual encounters that fall in this gray area is unproductive because the perpetrators are often clueless about committing an offense and may face disproportional consequences as a result (Faludi et al. 2020; Friedersdorf 2018). However, this privileges the perspective of perpetrators and does not account for the harm experienced by victims.

Empirical Studies

There is a small body of empirical research related to how gray areas are conceptualized and how this affects interpretation of experiences, most of which focus on college students and discussions of gray areas on Twitter (Baldwin-White and Bazemore 2020; Brockbank 2019; Graf and Johnson 2021; Gunnarsson 2018; Karlsson 2019; Tarzia et al. 2020). These empirical studies suggest that murky understandings of consent create the perceived "gray area". A study of male college students found that though they knew they should verbally ask for consent, they also viewed verbal consent as unrealistic and relied heavily on their perception of nonverbal cues. In the same study, the participants described feeling like consent is an ambiguous concept and understandings of consent vary by person (Brockbank 2019).

In a study of both male and female college students, Baldwin-White and Bazemore (2020) found that students evaluate sexual experiences by considering consent, coercion, and intent, but struggle to clearly define sexual assault. Some suggested coercion was a normal part of sexual relationships, but that it shouldn't go too far. They also believed that without the intent to commit harm, an experience couldn't be labeled as sexual assault. However, students find it difficult to apply these concepts if someone is intoxicated, if two people are in a relationship, or have had sex before. The most striking result from the study is the finding that for many students, sexual assault has become an expected and normalized part of college campuses (Baldwin-White and Bazemore 2020).

It’s not just college students who struggle to define consent. In a study of adults grouped into younger, middle, and older age categories, Graf and Johnson (2021) found that there were no significant age differences in core definitions of sexual consent. However, they also found that younger adults reported more expansive definitions of consent that went beyond a yes/no, such as sobriety during sexual activity, and valued consent to a higher degree than middle age and older adults (Graf and Johnson 2021). While many people can articulate basic understandings of consent, they struggle to implement those understandings during sexual encounters. Rape myths and stereotypic rape scripts contribute to the murky definition of consent and labeling of experiences, preventing a person’s legal consciousness from labeling their experience as sexual violence (Oberweis et al. 2021).

Feminist Theories of Sexual Gray Areas

“Gray areas” are an important point of theorizing because historically if something is in the gray area, it has been minimized or dismissed, limiting, or eliminating accountability (West 2017; Woodard 2022). Additionally, it can be helpful for healing for people to have language to name violating experiences, regardless of if they rise to the level of rape (Woodard 2022). Feminist theorists have long debated the meaning of sexual violence within a patriarchal society. Susan Brownmiller (1975) argued that rape is about violence, not sex. Her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* also suggested that rape is a common act integral to the patriarchal structure of society and dismantled several rape myths (Brownmiller 1975). This construction delineates rape and sex as distinct, mutually exclusive experiences. Catharine MacKinnon (1982) contradicts Brownmiller's assertion that rape is not sex by suggesting most, if not all, heteronormative sex is rape. She argues that rape is a problem of the patriarchy, but also suggests that consent is a problematic concept because it relies on men getting consent from women, rather than both parties coming to mutual agreement to have sex. She also argues that sexuality is what makes gender inequality possible because women are constructed as being sexually available for men (MacKinnon 1982). Although Mackinnon does not explicitly discuss gray areas, she argues that sex under any form of compulsion, including the gender hierarchy, is rape. In other words, for it not to be rape, sex should be both consensual and desired (MacKinnon 2005).

More recently, Nicola Gavey and Ann Cahill critique MacKinnon for dismissing women's agency and have attempted to conceptualize sexual gray areas, specifically for heterosexual sexual interactions. In her book *Just* Sex, Gavey argues there is a gray area of sexual interactions in which "the woman nevertheless found herself going along with sex that was neither desired nor enjoyed because she did not feel it was her right to stop it or because she did not know how to refuse." She argues that the gray area provides "scaffolding" for rape culture by adhering to cultural scripts in which men pursue women and women feel that it's necessary to have sex to maintain the relationship and/or exit the situation resulting in situations where women don't desire sex (Gavey 2005).

Cahill critiques Gavey for not clearly delineating what distinguishes the gray area from sexual violence or mutually agreed upon sex. (Cahill 2016). In a critique and expansion of Gavey, Cahill attempts to map out sexual gray areas, what she calls unjust sex (2016). She provides the following examples:

> "Some examples of sexual interactions that inhabit this gray area include cases where women felt significant pressure to have sex with a partner; where women felt that among

> the options that existed (including increased or continued tension with that partner), sex was the least bad option; and where women felt that acquiescing to their partner's sexual requests or demands was the easiest and/or quickest way to achieving one of their own needs or desires (sleep, for example)."

For both Gavey and Cahill, these experiences are unethical, but they are also characteristic of heteronormative sexual interactions (Gavey 2005; Cahill 2016). Critical to Gavey and Cahill's theories is evidence from interviews in which women describe these gray area situations while refraining from labeling the situation as either consensual or sexual violence. Their rape consciousness does not recognize these experiences as meeting legal or archetypal definitions of sexual assault. Cahill further clarifies Gavey's theory by suggesting that sexual violence is what happens when a man ignores a woman's sexual agency. An experience falls into the gray area is one in which agency is limited but sought within accepted sexual scripts (Cahill 2016). This differs from public understandings of gray areas which often encompass experiences that are legally defined as sexual violence, such as sex when they were too intoxicated to give consent, when they consented after prolonged coercion, and assault by an established intimate partner.

Woodard (2022) takes Cahill's conceptualization of unjust sex a step further and breaks down what she calls bad sex into three categories: social coercion, psychological pressure and calculated tradeoffs, and epistemically unsafe sex. Social coercion refers to societal pressures that shape the reasons someone might say yes to sex. For example, a woman might feel it is polite to have sex with the man who bought her dinner on a date even if she doesn't want to[7]. Psychological pressure is similar to social coercion[8] and describes verbal threats or manipulation in which a person may consent to having sex because it is the least bad option. Epistemically unsafe sex is defined as cases where women say yes because they believe “no would be ineffective”. Their bodily autonomy will not be respected so saying yes provides an element of control and the ability to believe that choice was involved (Woodard 2022).

---

[7] See Roupenian (2017) for a detailed example.

[8] The Office on Women's Health defines sexual coercion as "Sexual coercion is unwanted sexual activity that happens when you are pressured, tricked, threatened, or forced in a nonphysical way." See also Jeffrey and Barata (2017).

Mothers in my study are challenging public understandings of gray areas by re-naming their experiences and redirecting blame from themselves to the perpetrator. The #MeToo movement and other contemporary events related to sexual violence is leading to a change in their rape consciousness because they are relabeling some experiences as rape while grappling with language to describe experiences that they don’t define as rape but were nonetheless violating. Woodard’s subcategories of bad sex are helpful here for adding reference points to the continuum between consensual sex and rape.

Findings

Mothers in my sample acknowledge that there are gray areas, but also contend that those gray areas are narrower than popular conceptions. Some mothers described experiences as falling into a gray area resembling Cahill’s description of unjust sex and Woodard’s bad sex categories, experiences that made them uncomfortable, but they didn’t feel like they said no so they would not label the experience as assault but wished there was something to describe experiences that fell in between consent and assault. Other mothers in my sample described experiences that were clearly sexual assault, but also explain that they did not initially label that experience as sexual assault because they felt like it fell into a gray area. Particularly, that their experience didn’t fit the stereotypical experience, so they didn’t think it “counted” as rape. Relabeling their experience was prompted by a change in their legal consciousness related to rape (rape consciousness). Mothers’ struggle to label their experiences with sexual violence contributes to why they want to teach their children a nuanced understanding of consent, which I discuss in Chapters Three and Four.

The Gray Area as Staving Off Trauma

Emily is a 27-year-old biracial Black legal assistant living on the West coast and is currently working on her bachelor's degree. When they aren't in school or working on homework, Emily and her son spend a lot of time outside going on bike rides and walks or building Lego models. Emily told me that she has had a lot of bad sexual encounters in her life, and she's talked about those bad experiences with a close friend whose response made her question how she's been labeling that experience.

> "I was telling one of my friends about it and she goes, 'that's rape.' I was like, 'that's not rape.' And she was like, 'it is.' So, I was like I'm gonna talk to my therapist about it."

Emily told her friend about a sexual experience with a previous partner in which she told him no because she wanted to go to sleep, but he did not stop touching her. Her friend told Emily that what she experienced was rape. For Emily, the word "rape" didn't fit her understanding of the experience, so she asked her therapist about it.

> "When I was raped – which is still really hard for me to say because it's not like what you see on TV – I said no multiple times. And then I just let it happen, because I wanted to go to sleep and he was not letting me go to sleep. And [my therapist said], 'that's rape.' I was like whoa, that's a really strong word. I don't think so. And she was like, 'that was rape.' It was like okay, so that's why it's been unsettling with me for all these years. That's why I felt weird about that encounter forever. Then, because of that, I slowly realized I had that happen multiple times to me. Where I would just stop because well, it doesn't matter what I say."

Both Emily's friend and her therapist labeled her experience in a way that she didn't agree with at first, rape. She didn't think the label fit because the rape she experienced didn't happen the way rape is depicted on TV. She hadn't "put up a fight". Emily also realized that wasn't the first time she had said no, but her partner hadn't listened. This made her feel like what she said didn't matter, that her desire to have sex or not didn't matter. However, labeling the experience as rape helped her understand why she kept thinking about the experience over 10 years later and process the emotional impact it had on her.

> "When I was able to identify why I felt unsettled all these years later, it has helped me move past it and not do it again. And just be like no, I'm not going to allow – it's weird because like I'm not going to allow myself to be raped. Which obviously as a woman, I shouldn't have to think about that. But it goes back to again, if you're not aware that that's rape, how do you stop it or know how to prevent it or how to not make yourself feel icky after it happens? Because coercion or coerced consent, isn't consent."

Identifying her experience as rape was important for Emily in two ways: moving past the experience and knowing what she says does matter. Interestingly, she also says that labeling her experience as rape helped her understand how to prevent the same thing from happening again, though she also thinks this shouldn't be her responsibility. Despite Emily having said no, she did not initially identify this experience of rape because it didn't happen the way she expected, and it was only when her rape consciousness was challenged that she was able to process that experience.

Emily wasn't the only one for whom it took some time to process her experience. Callie, an education specialist, lives in the Pacific Northwest with her 3 daughters. For her, the most important thing she can do as a parent is raise her daughters to believe they can be anything they want to be when they grow up and should not be constrained to particular roles or aspirations because they are girls. The 32-year-old Latina mother, described an experience in high school in which a boy only left her alone after she yelled loudly.

> "There was a time when I was 15, and I think it took me a really long time to realize that I had been raped. It ended because there were other people in the house, and I yelled. And he was like fuck, somebody's going to hear. He got off of me and left the room so quick because that's what it was. But I think for a long time that I was like oh, I just had sex with this guy, and I feel ashamed about it. It was like no, that's not what happened… Women have assault done to their bodies so much and it's so normalized that we don't

> even know we are being assaulted. Like we do not cognitively know that we are being assaulted."

Callie's shouts caused the perpetrator of her assault to stop and leave the room. Despite recognizing that her yelling made him leave, Callie initially didn't label this experience as rape. She thought of it as sex that she was ashamed of. Like Emily, Callie suggests that women are not always able to identify that they have been raped because sexual violence is a normalized part of our culture. Renaming the experience she had as a 15-year-old helped her stop feeling ashamed as an adult.

Lauren is an academic librarian living on the East coast with her 5-year-old son who she co-parents with her ex-husband. The 34-year-old white mother, also re-labeled a previous experience as rape. But for her, the catalyst was the #MeToo Movement. She saw other survivors tell their story on Twitter and realized she had had a similar experience in college.

> "I'm only now realizing I didn't want to have sex with that person the first week I got to college. A couple years ago I realized that was kind of rape. I did not want to have sex with that person. I was drunk. I didn't say no, but I had no idea that was going to happen. We were making out on my bed and he just started having sex with me. I kind of made myself just be like yeah, okay. I'm okay with this. I was trying to convince myself. I look back, and I'm like that was awful. And you know, obviously you have those feelings of like, well I didn't say no so it's not really his fault, right?"

The conversation happening on social media during the height of the #MeToo movement led Lauren to label her experience in college as rape. She also shared her experience on Twitter. She describes having been at a party and choosing to make out with a guy. In her interview, she explains that she was fine with that. But she didn't want to do more than that. Afterwards, and for many years, she told herself that was just what happened in college. Like Emily, she identifies what happened to her as rape. She also still feels like it might have been her fault. However, unlike Emily, she didn't say no. While Lauren feels like she could have been clearer, later in the interview she told me she tried to push him away.

Andrea, a 37-year-old mother who is biracial (white, Latina) is a lecturer concurrently working on her PhD and living on the West coast with her 16-year-old son. Her and her son do a lot of homework together and sometimes watch movies. Andrea studies women in literature, so she's thought a lot about gender and sexuality issues. She described a negative experience with a former partner. They were having consensual sexual intercourse when he wanted to have anal sex. She said no, but he didn't listen.

> "He just went to the bathroom and when he came over to me, he said get over yourself, you're exaggerating or something really dismissive. I didn't know how to process it at the time. I remember telling my sister what happened and her giving me a very bizarre look. Like Andrea, are you okay? And me telling her, well yeah, of course I'm okay. She's like, Andrea, that doesn't sound normal. And me, not knowing how to interpret it at the time, I'm like well, you know I'm dating him and it's not like he raped me right? What was really bizarre for me, I had been raped before. So I knew it wasn't that version of it."

Initially, Andrea doesn't know how to understand this experience. They were dating, it was different than her previous experience with rape, and it started as consensual sex. But it changed to a violating and nonconsensual experience. She didn't agree with her sister's labeling of the experience until several years later when "it hit [her] in the middle of the morning." For these women, other people were important catalysts for helping them process and relabel their experiences as rape, changing their rape consciousness. Many of the mothers in the stories above, and the stories below, described in the previous chapter how the #MeToo movement made it easier to talk with others about sexual violence. It is possible that the #MeToo movement created space in our culture for friends to have more direct and honest conversations about sexual experiences that feel violating but are hard for them to label.

Psychologically Pressured Sex and Calculated Trade-Offs

Despite marital rape being recognized as a crime in every state[9], relationship status continues to muddy understandings of sexual violence within relationships. Because she was dating the man who raped her at the time, Andrea struggled to understand her experience as rape. Michelle is a white, 46-year-old college professor living in the northeast United States with her two teenage sons. She is divorced and now happily partnered with another man. Michelle described how she and her sometimes physically abusive ex-husband's sex life changed over time from "healthy" to a "debate".

> "We had a healthy sex life for a good part of our relationship… Then it became this kind of debate. He would be like, oh we haven't had sex in a while, I'm feeling insecure. He would get his security means – and I think that's the case for a lot of men – but he would get his security means through sex. Do you still love me, you're not having sex with me, and I'm like yes, but you're not like connecting with me and so I don't want to have sex if there's not this kind of intimacy and trust. It ended up being that I would, you know, kind of like, oh it's been a week and I know he's gonna get upset if we don't. And so, let me find a night where I can tolerate it."

What Michelle describes falls into Woodard's *psychologically pressured sex and calculated trade-offs* category. Her ex-husband would complain they weren't having sex frequently enough while Michelle was upset about his treatment of her and the kids, so she wouldn't want to be intimate with him. But she found her life was easier, meaning he would get upset less, if she strategically had sex with him on a weekly basis. She consented to sexual activity with her ex-husband because it felt like the best option for avoiding other negative experiences. Michelle also described an experience with her ex-husband that led to additional conversations about consent with him. To be clear, Michelle did not label this experience as rape.

> "There was one night, it was Super Bowl night, and he came to bed drunk and I was already asleep and he tried to, he started trying to have sex with me and I woke up and was like no, no, no. And he continued. And so that created a lot of conversations afterwards about consent and that not being okay. And I think for him it was you know, well you're never in the mood and so I feel like I need to get you in the mood. I'm like well, but if I'm saying no, you need to respect that."

---

[9] See Garvey, Fuhrman, and Long (2019) for a discussion of state exemptions to marital rape charges.

Michelle woke up to her now ex-husband trying to have sex with her. She told him no, but he didn't listen. She says she talked to him after that about the meaning of consent and that he can't try to "get her in the mood" if she says no. While she did not name this experience as rape, she did label it as "not okay".

Jill currently lives with her husband, son, and daughter in the south United States. She and her husband, who she describes as her best friend, both work for the local school and spend a lot of time camping with their kids. Jill, a 36-year-old white woman, has also experienced psychological pressure/sexual coercion in her marriage, though she doesn't think of it as sexual violence, it is just part of her relationship. When I asked her about how she and her husband communicate about sex, she said: "I mean the classic man thing of being whiny. When he wants it and I'm like, no I don't feel like it." I followed up by asking if her husband respects her decision when she says no and Jill said,

> "I mean yes and no. Because then he gets all annoying. You know every few minutes, want to do it? Can we do it now? And sometimes, I say yes. And my [friend] will tell me that's not consent."

Jill initially says no, but when her husband continues to pressure her, she says yes. She explains that one of her friends (who is quite a bit younger than Jill) has told her that that doesn't count as consensual sex because of the pressure to change her mind. Her friend's argument that what Jill is experiencing is rape hasn't changed Jill's mind, but it has stuck with her. Jill was still processing her feelings about this when I talked to her, stating she and her husband are working on their relationship. As the stories above showed, friends are a critical reference point for mothers trying to make sense of their experiences with sex and sexual violence and are a way that changing societal norms can shift individual perceptions as they filter through friend networks, causing a change in rape consciousness.

Social Coercion

My conversations with mothers suggest the #MeToo movement and other contemporary public conversations about sexual violence have led to increased recognition of social coercion, in addition to psychological pressure. Callie, who earlier described being raped when she was 15, explained that repeated requests for sexual activity from a partner resulting in consent eventually is not equivalent to full consent.

> "Men, particularly young men, think that no means I haven't yet convinced you… I'm not mad at my boyfriend because he like hounded me a little bit to have sex or whatever. But there becomes a line where that is almost sexual coercion. I think some people would think that is extreme, but I'm like, if I had sex with you because you bugged me for 30 minutes, even if I enjoyed it, then still I would not say that that is 100% consent."

Callie describes how sometimes she isn't in the mood for sex, but her boyfriend is, and sometimes she will acquiesce after he asks repeatedly. She explains that while she sometimes does say yes to him eventually, it was only after he continued to bother her about it, and she finds it coercive. For her, because she trusts her partner and she does say yes, she's not mad about it. But she acknowledges that pressure can make the line between consent and denial, blurry. This would fall into Woodard's *social coercion* category. She says yes for reasons other than her own desire, not out of fear, but understanding social norms related to sex in relationships.

Callie's story contrasts with that of Michelle. She does not feel violated after these experiences and does not anticipate negative repercussions from her boyfriend if she continues to say no while Michelle describes the "debate" she had with her ex-husband and consent to sex to avoid an even worse outcome. Later, Callie talked more about social coercion and how she hopes her children can talk about it with their friends as she does with her friends and sisters.

> "I think that in talking with my own girlfriends and my sisters that so many women have sex or do things for their partners that they don't necessarily want to do because they feel like they have to. Whether it's the frequency of sex or the way they have sex or whatever. I may or may not develop that type of relationship with my children to be like you don't have to do it more than you want to, but I hope they have good friends who tell them, you don't have to do that if you don't want to, you know?"

Callie describes how she has realized that a lot of women engage in sexual behavior because they think it will make their partners happy, regardless of their own desires to engage in those behaviors. She expresses some ambivalence about whether she will be able to talk with her children about the different ways sexual coercion can be present in sexual relationships. As I will show in the next chapter, while Callie may not feel comfortable talking explicitly with her children about sexual coercion, she does use nonsexual touch such as holding hands to talk to them about doing *only* what they want with their bodies and not doing things just because they think someone else wants it. Conversations with friends and other close ties were also important sources of change to understandings of social norms related to social coercion. Christina is a 36-year-old Black American living in the Southwest with her two daughters and son. Christina learned that sex is not obligatory within marriage from a friend.

> "I had a conversation with my friend, it was the first conversation that I probably had with anybody about sex in the relationship and it's like you know, you don't have to have sex with your husband if you don't want to. She was like me and my husband go stretches of time without having sex, like it's not something you're obligated to do every day. I just remember feeling embarrassed. But at the same time, I needed to hear that. Like okay, so I'm not just crazy because he definitely would make it feel that way."

Christina found the conversation with her friend about sex within a relationship to be both embarrassing and illuminating. No one had ever talked to her about the dynamics of sexual behavior in a relationship before and it helped her realize she's not "crazy."

Epistemically Unsafe Sex

Woodard (2022) suggests that one category of bad sex (called gray areas by some) occurs because women say yes to men or forgo saying no because they fear that if they say no, they will be raped. Saying yes gives them a semblance of control and the ability to think of the sexual encounter as something other than rape. But those encounters leave lasting impressions. Jessica is a 46-year-old learning and design specialist living in the northeast United States. She and her husband live with their 17-year-old son. When I asked Jessica if she had ever had a negative sexual experience, she said:

> "There have been many occasions where I didn't like what was happening, but for whatever reason I froze or didn't say I don't want to do this or I'm not interested in this. It was more like eh, I'll keep going…it was more like I didn't matter in the equation? Kind of a learned helplessness. Just like welp, this is going to happen no matter what so I'm just going to lay here until it's done. It makes me deeply uncomfortable now and I wish I could have told that 19-year-old me, no. You have every right to say no. You have every right to stop this."

Jessica describes how as a teenager, she had several sexual experiences where she wasn't enjoying what was happening but didn't say anything to stop it. She felt like her desires were not valued during sexual activity. For her, it was easier for her to just wait it out because whatever she said, it was going to happen anyway. She wishes she had known then what she knows now. That she didn't have to endure that experience and her desires have value. Andrea described similar experiences. At the end of our interview, I asked her if she had any final reflections she wanted to share and she said:

> "There's so many things that come with the no and we know that. We are fearful for what may happen to us physically. We're fearful on all these other levels. A lot of times saying yes is the easiest choice to not encounter the possibility of all these other harsher problems. Is that really still yes when we can't say no? So, what I'm grateful to the #MeToo movement for is that we're having these conversations about what consent is and what it's not and how that gets lost in the perspective of women and how we don't learn to listen to the perspective of women."

Andrea highlights the complex feelings women have, particularly women who have been raped, around the meaning of consent. Women fear saying no because of their own experiences, knowledge of sexual violence, and cultural depictions of sexual violence. Andrea explains that in many situations it is easier for women to say yes because yes removes the possibility of other “harsher problems”. But she suggests and Woodard (2022) would agree, a yes in a situation where no may lead to an unsafe outcome, is not freely given nor enthusiastic consent. Andrea also speaks to the importance of the #MeToo movement in creating an opportunity to talk about these issues. Specifically, she feels that women’s perspective on what consent is and is not, is taken more seriously post #MeToo, than it was previously.

Discussion and Conclusion

Stories like the ones I’ve shared in this chapter were ubiquitous on social media during the height of the #MeToo movement in late 2017 and early 2018. They highlight the complex sense-making processes people who have experienced sexual violence negotiate. Mothers in my sample agreed the movement made it easier to talk to friends and family about sexual violence more generally, and for some, about their own experiences with sexual violence. This led some mothers to reconsider how they think about previous sexual experiences, particularly experiences that fell within the “gray area” as understood in the public consciousness. They are deconstructing the gray area by renaming some experiences previously considered “gray” as rape or sexual assault and recognizing other experiences as violating. However, the public does not have the same language to discuss this other type of violating experience that doesn’t rise to the level of rape that is used by theorists (unjust sex, bad sex) and advocates (sexual coercion).

The public nature of the #MeToo movement allowed mothers to see similarities between their own negative sexual experiences with experiences other women labeled as sexual assault causing a change in their legal consciousness. They also talked to their mothers, sisters, friends, and therapists about negative sexual experiences and were told what they were describing was rape. There were other experiences that they described as violating but did not label as sexual assault and generally refrained from labeling. These experiences fit within Woodard's (2022) typology of bad sex and involved psychological and social pressures. For others, they felt that even if they did say no, it wouldn't be respected so saying yes gave them a semblance of control. Rape myths and sexual scripts shape how people interpret and navigate the law related to sexual violence, including beliefs about sexual behavior in relationships. In a vignette experiment, Humphreys (2007) found that people believe explicit verbal consent is less necessary when couples have been together at least three months and had two or more sexual experiences together compared to couples on a first date (see also Lee 2021).

The current dichotomous understanding of sex as harmful or not harmful relies on two assumptions: 1) consent or nonconsent as a marker of sex as good and moral (consensual) or bad and criminal (nonconsensual); and 2) consensual sex is desired. What my interviews make clear is that there is no gray area of consent. However, there *is* a gray area of desire that Woodard's (2022) typology helps us understand. People may consent to sex that is not desired. There are experiences people need better language to describe, and for those experiences to be recognized as violating and potentially harmful in which they gave consent or did not say no in response to psychological pressure, social coercion, or the belief their desires were irrelevant to the interaction. These experiences should be recognized as problematic – but it is hard for women to name that because of pressure to identify an experience as either rape or consensual sex (Canan, Kaplan, and Jozkowski 2022). This minimizes harm caused by experiences, such as those described in this chapter, that are nominally consensual but violating. The binary also hinders labeling of experiences that do not match archetypal rape as sexual assault and hides the impact of sexual coercion. The alternative terms that have been suggested by feminist theorists (unjust sex, bad sex, consensual sexual dysphoria, unwanted sexual intercourse, gray sex) could serve as an important touchstone for people who have these experiences and are trying to make sense of them. Sex education, in all its forms (by parents and relatives, schools, or organized programs.), should expand conversations about consent to include desire and make it clear that affirmative consent is not enough to mark sex as good and morally acceptable.

Chapter Three: How Mothers are Raising Sexual Citizens

Sophia, a psychologist, is a white mother of a 6-year-old boy whom she describes as "very active and super extroverted." Despite his young age, she is already teaching him about his right to give consent and the importance of receiving consent from others, in hopes that he will not be the victim of childhood sexual abuse nor a perpetrator of sexual violence.

> "I do a lot of, 'no one is allowed to touch you if you don't want them to. No one's allowed to touch you, like you get to pick if people touch you or not.' We [also] don't ever make him hug people. We say like, 'how do you want to say goodbye? You want a hug or a high five or a wave?' And my son likes to wrestle so it gives us a lot of opportunity to talk about consent. Ask people first before you touch them and then check in the middle if it seems like they're not having fun."

By giving him choices about whether to touch others when he says goodbye, she is teaching him bodily autonomy. Then, when they wrestle, she teaches him that other people (i.e., his wrestling partner) must give him permission to touch them and that they can change their minds about that touch mid-wrestle. In addition to respect for bodily autonomy, she is trying to teach her son respect for all sexual orientations. Later in the interview, Sophia told me about using the book *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* to teach her son that not all relationships occur between men and women.

> "The book is about a bunny who is gay and it says boy bunnies can marry boy bunnies and girl bunnies can marry girl bunnies. You can love whoever you want and I really tried to hammer home that message and I know that I hammered it home because [when] we were having a zoom birthday party in the pandemic with my husband's college roommate…my son was like 'who are you calling?' And [my husband said], 'it's my friend Dan from college.' And [my son] was like, 'why didn't you marry Dan? Boys can marry boys.' It's like, yes! I have made it as a liberal parent."

Sophia was ecstatic to find that her son had absorbed the intended lesson from *Marlon Bundo*, that he can love whomever he wants and so can everyone else. This was a value she, as a self-described liberal parent, wanted to teach her child. Although, she is confident her son will be heterosexual which informs her concerns about sexual victimization. She continued:

> "He fell in love with the mermaid. I was like 'what do you like about Ariel?' And he's like, 'what's the part of her like between her head and her waist?' Like several comments about his love of breasts. That was a long tangent to say, I know he's going to be in heterosexual relationships. Not that [women sexually assaulting men] doesn't happen, but I'm not particularly worried that he's going to be taken advantage of in a relationship. So I'm mostly concerned about childhood sexual abuse."

Sophia isn't worried about her son experiencing sexual violence in intimate relationships because she perceives him to be a boy who will likely be in heterosexual relationships. Although, as her son is only six, this may still change. Her concerns about victimization are largely driven by her experiences working with victims of child sexual abuse, including knowledge that straight men are less likely to experience sexual violence in relationships than women and queer men.

In their book, *Sexual Citizens,* Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan (2020) suggest that parents have a responsibility to raise good sexual citizens who will not perpetrate sexual violence when they become sexually active. Using everyday childlike encounters and children's books and movies appropriate for his age, Sophia is teaching her son *sexual citizenship* that is cognizant of the patriarchal and heteronormative culture in the United States. My research has found that some mothers are attempting to raise good sexual citizens by introducing their children to concepts regarding bodily autonomy and respect for other people's bodies at young ages. As their children get older, these conversations transition from focusing on non-sexual touch to touch in a sexual context. Using Hirsch and Khan's concept, this chapter investigates how mothers are attempting to instill a sense of sexual citizenship in their children within the context of patriarchal and heteronormative society.

Sexual Citizenship

Hirsch and Khan's case study of Columbia University investigated the social and physical conditions that facilitate campus sexual assault among undergraduates. From their research, they developed three concepts: sexual citizenship, sexual projects, and sexual geographies. Sexual citizenship is defined as the “acknowledgement of one’s own right to sexual self-determination” and recognition of the same right in others, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation (Hirsch and Khan 2020, p. xvi). It is socially cultivated sexual agency and recognition of the agency of potential sexual partners. As it is used by Hirsch and Khan, sexual citizenship is not something some people have and other do not. It must be developed, fostered, and encouraged within every individual.

The term sexual citizenship is considered a multi-faceted concept and has been used in a variety of ways since the early 1990’s (Evans 1993; Richardson 2017). Some researchers use sexual citizenship to analyze how some social groups are granted or denied rights in different countries based on their sexual identity (Richardson 2000; 2017). Other research has focused on how assumptions made about national citizenship are predicated on patriarchal heterosexuality (Richardson 1998; 2017). This was evident in rape laws that viewed women as the property of their husbands. This view of sexual citizenship is also relevant to how mothers are talking to their white sons about power and privilege, which I discuss in Chapter 5. Both strands of research are relevant to Hirsch and Khan’s use of the term as they examine how some groups’ bodily autonomy is more respected in some spaces (i.e., identity-based spaces) than others and how power relations more generally shape who has power in what space

Hirsch and Khan (2020) argue that sexual citizenship should be cultivated and supported by institutions, including college campuses (p. 269). But ultimately, they found that campus sexual assault prevention programming comes too late for many students. They want parents to raise sexual citizens from a young age. In a podcast about the book, Hirsch and Khan describe the title of the book as a “provocation to parents” to recognize their children as sexual citizens, arguing that parents have a “moral obligation” to foster sexual citizenship in their children (Hill

2020). However, in order to teach their children sexual citizenship, parents must recognize their children as having sexual citizenship, which in the United States, they have historically denied (i.e, “not under my roof”) or been embarrassed about (Schalet 2011). Additionally, despite the majority of parents saying they support their children receiving comprehensive sex education in schools, schools are increasingly providing little to no sex education (Lindberg and Kantor 2021). Hirsch and Khan (2020) emphasize that gender is not the only power disparity that facilitates sexual assault on college campuses (pg. 229). Race, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, sexual experience and on campus age and control of space create social conditions that facilitate sexual assault. A lack of LGBTQ-inclusive relationship and sex education leaves people in this community vulnerable to sexual violence because of belief in stereotypes and few trusted adults to approach with questions and concerns. LGBTQ inclusive education provides youth with medically accurate information, positive examples of LGBTQ relationships and families that dispel myths, and information about protection during sex regardless of sexual orientation (Slater 2013).

I find that the mothers in my sample are trying to instill sexual citizenship in their children. At younger ages, mothers use nonsexual touch to teach concepts of consent and respect for their own and others bodily autonomy to their sons and daughters. As their children age, conversations shift to be explicitly about sexual behavior and content diverges by gender. Mothers want their sons to consciously seek consent in sexual interactions and are actively trying to counter societal messages of hegemonic masculinity. With daughters, they are trying to counter societal messages of passive femininity and encourage them to stand up for their desires. In addition to consent, mothers are trying to provide their children the space to have a non-heterosexual sexual orientation while also teaching them to respect others sexual orientation. My findings show mothers are trying to help their children understand the importance of power and social location.

Findings

Mothers in my sample operationalized sexual citizenship by teaching young children bodily autonomy and consent related to non-sexual touch, regardless of the child's gender or sexual orientation. They describe consent as something children can give, but also should receive from others. As children age, conversations about consent become explicitly related to sex and sexual behavior. Mothers in my sample strived to raise daughters who are confident enough to voice both consent/dissent and their desires to potential partners while focusing on ensuring their sons understand verbal and nonverbal nuances related to perpetrating sexual violence. Though conversations with children diverge in content by gender, mothers generally have the same goals for their sons and daughters: countering societal messages that contribute to sexual violence. Some mothers took steps to teach their children about sexual orientation and respect for people who identify as LGBTQ. For some mothers, the #MeToo movement has been an effective tool for talking to their children about consent. While for other mothers, their own experiences with sexual violence in childhood, college, and in intimate relationships shape their desire to raise children who will not experience sexual violence nor perpetrate it.

Fostering Sexual Citizenship

While the mothers in my sample do not use the term sexual citizenship, they are invested in fostering self-determination in their children in the form of who is and is not allowed to touch their body and what kind of touch is acceptable using age-appropriate examples. They are also determined to teach their children that other people have the same right to self-determination, and they cannot violate someone else's self-determination to satisfy their own desires. Mothers provide opportunities for their children to reject or accept touch as an example of consent, but in a non-sexual manner. Elizabeth, who is white, is the mother of a 10-year-old girl who she is determined to teach that "her voice matters." Elizabeth's father-in-law, like many grandparents, regularly asks his granddaughter for a hug and kiss hello or goodbye. Elizabeth described how she uses these types of greetings with family members as a teaching opportunity for her daughter about consent:

> "My husband's father was very much like, give me a hug and a kiss, give me a hug and a kiss… Those conversations were a bit difficult to navigate with family members, but I think it's really important to teach kids early on what consent looks like and that you don't have to give people a hug and a kiss if you don't want to. So it would be like you can give them a high five or say goodbye or wave."

Elizabeth, a clinical supervisor, wants her daughter to know she can choose how to say goodbye, and she hopes by extension, this will affirm to her daughter that it is her choice what she does with her body. She is trying to foster a sense of self-determination and bodily autonomy in her child. Elizabeth also told me that she had to explain this practice to extended family members who took offense. She said, "they didn't know where I was coming from" because they view hugs as an expression of familial love. Elizabeth tries to reassure them that it's not that her daughter doesn't love them, it's about her having a choice in how she wants to express that love.

Stephanie, a clinical psychologist, is the mother of an 11-year-old girl who is "very sensitive and pretty mature" and a 6-year-old boy who is "full of energy and somewhat destructive." She has also found it helpful to use interactions with relatives to teach her children about consent.

> "Both of our families are fairly good about if the kid doesn't want to hug them, that's fine. But my husband's family is a little bit more, 'sit on my lap, I want to talk to you, I haven't seen you.' And so we have talked about sometimes you don't want to, but sometimes it's just a polite thing to do. But if it's very uncomfortable for you, then you have a right to say no. It's like having an awareness of what it feels like and then deciding for yourself, am I willing or unwilling to do this."

Stephanie has a similar approach to Elizabeth. She lets her children know they can tell a relative no if they don't want a hug. However, she slightly differs from Elizabeth in that she suggests there are times where it might be better to give the relative a hug if it's not too uncomfortable.

Emily, who describes her race as mixed, is a legal assistant living on the west coast with her 7-year-old son. Like Sophia, Elizabeth, and Stephanie, Emily uses hugs to teach her son about consent. But she also extends the rules related to hugging beyond other relatives to people in general. She describes how she tells her son that he must respect other people's boundaries related to touch and that they should respect his boundaries:

> "So if someone doesn't want to give you a hug, if someone doesn't want to give you a high five or fist bump or they don't want you to touch them, then you don't touch them. You don't complain about it. You don't cry about it. You just go okay and go about your day. And the same thing goes for you, if you don't want somebody to kiss you, you don't want someone to hold your hand, anything, they're not entitled to it."

Emily is clear that a no is a no, either by her son or directed toward her son. She also emphasizes that it is important he doesn't complain about it if someone says no, he should move on with his day. In this way Emily is teaching her son that should not try to change someone's "no" into a "yes."

Lauren, a university librarian who describes her son as "super empathetic" and "a typical boy" who likes building things and wrestling, uses other types of non-sexual touch to teach her six-year-old son consent. While he was tickling her one day, he touched her butt:

> "[I said] you need to ask me consent. Like that's a part of my body that I don't necessarily want everyone touching, right? So he understands that. And I make him see the same thing. I'm like, would I stick my hand down your pants? No. So learning about sex and consent is important."

Lauren, who is white, wants her son to understand that consent is something that goes both ways. He shouldn't tickle her unless she says it is okay and she won't touch him because he doesn't want her to. Both Emily and Lauren use non-sexual touch as an opportunity to teach their children about consent, to recognize their own bodily autonomy, and the bodily autonomy of others, regardless of the gender of their children.

Mothers in my sample with younger children sought opportunities related to non-sexual touch to teach their children about their own bodily autonomy and the necessity of respecting others bodily autonomy. They hope that these conversations will prepare their children to transition to conversations about consent related to sexual behavior as their children age. Stacey, a white sales director, is the mother of a 14-year-old boy. While she doesn't think he is sexually active and won't be for a while, she and her husband try to make conversations about sex and sexual behavior a regular part of dinner table conversations.

> "We've been talking about 'but don't feel pressured. You don't have to do anything.' And then we did talk about consent too. That they have to say yes. But that also means that you have to say yes. So talking [about] both sides. That both people have to say yes and that you make sure."

Stacey is concerned her son will feel pressured to have sex sooner than he is comfortable with. She also wants to be sure he understands that it takes two people saying yes for sex to be consensual and that he is confident in his yes and the yes of his partner. Jessica, who is white, is a learning and design specialist. She wants her son to understand that any behavior related to sex, including kissing, requires consent from the other person.

> "I always emphasize to him it's always about consent. If you ask somebody if you can kiss them and then you want to do more, you have to ask about every single action, even if it feels ridiculous to you."

Jessica's only son is 17, and she regularly reminds him that consent is an ongoing practice. She understands that might feel ridiculous for him to actually implement, but argues that it doesn't matter if it feels that way. Jessica also explained that seeking consent is particularly important because her child is male. She said:

> "I said to him, because you present as male, you have to go out of your way. You're supposed to be masculine and be able to get the girl and all of this stuff. But he has to go out of his way to get consent, full verbal consent from whoever he was with…I tell him whatever relationships he had, romantic or sexual or both, were good and valid and wonderful things as long as he felt fulfilled by them and his partner was comfortable."

Jessica wants her son to have fulfilling sexual relationships but wants him to understand his needs cannot come at the expense of his partner's needs. She reminds her teenage son that because he is a boy, it is his responsibility to seek consent from his partner, though she acknowledges later that she has also talked to him about non-heterosexual sex, and he could potentially have male partners.

Like Stacey, Michelle wants to be sure her sons understand consent, but like Jessica, she recognizes that many people feel awkward verbally asking for consent. Michelle is a 46-year-old white college professor and mom to three children: her 19-year-old son (who she described as exploring a non-binary gender identity), her 16-year-old son, and the daughter of her partner who just started college. She described talking to her sons about seeking consent related to a variety of sexual contact and understanding nonverbal cues:

> "We talk about consent, but also how do you know if somebody is consenting and how do you do it in a way that's not awkward, you know? Like can I kiss you, can I touch your shoulder, can I unhook your bra, that just kind of ruins the mood. So how do you navigate that and know that somebody is consenting without having to ask every moment."

Michelle speaks directly with her children about how they should seek consent when engaging in sexual activity. She emphasizes that consent is something that happens throughout a sexual encounter, but she also acknowledges that verbally asking for consent can feel awkward and be challenging for people to implement. She is trying to teach her sons to recognize nonverbal cues and believes this is important to their understanding of their partner's bodily autonomy and their own.

By teaching children from a young age that they can make choices about their bodies, but also that other people have the right to make choices too, many of the mothers in my sample are enacting Hirsch and Khan's recommendation that parents instill their children with a sense of sexual citizenship, preparing them to be good sexual citizens when they enter sexual relationships later in life. It is important to note, that all mothers in my sample described teaching their children sexual citizenship at all ages though not all talked with their children about sexual orientation. However, this may be directly linked to my sample being highly educated and except for two participants, politically liberal. It's also possible mothers who were willing to participate in my study are more comfortable discussing sex and sexual behavior with their children than the general population.

Gendered Sexual Citizenship

While mothers talked equally about protecting their sons and daughters from childhood sexual assault by teaching them sexual citizenship at a young age, conversations diverge by gender – because of gender – at later ages related to behavior in sexual relationships. Michelle told me about discussing consent with her partner's daughter, and how the discussion differed from conversations with her sons.

> "I think for my conversations with [my stepdaughter], it's been much more you know, make sure that you're attending to your own pleasure and learn what your body enjoys, and you know, how do you communicate that to somebody else. How to say no in a way that's clear. And, how to know when to say no and how to feel ok in that, if it disappoints somebody else."

Michelle still discusses consent but emphasizes her partner's daughter's right to pleasure and her right to say no to a sexual partner if she doesn't want to engage in a particular sexual activity or if the context for an experience isn't comfortable. Her focus on how her partner's daughter can say no echoes the discussion of gray areas in Chapter 2. She wants her partner's daughter to feel comfortable and empowered to say no in any situation rather than conceding to coercive pressure from partners. When I asked her why her conversations were different between her sons and her partner's daughter, she said:

> "I would give a girl you know, kind of, reach for the stars, you can do anything. Those messages boys are already getting and so it doesn't really help for me to give them those messages. So the messages I want to give my kids were counteracting the messages that they get in society, right? So, slow down. Be gentle. Be thoughtful. Be kind…Thinking about, especially with female partners, how pleasure can look very different than men and making sure that you're attending to your partners needs just as much as your own."

Michelle suggests, and previous research has found, that boys and girls receive different messages from society and her job as a parent is to counter the negative messages each receives and provide alternative, preferable behaviors. In this way, she is teaching a gendered sexual citizenship, but does so because she believes society does not teach boys to respect the bodily autonomy of their sexual partners. She also believes that girls are taught that their bodily autonomy and sexual desires are less important than boys. Michelle encourages her sons to recognize their sexual partners will have desires that may or may not align with their own while encouraging her partner's daughter to assert her bodily autonomy and seek experiences that bring her pleasure.

Megan, a white data analyst, is the mother of three daughters (ages 16, 11, and 10) and one son (age 14). She had been hoping her son's dad (they are divorced) would be more involved in talking to her son about sex and sexual behavior, but that hasn't happened, so she's been trying to fill in the gaps. She also doesn't expect her current husband (father of her two youngest children) to help with these conversations with his stepson. I asked her how the conversations have varied between her sons and her daughters, which she was a bit nervous to talk about. She said:

> "I'm anxious to talk about this because I don't want to sound sexist, you know? But it just seems so much more pressing that my girls understand the mechanics and the implications of sex in human relationships…So my son is a white dude. He's going to have access to resources and power that other people don't really have. So the conversations with him are often about hegemony. They're about power differentials because talking to him about how his dick works is not going to be as useful as hey dude, just by virtue of what you look like, you're coming to the table with more power. That seems like a more important conversation for me to be having with him than the mechanics of how things work."

Megan, like most of the mothers in my sample, wants to be sure her daughters understand the mechanics of having sex. She also wants them to understand that sex will impact their relationships with partners and that there can be consequences. Megan describes how her son's status as a white boy informs how she talks to him about sex and relationships. She wants her son to understand that he inherently has power and access to resources that potential partners may not. I also want to note that Megan was concerned she would sound sexist because her approach to sex education with her children is intentionally different based on gender identity. For her, sexual citizenship is gendered because of power differences that are present in relationships. I will return to Megan's discussion of her son's race in the next chapter.

It wasn't just moms with sons and daughters that were thinking about gender. Mothers with only sons still felt their child's gender influenced some of the lessons they were trying to impart on their children, particularly they felt it was important to counter messages about masculinity. Sophia, who's quotations introduced Chapter 2, also only has a son. She described how her child's gender shaped some of her parenting goals and the perceptions of other parents.

> "I was talking to my colleagues about the sex of the baby and one of my friends who had a boy said 'That's great. Now your goal is just to teach them not to be an asshole. [With] a girl, [the goal] is to teach them to be strong and assertive and that they have the same value as everyone else. That boys are not better than them. But boys, it's try not to be an asshole."

Sophia feels that boys and girls encounter different societal messages and her job as a parent is to counter messages her son receives that could push him towards hegemonic, and potentially toxic, masculine behaviors. Her colleagues described this type of masculinity as “being an asshole.” I will return to this idea in the conclusion section of this chapter. Like Sophia, Emily was relieved she had a son, but for her this was tied to the belief she won’t have to worry about him experiencing rape the way she would worry with a daughter.

> “You know, it sucks. I had a lot more relief when I had a son. I was like, he will never have to experience what I’ve gone through. But now I have to make sure that he’s not the perpetrator. I feel like if I have a girl [in the future], I will have to be a little bit more, ‘okay, make sure you have pepper spray with you and don’t be afraid to use it.’ Maybe self-defense classes. Kind of prepare her more to really be able to stand up for herself.”

Emily’s relief in having a son is tied to her own experiences with sexual violence and not wanting her own child to have a similar experience. Though she does acknowledge feeling a responsibility to ensure he does not become a perpetrator. Theresa, a communications director, is the white mother of two biracial Latino sons. She actively tries to counter rape myths in their daily conversations:

> “We have had to say things to the boys like just because you know a female is dressing differently or showing more, you have to treat her the same way you would treat someone in a turtleneck and sweats.”

Theresa wants her sons to know that how girls dress does not communicate information about their interest in sexual behavior. She wants her sons to treat girls the same way, regardless of what they are wearing. This directly counters a rape myth in which blame is shifted to the victim because of what they were wearing when they were raped. Lauren takes this a step farther, wanting to teach her son that just because a girl doesn’t say no, does not mean he has consent. Lauren, as described in the previous chapter, has recently come to terms with labeling an experience in college as rape.

> "Making sure that you and your partner are on the same page. Like what does that look like, what is that check-in like, how do you know you're on the same page, right? And listening, what is no, what does no sound like. You know females don't have to say no [for it to be nonconsensual]. So to recognize not only the verbal signals, but also the nonverbal signals."

Lauren is cognizant that sometimes women feel unable to say no, but wants her son to recognize nonverbal signals from a partner and to understand that the lack of a no, is not the same as a yes.

Callie (referenced in the previous chapter), is the mother of three daughters ages 15, 14, and 8. When I asked her how consent and unwanted bodily contact has come up in conversations with her daughters as they've gotten older, she told me:

> "[A few years ago] my oldest daughter had a little boyfriend at school. She was like, 'Well he wants to hold my hand and I don't want to. But I do because he wants to.' In my head, I was like oh my god, this is how it starts… I don't want her to get used to having even that little bit of un-comfortability because somebody else wants it and it's not really harmful. They're not having sex at 12, but they're holding hands at 12 and she already doesn't want to do it."

Callie's story about her daughter's reluctance to say no to holding her boyfriend's hand at age 12 explains why conversations with children about sexual citizenship, both their own and others, are vital at young ages. While her children were not yet sexually active, she could imagine how holding hands "because he's nice or because he's [her] boyfriend" could lead her daughter to having sex for the same reasons, regardless of her own desires. This also speaks to social coercion which was discussed in the previous chapter.

Mothers spoke to both daughters and sons about their own right to bodily autonomy and the rights of others to bodily autonomy, they seem to only talk to sons about respecting their partners bodily autonomy in sexual relationships and do not emphasize their own right to say no. This practice aligns with what is known about gender differences in rates of sexual violence. However, this does not account for sexual violence in which men experience sexual violence in heterosexual relationships or within non-heterosexual relationships. While much less common in heterosexual relationships, women can and do perpetrate sexual violence (Stemple, Flores, and Meyer 2017). Additionally, despite mothers' intentions of supporting their children's sexual identity, rates of sexual violence in LGBTQ+ relationships is high (Flores et al. 2020) and should be part of consent conversations.

Non-Heteronormative Sexual Citizenship

Many, though not all, of the mothers in my sample incorporated sexual orientation into their conversations about sex and sexual behavior. Mothers want their children to know that they can love whomever they wish and can count on their support regardless of the gender of their child's potential romantic and sexual partners. For them, sexual citizenship for the children includes their ability to determine their own sexual orientation and respect the sexual orientation of others. Some mothers implied acceptance by using gender neutral language to discuss a child's future partner while others explicitly referenced the sexual orientation of friends and/or acquaintances. For two mothers, their child's sexual orientation was a source of conflict with their ex-husband and they continue to try to support their child's identity while countering homophobic messages from their fathers. While a sample of two is a small number, I think these mothers highlight the challenges children who are not heterosexual encounter within their families and point to a potential bifurcation in support of these children.

Callie does not explicitly talk with her daughters about their sexual orientation, but she feels that she has clearly signaled to them that they can date whomever they like and she would be okay with it.

> "I try my best to say when you start dating a boy or a girl. And I feel like even if I'm not explicitly having a conversation with them, like hey if you were to fall on the spectrum of LGBTQ in any way, I would be okay with it. I think I signal it with 'when you have a boyfriend or girlfriend.' They would just know my mom would be okay were that to happen."

Instead of saying to her daughters “when you have a boyfriend”, she says “boyfriend or girlfriend.” Similarly, Theresa and her husband are intentional about using gender neutral terms to describe potential partners.

> “We’re very careful about, I mean I think this generation is super progressive anyway, but we’re very careful about using terms like partner instead of boyfriend or girlfriend to let them know that we’re inclusive.”

Theresa and her husband use “partner” when talking with their children about sex and sexual behavior. Interestingly, Theresa also says that her children’s generation is progressive, indicating that though she is careful to say partner, it may not be necessary because her children already get it. She later explained that one of her sons has a classmate who is bisexual and that he was comfortable with that language before she talked with him about it.

Other mothers in my sample have spoken more explicitly with their children about gender identity and sexual orientation. Crystal identifies as a member of a Native American tribe and describes herself as gay, bisexual, and asexual. She is the mother of 18-year-old twin daughters. She described her own friends and relationships as being integral to teaching her children about gender identity and sexual orientation.

> “I taught them that there is a spectrum of genders. I’ve always had a lot of different kinds of friends. So the modeling was there for the fact that gender and sexuality is on a spectrum. And so both kids have had relationships with multiple kinds of people.”

Crystal taught her daughters explicitly that gender identity and sexual orientation are a spectrum and she modeled acceptance of these identities within her own life. Her daughters were also able to observe her own relationships with people who had varying gender identities and sexual orientations. She feels she succeeded at teaching them this because both her daughters have had relationships with “multiple kinds” of people and have been comfortable telling her about that. For some moms, talking about sexual identity explicitly was necessary to counteract messages or fill in gaps in their children's formal sex education (school, church program, etc.). Lauren talked about the Catholic Church in relation to sex education throughout her interview. Her son attends a Catholic school and he asked his mom why some of his friends he went to preschool with don't attend his current school.

> "I was pretty honest. I said well because they have two mommies and the Catholic Church doesn't think that's appropriate and they think only a man and a woman should be married. So we do talk about the differences at his school, but also why the other is perfectly fine."

Lauren explained to her son that the church that operates his school does not allow children who have parents in non-heterosexual relationships to attend the school. But she also wants him to know that it is "perfectly fine" for people to have two moms or two dads. Stephanie similarly wants to address topics related to LGBTQ identities because she knows her children's school is not going to address them and her daughter has a friend who identifies as questioning.

> "They're not going to cover LGBTQ issues at all. So we will have to have those conversations ourselves. She has a friend who identifies as questioning I guess you would say. So we've had that conversation just based on that, but they're not going to get that exposure in a formal educational environment."

Other mothers in my sample described needing to go beyond making space for their children to identify as something other than heterosexual and educating their children about sexual orientation. They needed to actively protect their children from another parent who did not affirm their right to determine their own sexual orientation and was actively derogatory toward others with non-heterosexual identities. Michelle's oldest son identifies as pansexual. Michelle, who is divorced from the father of her children, described how her child's sexuality was a source of conflict when they were married and continues to play a role in their ongoing co-parenting relationship.

> "It's been hard for his dad to understand that [older son] identifies as pansexual and multi-attracted. He will make a comment to me that's homophobic and I'll call him out

> on it and try to point out how that would really hurt [older son] to hear that type of comment knowing he's already said it to [older son]. Then I have conversations with [older son] about where this might be coming from for his dad who was raised in a homophobic home. I guess trying to kind of soften some of the blows and also trying to explain to his dad that this is okay and it would be helpful if he was more supportive."

Michelle's ex-husband has made homophobic comments to both her and her son. She tries to correct him when the comments are made to her and to affirm to her husband that her son's sexual identity is valid. She also lets her son know that she supports him and tries to help him understand where her ex-husband's homophobia comes from while affirming that that it is not okay. Christina mentioned navigating a similar challenge with her ex-husband, though her daughter is quite a bit younger than Michelle's son.

> "She identifies herself as pansexual because she feels she's attracted to just the person. She doesn't really look at gender or anything. She was terrified to tell me because she says she was afraid that somehow her dad would find out. I'm trying to reassure her that I'm doing everything [I can] to protect her."

Christina's daughter was hesitant to tell her mom about her sexual identity because she was scared her dad would be upset. She has heard him make homophobic comments in the past. Christina wants her daughter to know that she can love who she wants to love and her mother will do her best to protect her. While Michelle and Christina were the only two mothers in my sample who described conflict with their children's fathers related to their children's sexual identity, their stories highlight the entrenchment of heteronormativity in society and point to challenges parents face when supporting their children's sexual citizenship.

Mothering After #MeToo

For some mothers in my sample, though not all, the #MeToo movement is the reason they are talking to their kids about consent. It has changed how they approach sex education and for mothers of younger children, how they plan to approach sex education in the future. When I asked Jackie if she felt the #MeToo movement has changed the way she plans to approach conversations about sex with her kids, she said:

> "I think it just reinforces how ubiquitous these things are. That young women, all women you know, have these experiences and it sucks. I guess it just makes me bring up the topic with the kids."

For Jackie, the #MeToo movement made it clear how prevalent experiences of sexual violence are for women. She also found it to be a helpful avenue for bringing up sexual violence as a topic of conversations with her children. Brandi felt similarly, although she was explicit in saying that the movement increased her focus on talking with her children about consent.

> "I would say, definitely, explicitly talking about consent. I don't think I would have been so conscious of it except for you know, the events of the past couple of years. I think it would have come up in a general conversation, but I doubt I would have introduced it so early. I'm glad, in a sense, that it was raised in my awareness and is something that I'm focusing on because I think in any relationship thinking about consent and boundaries and things is respectful. But I think particularly once he starts getting into any kind of romantic relationships, it's so important."

Brandi explained that the #MeToo movement led her to introduce her children to the concept of consent earlier and more intentionally. The movement increased her consciousness of sexual violence as something she should focus on in conversations with her children about romantic relationships. Stacey and her husband talk to her son about sex and sexual behavior regularly during dinner table conversations. She similarly felt the movement made her think more about teaching her son about consent.

> "I think the whole consent thing, I never would have talked to [my son] about that, before [#MeToo] I mean. It never would have never entered my brain before, right. I mean, obviously, we know that that's bad, you know all that stuff shouldn't happen and shouldn't have happened, but I don't think that that word 'consent' and actually having those conversations as part of sex ed would have entered my brain before. Part of what I tell him is about being very careful when it comes to that [my husband] talked to him about that too, you know don't get yourself caught in a bad situation where you maybe have sex with somebody and they didn't really want it."

For her, it’s important that her son knows what consent is and is careful not to put himself in a “bad situation” where he has sex or engages in other sexual activity with someone, and they perceive that sexual encounter to be nonconsensual.

Other mothers in my sample did not feel like the movement changed the way they talk to their kids about sex and sexual behavior because they had already planned to cover topics related to consent and sexual violence. Although, like Jackie, they found the movement to be a useful mechanism for introducing concepts to their kids because there were relevant events to point to and use as examples.

Conclusion

Mothers in my sample are trying to raise good sexual citizens by teaching them about bodily autonomy and respect for others’ bodily autonomy. They use instances of nonsexual touch to demonstrate to young children their ability to choose who touches them and other people’s ability to do the same. They also emphasize the need to respect other people’s choices related to touch. As their children get older, they transition these conversations from covering nonsexual touch to covering sexual touch to teach consent and respect within sexual relationships. These conversations diverged by the gender of children as mothers attempted to counteract gendered social scripts. For most of the mothers in my sample, sexual citizenship also included raising children who felt comfortable expressing attraction to any gender and who respected other people with non-heterosexual relationships. The mothers in my sample provide evidence of how the #MeToo movement has contributed to social change related to sexual violence. The movement has pushed some parents to foster sexual citizenship in their children before they graduate from high school, as Hirsch and Khan (2020) argue is necessary to decrease the prevalence of sexual violence.

It is also worth discussing how the gendered divergence in sex education provided by parents will impact boys and girls as they approach maturity. The mothers in my sample hope to raise girls who will be strong, empowered women who believe they can do and be anything. They want to raise boys who respect girls and men who do not perpetrate sexual violence against women. Some have expressed concern that empowering girls without empowering boys could be harmful to boys' self-confidence and cause men to have lesser life chances than women (Reeves 2022). Others have suggested that even when boys and young men recognize the importance of consent and emotional attachment within sexual relationships, they still view themselves as the initiators and girls and young women as receivers (Aho and Peltolla 2022). Future research should examine if and how parents teach their sons positive alternatives to hegemonic masculinity in addition to teaching against hegemonic masculinity.

However, it is important to recognize my sample does not generalize to the population of the United States. While the mothers in my sample are trying to raise sexual citizens, it is unlikely all children will receive this education. The mothers in my sample are highly educated and politically liberal which contributes to their parenting aspirations and support for the #MeToo movement. Interestingly, a recent advice column in the *Washington Post* responded to a reader who asked how to help their toddler enforce boundaries with relatives during the holidays, including if their child does not want to hug a family member. The columnist provided suggestions similar to those of several of the moms in my study, including offering a fist bump or a high five. The columnist also emphasizes that while it might be tempting to encourage a child to relax their boundaries to placate a hurt relative, it is more important to affirm the child's right to bodily autonomy (Leahy 2022).

Chapter Four: Feminism, #MeToo, and White Privilege

Jessica, who was first introduced in Chapter 2, is the mom of a 17-year-old son who is excited about leaving home to go to college. She is white, her husband is Latino, and her son is biracial. Her family lives in a multi-family home with extended family members on the East coast which she described as both a blessing and a curse during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. When I asked her what she thought about the #MeToo movement, she had a lot to say about the benefits of the movement, how it didn't go far enough, and how it has changed the way she talks to her son – not only about sex and sexual behavior – but about his relative privilege in society.

> "I was thinking, *about fucking time*. Now, we've been having these conversations, right? There's always been folks – feminists, queer activists – having these conversations. Nobody was listening. Cis het white males had the power to make sure nobody heard it, let alone listened to it. So social media, specifically Twitter, I think it has amplified those voices and centralized them and brought it into public consciousness in a way that was not available before."

Jessica felt that the #MeToo movement had been a long time coming. She studied feminist literature in college, so she felt like conversations about sexual violence have been ongoing, but that men in positions of power were preventing open and widespread discussion about these issues. For her, social media provided the means for consciousness raising about sexual violence that people in powerful positions could not shut down. However, Jessica also felt like the movement ignored women of color's historical activism related to sexual violence and did not address how structural racism contributes to which women are heard and believed.

> "My husband is from a Latinx family, so my son is white and Latino at the same time. We have very frank discussions about race and ethnicity and gender, and so watching these things it's just like part of an overall pattern where white women are going thanks, you started it. But we'll take it from here. Just because we as white women have a lot of people who will listen to us… whereas women of color do not have access to the same power structures and do not have the same people who will listen to them. There's very different and real considerations for how you'll be perceived."

Jessica's feelings about the #MeToo movement are complicated by her understanding of racial inequality within a gender unequal society. She argues that white women (she refrains from naming particular people) co-opted the #MeToo movement from Black women and women of color (she specifically referenced Tarana Burke). She also makes the point that white women who came forward during the movement and more generally are more likely to be believed and to have access to support and financial resources than women of color. She and her family talk openly about race and gender because they each hold different social positions relative to each other. For her, the movement called attention to her own privilege, but it also called attention to what she wants to teach her son regarding his privilege.

> "In terms of raising my son now, it's being very open about those things. Like when we are dealing with any type of social or governmental agency, I'm the one that interacts, not my husband. So we have those conversations with our son. Because he presents as white, he presents as male, he has a lot of responsibility because he has a lot of privileges… While assault and sexual assault isn't unique, and my identity as a middle aged nice white lady isn't unique, it's crucially important to leverage those parts of our identity where we can to amplify these discussions as much as possible."

Jessica described how she tends to interact with social or government agencies, such as the IRS, rather than her husband because she anticipates she will be treated better than her husband would. It is urgent to her that her son understand how his position as a man who "can pass as white" gives him access to resources others do not have, and that comes with responsibility. For her, she will continue using her privilege to educate her son. My conversation with Jessica highlights the complex feelings shared by many of the mothers in my sample about the #MeToo movement.

Mothers thought the #MeToo movement was an important public consciousness raising event, although some did not feel seen by the movement and were skeptical of the movement's ability to create tangible societal change. However, despite both positive and negative feelings about the movement, they are using #MeToo as a catalyst for talking with their children about sexual violence and consent, but also privilege and inequality. Interestingly, and surprisingly for white mothers, they aren't just thinking about gender privilege, but racial privilege too. The #MeToo movement has potentially caused lasting change in how consent and power are prioritized when mothers talk to their children about sex and sexual behavior.

Race and the #MeToo Movement

Although the #MeToo movement is associated with sexual harassment and assault, it has also been characterized by persistent racial biases since it became a widely recognized national movement in 2017 (Onwuachi-Willig 2018; Trott 2021). When Alyssa Milano, a white actress, asked Twitter users to "write 'me too' as a reply to [her] tweet" if they had experienced sexual harassment or assault, she unwittingly became the face of a movement that had been started 11 years earlier by Tarana Burke, a Black activist (Vagianos 2017). Some noticed the lack of recognition of Burke right away, including one of the co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement Alicia Garza, who tweeted about it (Onwuachi-Willig 2018).

In an essay for the *Yale Law Journal Forum*, Angela Onwuachi-Willig (2018) argues that Black women's contributions and experiences were ignored at critical junctures before and after the resurgence of the #MeToo movement. For example, she highlights the disparity in support Rose McGowan, a white actress, received when she was suspended from Twitter for posting the phone number of her alleged harasser compared to the online harassment Leslie Jones, a Black actress, faced after the release of the Ghostbusters remake. She also suggests, and provides ample evidence, that Black women's stories were sidelined by media coverage.

Almost a year after the #MeToo movement erupted, #WhyIDidntReport[10] was trending on Twitter as America watched Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testify in Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court confirmation hearings. The parallel stories of Anita Hill and Christine Blasey Ford highlight how race and gender are interwoven into responses to allegations of sexual violence against public figures. In 1991, Black law professor Anita Hill testified to repeated sexual harassment perpetrated by then-Judge Clarence Thomas, who is also Black, to the Senate Judiciary Committee overseeing the hearings for his nomination (Tillet and Leive 2021). Hill endured sexist and racist harassment, including death threats, related to her testimony for years afterward (Gross 2021; Hill 2021). Just over 27 years later, psychology professor Christine Blasey Ford who is white, testified that Brett Kavanaugh, also white, raped her at a house party in high school. Both men were confirmed to the Supreme Court. There is a tension in the #MeToo movement, highlighted by #BlackLivesMatter, that recognizes Black men do not always receive due process and in the not-to-distant past, were falsely accused of rape by white women as a tool of white supremacy (Greene et al. 2019). This knowledge, alongside a charge from #MeToo to always believe women, complicates the movements for racial and gender justice.

Although the two movements have different goals and prospects for the future, #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have a lot in common (Greene et al. 2019). Following the *Race-Ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Black Lives Matter and the Role of Intersectional Legal Analysis in the Twenty-First Century* symposium, the speakers worked together to collectively write an essay about the complex intersections of the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements

---

[10] #WhyIDidntReport began trending on Twitter during Christine Blasey Ford's testimony during Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court confirmation hearings. Survivors of sexual assault used the hashtag to discuss the reasons for not reporting sexual assault experiences to law enforcement. See Guidry et al. 2021 for an analysis of related tweets.

(Greene et al. 2019). Their essay provides a framework for imagining how these movements came to be linked in the public consciousness, particularly for mothers. First, both movements were founded by Black women but have come to be associated with other groups. In the public perception, Black Lives Matter is primarily viewed as being about Black men at risk of being killed by police, despite a concurrent #SayHerName[11] campaign while #MeToo is primarily associated with white middle- and upper-class women who want access to the same boardrooms as white men. Second, both movements are somewhat leaderless, suspicious of institutions and traditional hierarchies, and make use of online social networks to increase awareness. Third, both movements were preceded by historic social movements that resulted in social change, i.e., the Civil Rights movement and the Women's movement (Greene et al. 2019; Hirshman 2019).

Most important for understanding how mothers perceive these movements to be linked is the assumption that ordinary people can contribute to social change. People felt like by speaking out and contributing to raising awareness, and maybe showing up to a protest, they were contributing to social change. Both movements also caused people to examine how their own behaviors have been complicit in racist and sexist interactions and social structures (Greene et al. 2019). Women were challenged to think about how they've thought about their own experiences with sexual violence and excuses they may have made for the men in their lives. White people were challenged to recognize they have a racial identity (white), and that racial identity affords them an assumption of innocence in interactions with law enforcement.

These ideas have resulted in Women's March signs produced by the National Women's Organization (NOW) reading "Intersectional Feminism"[12] and the "My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit" slogan (Romano 2016). My findings show, and I will argue, that these ideas have also contributed to how mothers of white sons hope to teach their sons about white, male privilege.[13] It is evident that the confluence of #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter is challenging parents to educate their sons about privilege. This discussion provides important context for understanding how mothers from different social locations felt about the #MeToo movement, how race became intertwined with how some mothers are thinking about sexual violence, and why they are teaching their sons about both male privilege and white privilege.

---

[11] #SayHerName is a campaign against police violence toward Black women. See Brown et al. 2017 for discussion.
[12] See the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History for more information: https://www.si.edu/object/intersectional-feminism%3Anmah_1893624

Findings

#MeToo Surprised White Women

The #MeToo movement publicized cultures of sexual violence in the film, comedy, music, and news industries, by telling the stories of women who experienced sexual harassment and assault at the hands of industry giants and were – initially – silenced. The movement went viral on social media with women (and men and other gender people) sharing their experiences with sexual violence. Some mothers described the #MeToo movement as a positive moment in history that drew attention to a longstanding systemic problem. Lauren was sexually assaulted in college, and later by an intimate partner. She shared her own story on Twitter during the height of responses to Alyssa Milano's viral tweet. The #MeToo movement helped Lauren feel less alone.

> "I think obviously before MeToo, like that's the whole thing, like bringing awareness of like oh my god, like I'm not alone. This is a huge systemic problem in our society and I think MeToo has really been beneficial for society, putting everything out there. This stuff happens and its horrible and even if it hasn't happened to you, like I'm thinking now

---

[13] It is important to note that the efficacy of movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter are also under scrutiny for "slacktivism" rather than engendering actual cultural and social change (Green et al. 2019; Nenoff 2020; Steinberg 2016). Slacktivism combines "slacker" with "activism" and refers to the people who will post about a cause on social media, but do not make other efforts to contribute to change.

> about like my conversations with my son like, even if that hasn't happened to you as a parent, you know that it happens. So how can we prepare our children do be better, do better."

The #MeToo movement made it clear to Lauren, who is white, that she was not alone in her experiences, that millions of women had been the victim of sexual violence. She also felt it was beneficial for society more generally to have greater awareness of the commonness of sexual violence. For Lauren, this is directly linked to her parenting goals. She wants her son to "do better" than the men she has been reading about in the news. While Michelle, who is also white, didn't share her story on Twitter, she did think the #MeToo movement made it easier to talk to about her experiences.

> "I think I feel less shame about talking about my experiences with others. Not that I should ever have felt any shame, but I do think there's this little trepidation of like, what are they going to think of me if I tell them this? Are they going to think I'm this damaged person? Or broken? And so I think because it's in a more public conversation that it feels easier for me to just bring up casually and have a conversation about it because I can reference other conversations that are happening."

Michelle, who was raped in college and later experienced sexual violence within her marriage, appreciated that the #MeToo movement created opportunities for her to share her experiences with others because they were relevant to the ongoing public conversation. She feels less shame now (though she knows she has nothing to be ashamed of). Unlike Lauren and Michelle, Jill did not identify any of her sexual experiences as rape or sexual assault, but she still found the #MeToo movement to be beneficial, particularly because of where she lives.

> "I have read a lot of threads where people share their stories and I've realized how lucky I've been in not having experienced things I was reading about. I know there's some privilege involved there probably… I think it's good that it went so national and was all over the news because it brought attention to it and it did create opportunities for conversation that wouldn't probably have existed before. It kind of forced us to talk about it a little bit instead of the whole taboo you don't talk about that. But I guess it depends on your circle too. We live in a very conservative rural area and I would not feel safe enough to talk about the movement with the general population because there's a lot of scrutiny and people aren't shy about it."

Jill, who is white, was the only one of my participants who lived in a rural area. Recall that Jill is the mother who talked about her husband being “angsty” and “annoying” when he wanted to have sex and she didn’t, something her friend called “not consent” in Chapter 2. She read a lot of survivor stories online as the movement was unfolding, but she didn’t see any of her experiences in what she read, which she is grateful for. The #MeToo movement made her feel lucky. She also recognizes that this is a privilege that many women do not have. Whether or not Jill identifies personally with the movement, she found it created opportunities to talk about sexual violence, and sex more generally with people in her circle. However, she still feels like it is somewhat taboo to discuss the movement outside of her circle. Lauren, Michelle, and Jill are white. They were raised in middle class homes and have current household incomes above $75,000. For them, the #MeToo movement helped increased the number of people they were comfortable talking to about sexual violence and for Lauren and Michelle, process some of their feelings about previous experiences. This suggests that they weren’t aware of how many women have experienced sexual violence.

Mothers in my sample who came from less privileged backgrounds were also glad the #MeToo movement increased awareness of sexual violence as a social problem. They weren’t surprised at the prevalence, and they talked about family histories of sexual violence. Christina, who identified her race as Black American and whose household income is less than $25,000, knew that other people had similar experiences as her, but the #MeToo movement still helped her feel less alone.

> “There’s five generations strong of sexual abuse [in my family]. I would say it wasn’t until the MeToo movement that I felt like I wasn’t operating in that space of an embarrassment. Because you do feel so isolated and you feel like, even though logically you think obviously other people have gone through this too. But you don’t feel that way.”

Christina experienced both sexual and intimate partner violence in her marriage, and she is now divorced. She noted that women have experienced sexual abuse over five generations in her family, so it wasn't that she didn't know others had the same experiences. But the #MeToo movement helped her feel less embarrassed about those experiences. When I asked Emily, who identifies as mixed race and whose household income is less than $50,000 a year, how she reacted to the #MeToo movement, she said:

> "Honestly, I felt like it was a long time coming… because suddenly you're reading everyone's stories and it's not just isolated to like one or two people you know. Suddenly your grandmother's talking about it. Your sister's talking about it. Your girl best friends are talking about it. Your mother might be talking about it or your aunt. I feel like its retraining men to not see women as sexual objects, but as people."

Emily felt like women had been waiting for something like the #MeToo movement for a long time. She felt like it made it possible for people to talk about it more easily with each other, particularly other women in her family. She also suggested that the movement forced men to reevaluate how they view women. Callie, who is Mexican American and has a household income less than $50,000, similarly suggested that while it wasn't surprising that so many women have experienced sexual violence, the #MeToo movement was useful for bringing conversations about sexual violence into the public.

> "I remember being like, 'oh that's a catchy phrase' because yeah, me too, you know? Almost every woman in my family has had some sort of sexual assault experience… I told my sister about this stuff that happened when I was younger. I didn't need to explain to her how I felt because I knew that she would know what I was talking about. I remember feeling like it's nice that this is a conversation that is not only happening amongst women, behind closed doors."

Callie was molested by a cousin as a child. She was also raped at a party in high school. For her, the #MeToo movement was not necessarily revelatory because she already knew that most of the women in her life had experienced sexual violence and she knew they would understand her feelings. But she also felt like it was helpful that conversations about sexual violence were reaching a broader audience. Both Emily and Callie, identified sexual violence as a known part of their family history, whether or not their family actively talked about it.

Megan, a white woman with a household income greater than $150,000 but who grew up in a rural, low-income home spoke about the first Women's March when I asked her about the #MeToo movement.

> "I was on Twitter. I thought it was fascinating to see women come together to coalesce around a message like that was very exciting. My daughter and I went to the Women's March, the first one, right. We had little pink hats and everything. Getting to see this historic event with all of these women coming together, you know with these very loud and strong voices was so exciting for me to be able to share with her."

Megan thought the Women's March was a powerful message for her daughter to see women speaking out against sexual violence and gender inequality. However, as I will discuss below, this didn't mean she saw herself in the #MeToo movement.

#MeToo Did Not Represent All Mothers

Not all mothers felt represented or satisfied with the movement as it evolved. They couldn't place their own experiences within the broader conversations about sexual violence that were happening. Returning to Megan's story, she told me that while she thought the #MeToo movement was important and necessary, it was limited in reach.

> "Part of me was super into it. Like yeah, awesome, let's do this. [But] there was a piece of me that was like, there was no one championing me when I was going through my own repeated sexual abuse in my family. Part of my frustration was this whole me too thing took place in professional settings, you know well heeled, mostly white men, right? So much sexual abuse happens in families and I felt like that narrative was left out of the larger movement. So I almost felt like a spectator. Like oh yeah, this is a great movement. But it's not for me. It wouldn't have helped me, you know?"

Megan endured repeated sexual abuse as a child, perpetrated by a close family member. She felt like family sexual abuse was left out of the broader #MeToo conversation, with most of the stories that gained widespread attention focused on sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace. Other types of sexual violence were not made visible in the same way. Unlike some of the other mothers who I talked about earlier in this chapter, Megan had never discussed her experiences with anyone except a therapist. Not only did Megan feel left out of the movement, she felt like it missed the mark. She studied sociology in college and felt the #MeToo movement failed to interrogate how gendered and racialized power structures in society contributed to which women told their stories and which women were heard.

> "I think it's really important when we talk about me too that we talk about power differentials and how the women who have come forward are coming from places of power. These aren't underlings or poor or minority or undereducated people. These are well-heeled people who are saying, 'I demand the same respect that the white men at the table are getting,' and that's great for them to do. But to understand that it doesn't translate in the same way for other women who are not coming to the table with the same amount of power."

Megan suggests that the only women who were heard during the #MeToo movement were white women with considerable power and that many other voices were left out of the conversation. She adds that those women were able to do that because of their relative privilege compared to other women. Women of color, with less education, lower income, in subordinate occupational positions did not have the same options to come forward with accusations of sexual violence because the power structures would not protect them.

For Crystal, who is Native American, the #MeToo movement was maddening because it wasn't changing the conditions that lead to sexual violence and likely wouldn't lead to change in the future.

> "It makes me so mad. Because I work in disability justice and the MeToo movement, it's very white. Well I know it was started by a black woman. So just that right there, coming from an ancestry with historical trauma…The way it came out with very white, powerful women, it didn't speak to me. It didn't speak to my experiences or the experiences of people in my family who had been undergoing sexual violence as part of the colonization

> process. So “hashtag MeToo” is like, so fucking what? I don’t want to hear any more horror stories. I have to live my own.”

Crystal described her frustrations that Alyssa Milano was getting credit for the movement initiated by Tarana Burke. As a Native American woman whose tribal heritage is important to her, she feels this acutely. She didn’t feel seen by the movement and she didn’t feel like the movement cared about the experiences of Black and Native American women.

Raising White Boys Who Will Become White Men

I first started collecting interviews in early 2021, less than a year after George Floyd was killed on May 25, 2020, reinvigorating the #blacklivesmatter movement. This context is important background because not only were mothers thinking about how to teach their sons about male privilege, mothers of white boys were also trying to teach their sons about white privilege. While the outcomes of both the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements were not as society-changing as activists wanted, the desire of mothers to educate children about both male and white privilege is a positive outcome on the micro level. I spoke to Lauren, mother of a 5-year-old son in March 2021. At the end of the interview, I asked her if there was anything else that she wanted to share based on our conversation and she said:

> “It’s interesting, I feel like MeToo isn’t the only thing that’s really made me hyperaware of my actions as a parent raising a boy. Because I’m not only raising a boy, I’m raising a white boy, right? In a society that has rampant systemic racism. So, I’m not only thinking really closely about consent and all that, but I’m also having a lot of conversations about systemic racism and what that looks like and what it means to him as a white male. It sometimes feels like such a burden, well that’s not the right word, a challenge. There are so many important challenges ahead in terms of sex, sex education, and consent, and race education and stuff like that. It’s daunting. I know the outcome I want to have for him in my head, it’s just scaffolding it to get him there.”

Lauren describes how her parenting goals have been shaped by more than just the #MeToo Movement, alluding to recent public engagement on issues related to race and #blacklivesmatter.

Lauren wants her son to understand that he lives in a world of gender and racial inequality. She identifies her son as having *white privilege* in addition to male privilege, and while teaching him about these things isn't easy, she knows what kind of son she wants to raise. As she talked, Lauren extended her thoughts about racial inequality to women:

> "I think there's some intersectionality here too, between like, MeToo and women of color. I can imagine – I don't know the statistics, but I can imagine there's a lot more that might happen to women of color because they're not white and white men feel a sense of power over them. I think for me, making those connections with my son will be important too."

Like Jessica whose story I told in the introduction to this Chapter, Lauren is conscious that women of color face disproportionate levels of sexual violence and that those stories aren't being told in the same way as the stories of white women. She wants her son to understand how intersectional oppression affects women of color and ensure that he, as a white man, will not contribute to that oppression. Megan felt the same way. I shared this quote in Chapter 3, but I think it's important to mention again.

> "So my son is a white dude. He's going to have access to resources and power that you know other people don't have and so the conversations with him are often about hegemony. They're about power differentials because talking to him about how his dick works is not going to be as useful as hey dude, just by virtue of what you look like, you're coming to the table with more power."

Like Lauren and Jessica, Megan is conscious of the varying privileges her son will have and wants to help him understand that. For her, this is more important than teaching him about the mechanics of sexual behavior. All three of these mothers are white and so are their sons. Emily, who identifies as mixed race and describes her son's race as white, felt the same way.

> "I feel like it's influenced it a lot, mainly because I don't want him to add to those statistics, knowingly or unknowingly, which is another reason why I feel like sharing my story with him when he's older [will] make him realize the consequences of his actions… If I could just prevent it so that he's [never] even in the position to get accused of it, then I feel like I've done my job… He's going to be a white male in America. So use that privilege and use that voice to speak up and speak out about these things that are

> happening. Call your friends out or your coworkers that are doing something that's not appropriate because I taught you what is and isn't appropriate."

For Emily, the #MeToo Movement contributed significantly to how she is thinking about sex education for her son. She also thinks she will probably share her story of sexual violence with her son, because even though he isn't old enough to hear it now, he will be someday; and she wants him to know that it still affects her (and anticipates it will still affect her at that time). Emily is also determined that he use his gender and racial privilege to call out people in his life who are not acting appropriately.

Conclusion

While mothers in my sample universally felt the #MeToo movement was a positive force in society, mothers with less privileged identities were less surprised at the prevalence of sexual violence than mothers with privileged identities. They were more likely to describe knowing of generational sexual abuse within their families and to recognize the widespread prevalence of sexual violence. Mothers with less privilege also felt less seen by the movement. They felt that experiences of family abuse and stories of people with marginalized identities, such as those with a disability, were not taken seriously by media outlets or the movement. Mothers with greater privilege were more likely to feel the movement was integral for their ability to emotionally process the movement.

Given the news medias' tendency to focus on the workplace sexual harassment and assault stories of high-profile white women throughout the movement, it is not surprising mothers in my sample felt this way. For example, three months before the *New York Times* and *New Yorker* articles were published regarding allegations against white Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein in October 2022, *Buzzfeed* published an expose about ongoing allegations against Black musician R. Kelly beginning in 1994. But this article did not result in the same loss of status as the men who would be accused three months later (Leung and Williams 2019). The allegations against R. Kelly were largely overlooked by the media and wider public until a 2019 documentary, *Surviving R. Kelly* (Hampton 2019). The accusations against both men were similar, but the social location of their victims was quite different. The media focused on the stories of the high-profile white women who spoke out against Harvey Weinstein. The Black women and girls – and sometimes their parents – who spoke out against R. Kelly did not receive nearly as much media attention as the victims who accused Weinstein until after the documentary was released. Up until that point, many people hesitated to believe the Black women and girls who spoke out against R. Kelly (Leung and Williams 2019). In 2022, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison related to child pornography charges. Increasing awareness of racial injustice following the reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter movement led to renewed interest in the allegations against R. Kelly.

For some of the mothers of sons in my sample, it was impossible to disentangle the gender and racial privilege their sons will have in the future and they have been moved to try contribute to a future in which the prevalence of sexual violence is decreased by teaching their sons to use their privilege productively. My interview questions were focused on the #MeToo movement, sex education, and sexual violence. I did not ask mothers explicitly about privilege, either race or gender. However, the concurrent online movements, #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, and the public conversations they have engendered have led mothers to interrogate how they have been complicit in racist and sexist institutions and personal interactions. This introspection, and the belief fostered by the movements that individuals can affect social change, has led mothers to aspire to teaching their white sons about their privilege relative to other race and gender groups.

Some of this may be related to the time period during which I collected interviews. I started conducting interviews in March 2021 and continued through the summer of 2022. The disproportionate police violence experienced by Black Americans became the focus of the news again when George Floyd was killed by law enforcement following a traffic stop in May 2021, reinvigorating the Black Lives Matter protests. Additionally, the demographics of my sample may have contributed to participants nuanced understanding of race and gender power dynamics. Many in my sample are highly educated, liberal, and employed in professions that may take gender and racial inequality seriously.

Chapter Five: Conclusion: Yes, We Can Talk About Sexual Violence

"More than any law that has been passed or policy that has been changed in the past five years, this movement has created visibility and community for those who thought we might go to our grave bearing a shame that was never ours to carry in the first place."

– Tarana Burke

In this dissertation, I have explored how mothers are navigating changing cultural understandings of sexual violence, both personally and in their parenting. Using a feminist analytical framework, I have examined 1) how mothers are deconstructing the "gray area" of sexual violence by relabeling previous experiences as sexual assault and/or rape and fully acknowledging the harm caused by other violating experiences in which they gave coerced consent; 2) how mothers are attempting to instill sexual citizenship in their children by counteracting gendered social scripts; and 3) how social location shaped mothers' feelings about the #MeToo movement while simultaneously prompting white mothers to educate their sons about both white and male privilege. My findings demonstrate that the #MeToo movement challenged dominant misconceptions and silences of sexual violence, contributing to fundamental cultural change. The movement 1) built community by allowing people to speak openly with others about their experiences; 2) exposed the limits of consent as a marker for sex that is moral and good; and 3) documented sexual violence as a condition of pervasive gender inequality. The stories I shared in this dissertation are unremarkable because they are common experiences for women in America. However, the mothers in my sample are remarkable for their willingness to share both their pain from the past and their hope for the future.

Sexual Violence as a Social Problem

October 2022 marked five years since Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey published the first article detailing allegations of sexual misconduct against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein (Diaz 2022). Their investigative journalism combined with the hashtag #MeToo set off a viral social movement with the goal of raising awareness about the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault (Hirshman 2019; Twohey and Kantor 2020). Dozens of public figures, mostly men, were accused of sexual misconduct in the weeks and months that followed. Many lost their positions and social standing, although some have resumed their careers relatively unscathed (see Louis C.K.). The #MeToo movement was still evolving as I was conducting my interviews in the spring of 2021 through the spring of 2022. On June 30th, 2021, I ended a call with a participant and found Bill Cosby was trending on Twitter. He had just been released from prison after the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his 2018 conviction for indecent assault. His conviction had been a significant milestone in the #MeToo movement (Kennedy and Hernandez 2021). I sat in stunned silence wondering what it meant to be asking mothers how the #MeToo movement has impacted their lives when it felt like the movement was falling apart.

But the movement did not fall apart. Bill Cosby's release made space for more complicated questions about the goals of the movement, especially given the racial bias against Black men in American courts. The court vacated Cosby's conviction because it found his rights to due process had been violated. He gave incriminating statements under the belief that he would not be prosecuted in criminal court (Kennedy and Hernandez 2021). In an editorial for *Time Magazine* about the five-year anniversary, movement founder Tarana Burke writes that events like Bill Cosby's release and other failed conviction attempts have resulted in a belief that the movement is weakened. But if we look at her original conceptualization for the movement, it is less about carceral solutions and/or punishment than dismantling rape culture and providing avenues of support for victims and survivors. The movement is now focused on "moving beyond the hashtag to build a culture predicated on consent and harm reduction" (Burke 2022).

According to a recent *Pew Research Center* poll, 49 percent of adults living in the United States support the #MeToo movement and 21 percent say they oppose it, while 30 percent neither support nor oppose it. The gender gap in support for the movement is fairly small, with 54 percent of women saying they support the movement compared to 42 percent of men. However, this occurs along political lines with 70 percent of Democratic women supporting the movement compared to 28 percent of Republican women (Brown 2022). There are films chronicling the movement (e.g., *She Said*, *Bombshell*), contemporary events (*Women Talking, Unbelievable*), and satirizing gendered violence (e.g., *Promising Young Woman*) and reaching broad audiences.

Since the #MeToo movement erupted on the global stage, 22 states and the District of Columbia have passed more than 70 workplace anti-harassment bills, including prohibitions against nondisclosure agreements, requirements for workplace anti-harassment policies, increasing protections for workers regardless of employment classification, and extensions of statute of limitations (Johnson, Ijoma, and Kim 2022). In 2022, Congress passed two significant laws related to sexual assault and harassment that are hallmarks of the #MeToo movement: Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act of 2021(H.R. 4445) and the Speak Out Act (H.R. 4524). The first law invalidates forced arbitration agreements in the case of a sexual harassment or assault claim. The second law prohibits enforcement of nondisclosure agreements that were signed prior to a sexual harassment or assault dispute. It does not apply to agreements entered into following a dispute. Despite this progress, more work remains to be done. The National Women's Law Center argues states are failing to address retaliation and to modernize legal definitions of harassment and hold employers accountable.

Additionally, these laws do not address the disproportionate harassment faced by women of color and are not happening equally across geographic locations (Johnson, Ijoma, and Kim 2022).

Importantly, women and other people who have experienced sexual violence now know, resoundingly, that they are not alone. The #MeToo movement made the devastating and sometimes lifelong effects of sexual violence visible and relatable and the mothers in my sample highly valued this. They found themselves able to talk about their experiences – experiences labeled rape, sexual assault, uncomfortable, gray areas, or annoying – with their friends, sisters and mothers, intimate partners and for some, online networks. For some, this ended decades of silence, allowing them to emotionally process their experiences. They were able to see their own experiences in the experiences being shared on social media. This helped them understand how other people were labeling similar experiences. This, and conversations with strong ties, led to a change in some mothers' rape consciousness and they reconsidered how they labeled their own experiences. Several expressed wishing they had known "then" what they know now, that they have the right to say no and have their no be heard.

It is because of these experiences that mothers are approaching their children's sex education with the intention of raising good sexual citizens. This dissertation contributes to the literature on sexual citizenship and parent-child conversations about sex by demonstrating how mothers are attempting to socialize their children to recognize both their own and others sexual citizenship. I suggest that this socialization process becomes gendered as children age and mothers become increasingly concerned about the gendered sripts their children observe in their daily lives.

The mothers in my sample are determined to teach their children that they have the right to bodily autonomy and so do others. They are beginning these lessons at early ages, by using nonsexual interactions with relatives as practice for their children to assert how and when they want to be touched. They hope, as their children age, that these lessons will extend to sexual interactions. Mothers of older children are having explicit conversations about consent. These conversations varied by the gender of the child because mothers are trying to counteract the social scripts that tell boys that they have a right to sex and girls that their value is in sex. Mothers are hoping to raise daughters who feel empowered to express their desires and who know their “no” has meaning. They hope their sons become men who understand sex should be more than just consensual for both parties, it should be desired. If they are successful in their aspirations, these children will be adults who do not perpetrate any form of sexual violence. It is imperative that parents foster sexual citizenship in their children due to the lack of federally mandated or standardized sex education in the United States.

Most parents think it’s important for sex education to be taught in school and that sex education should include puberty, healthy relationships, abstinence, birth control, and STDs. This varies by political affiliation, with 77.2 percent of Republican parents saying it is very important sex education is taught in high school compared to 92 percent of Democrat parents (Kantor and Levitz 2017). However, despite high levels of support for sex education in schools many schools do not provide this curriculum. Currently, sex education and/or HIV education is mandated in 38 states and the District of Columbia, though only 25 states and DC require both and content varies widely. Only 10 states and DC require content be inclusive regarding sexual orientation. Additionally, while 40 states and DC require the inclusion of information about teen dating and sexual violence, only 11 states require consent education be included in those conversations (Guttmacher Institute 2022). Results from the National Survey of Family Growth 2015-2019 show that about half of adolescents received sex education that meets the minimum standard recommended by Healthy People 2030. However, fewer than half reported receiving this education before their first time having heterosexual sex (Lindberg and Kantor 2022). Compared to 1995, adolescents were less likely to report receiving sex education on key topics in 2015-2019. Since schools in the United States cannot be relied on to provide sex education, parents must try to fill the gap.

Relying on parents to provide comprehensive and factually accurate sex education to their children is problematic. While 8 out of 10 adolescents and their parents report they have talked about sex and sexual behavior, parents leave out important topics, like strategies for saying no, pleasure, and where to get reproductive health care services, and are unclear about values related to sex, such as considering the responsibilities of having a sexual relationship (Ashcraft and Murray 2017; Let's Talk 2014). Parents report they are comfortable talking to their children about sex, but they often do not know what to say (Grossman, Jenkins, and Richer 2018). When mothers in my study found themselves at a loss on how to talk about a topic, they sometimes talked to friends who are moms, sisters, or their own mothers, but most often they consulted books. They also gave their children books to read. Many referenced *The Care and Keeping of You* series published by the American Girl doll company (Schaefer 1998). Some of the children of mothers in my sample had received some formal sex education from either a school or church program, but mothers felt like there were some gaps in what they learned. Several mothers have children in Catholic private schools and are concerned their children will only receive limited, abstinence only sex education. Specifically, some felt it would be necessary to talk to their kids about LGBT and gender identity issues because they don't expect this topic to be covered by the school's curriculum.

In direct contrast to the United States, the United Kingdom provides abundant and specific guidance to schools on their sex education curriculums, greatly reducing the responsibility of parents to provide comprehensive sex education to their children. In 2019, the United Kingdom made Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education mandatory for children in primary and secondary school, respectively. This includes integrating LGBT content into the curriculum at age-appropriate ages and education about consent with the intention of preventing sexual harassment and assault (UK Department of Education 2019). In an ethnographic study of teenage boys' understandings of consent in the United Kingdom following the implementation of mandatory sex education, Setty (2022) found that while they clearly understand what consent is and why it matters, they do not feel confident in their ability to enact consent in a way that does not cause harm but fulfills their role in the gendered script as initiator of sex. They discussed "gray areas" and interestingly, that they know a yes does not always mean yes because of social norms, social pressure, and fear of being awkward. But they earnestly wanted Setty to know that they do not want to cause harm. She also found the boys were interested in outlets to discuss their emotions regarding the complex interplay of hegemonic masculinity norms, gendered scripts, and desire to not perpetrate sexual violence (Setty 2022). Her findings suggest that nuanced consent education can be highly effective when compulsory on the national level. However, educators (and parents) should consider how consent education that uses heterosexually gendered scripts in which men initiate and women accept is not compatible with enacting nuanced understandings of consent.

Sexual Violence as a Methodological Problem

One of the reasons I wanted to go to graduate school was because my work in victim advocacy had exposed a need for researchers who had advocacy backgrounds to ensure research with victims and survivors was victim-centered and trauma-informed. Researching sexual violence is difficult, but it is necessary. Researchers who study intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or other sensitive topics are at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma (Coles et al. 2014). But researchers who have advocacy backgrounds are also more likely to have the coping skills and resources to navigate this type of work. Despite having greater economic impact than cardiovascular disease and cancer, public funding to address all forms of violence (i.e. rape, youth violence, child maltreatment) is less than half the funding directed to cardiovascular disease and 15 percent of the amount directed to cancer (Waechter and Ma 2015). Additionally, funds available for research related to gendered violence are extremely limited (Hirsch and Khan 2020).

In the age of the #MeToo movement and the inclusion of "sexual violence" as a topic that would be covered in the interviews in my recruitment materials, I was somewhat surprised that two people shared an experience with me that they had never shared with anyone else. I did not anticipate that someone would choose a call to participate in research to share something so personal for the first time. I thought they would choose not to participate or would choose not to share. Despite not expecting this, I did prepare in advance by considering how I would respond and preparing resources to share with the participant if necessary. When a first-time disclosure happened, I took a feminist interviewing approach that emphasizes cultivating an ecosystem of care for research participants (Herron 2022). I let participants lead this part of the conversation by making space for them to share as little or as much as they were comfortable regarding the experience, avoiding any language or questions that could be construed as victim blaming, and making it clear that I believed them.

My background in victim advocacy was essential for helping me respond directly and compassionately to these first-time disclosures. I share the below conversation to illustrate this. When I asked Stacey if someone had ever touched her without her consent, she said yes. She said there were two stories, but that she only wanted to share one. She told me about an experience at work with a "creepy IT guy" who touched her in the office when no one else was around. She had talked about this with other coworkers at the time. After describing that experience, she decided to tell me her other story. While Stacey was in college, she woke up after a party and realized she had been raped. She didn't remember having sex but could tell from where and how she woke up that something had happened to her body without her knowing. She wondered if she had been drugged at some point during the party.

> Stacey: I think in college I rented for the summer, a little like apartment in the Greek system at [university] and you know, partying with all the people in the Greek system right? I was pretty stupid back then, drinking a lot. And I woke up one morning and realized that the guy, that we had had sex and I don't even remember it.
> Kelsey: That would be horrible to wake up to.
> Stacey: yeah, yeah, yeah – it was pretty bad. I remember waking up and being like, oh my god – I couldn't even believe that – and I don't need – I remember like hanging out with him, like with a beer. I even wondered at the time if it was a roofie, you know? Or whatever. Because the last thing I remember is standing there with the beer and we were like laughing and there…we were sitting by the keg having some beer. And that's like the last thing I remember the whole night, so I don't…who knows. But that pretty much sucked. Yeah.
> Kelsey: Did you ever talk to anyone about that experience?
> Stacey: No, I think you're the first person I've ever told.
> Kelsey: Thank you for telling me. I'm so sorry that happened to you. That shouldn't have happened.
> Stacey: No, and you know you just beat yourself up about it right? You're like, god why did I drink that much? Why was I partying? And like, and the other thing was, I didn't have, like a buddy. I realized now, at first I couldn't think about it at the time, but I didn't really have a buddy because I was living in an apartment by myself, right? And I was too, I just, I would meet people on the street, you know? Hey, how's it going, oh hey you want to come to my party tonight? And so I just kind of went by myself, which, that was stupid. But you just think about the things that you did wrong, right?

> Kelsey: Well, regardless of drinking or being by yourself, that shouldn't have happened, no matter what, like you know, doing this thing doesn't make it your fault.
> Stacey: yeah.
> Kelsey: People should respect you and your body, regardless of what choices you've made that day. So definitely not something to blame yourself for.
> Stacey: yeah, yeah.
> Kelsey: Yeah and I guess… we make choices and we expect people to you know, respect that.
> Stacey: Mmhmm

At this point, Stacey's body language made it clear she was uncomfortable. She was nodding a lot and avoiding eye contact. I gently steered the conversation away by asking if her friends had shared similar stories. She said her friends had mentioned things, but they had never talked in-depth about it. Her answer to this question was short and clipped. So I redirected further away, by transitioning to talking about parenting. Stacy was 50-years-old when I interviewed her and had never told anyone about being raped in college, although she did not use the word rape. As she was telling me about her experience, Stacy blamed her own choices for what happened to her. She felt like all she could think about was what she had done wrong. It was vital to me, and I think to her, that she know it was not her fault that she was raped. Regardless of whether she had been drinking, or didn't have a buddy, it was not Stacey's fault that she was raped.

There is some research on best practices for interviewing victims and survivors of sexual violence. An article in *Violence Against Women* provides six recommendations for interviewers from researchers and recommendations from victims and survivors who are participating in research (Campbell et al. 2009). From the researchers, interviewers should: prioritize the emotional well-being of participants, provide time for participants to tell their stories in their own words without rushing, show patience, encourage participants to ask questions and be prepared to answer them, provide information to help normalize experiences, and reflect understanding and compassion. Primarily, victims and survivors want interviewers to be knowledgeable about rape and how it impacts victims (Campbell et al. 2009).

I think it is important to add that researchers should not ask for more information than is necessary to answer the research question and should be explicit in recruitment materials what topics will be included in the interview. For example, I asked mothers about their experiences with nonconsensual sexual contact to provide context for how they are thinking about #MeToo and conversations with their children. I did not need to know every detail of what they experienced and made space for them to share as much or as little as they were willing to. If I was interested in the details of their stories for research, I would have approached this differently by stating that in my recruitment materials. I also want to point out that there is a lot of research on the different types of experiences victims and survivors of sexual violence have and how they react, and researchers should be careful not to ask survivors of traumatic events to recount their experiences unless necessary.

I don’t know what Stacey thinks of our conversation that day, but I hope I responded in a way that lessened the shame she feels from that experience at least a little bit and that she will be able to seek additional support for processing that experience if she wants to. I also hope that sharing this conversation illustrates for other researchers the importance of preparing for unexpected disclosures that require a caring and direct response that is more involved in the life of a participant than researchers generally prefer. It is more important to receive the story as the person tells it and reassure the person that what happened was not their fault, than to ask for more details or clarification.

Sexual Violence as a Theoretical Problem

In the Introduction chapter, I argued that sexual violence is both a cause and consequence of gender and racial inequality. And, in Chapter Two, I argued that the persistence of "gray areas" in the public consciousness perpetuates this inequality by obscuring the naming of experiences as sexual violence. There has been considerable theoretical work that attempts to define experiences that fall on a spectrum from consent to assault (in the gray area) which contrasts with assertions by advocates that gray areas do not exist. The mothers in my sample challenge both assertions by demonstrating that gray areas are the result of gendered social scripts and normalization of sexual violence in our culture. They demonstrate the necessity of language, like that proposed by Woodard (2022), for processing their experiences with sexual violence. They are also intent on raising sons who understand sex should be both consensual *and* desired. This dissertation contributes to feminist theories of gray areas by arguing gray areas are about sexual desire in addition to consent. Theoretical work on sexual violence should engage with both advocates and people who have experienced sexual violence to facilitate and disseminate language that helps victims and survivors process their experiences. This language must acknowledge how power inequalities shape perceptions of sexual encounters.

This dissertation also contributes to understandings of how social movements can lead to social change. In this dissertation, I have revealed a possible mechanism for how the #MeToo movement is changing society: by changing the rape consciousness of mothers who seek to raise children who will neither experience nor perpetrate sexual violence. These mothers have been inspired to educate their children thoughtfully and intentionally about the nuances of pleasure, desire, consent, and the devastating effects of sexual violence. If successful, these mothers will have contributed to decreased prevalence of sexual violence as these children age into adolescence and adulthood.

Future Research

This study suggests understandings of sexual violence are changing in the public consciousness, spurred by the work of anti-violence activists, the #MeToo movement, and as I argue, mothers. While we are five years beyond the global recognition of the #MeToo movement, there is so much we do not know about how the movement has affected and will continue to affect people. Researchers should consider studying issues elevated by the movement such as the differential impacts of sexual violence on white women and women of color (e.g., Onwuachi-Willig 2018), how boys and men are interpreting and responding to these events, how LGBTQ identifying people are thinking about the movement and issues of sexual violence, and how victim service provision has changed. Other potential avenues for research come from the analysis of my transcripts including why parents are thinking about the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements as linked, how religion and politics are informing what parents want to teach their children about sex and sexual behavior post-#MeToo, who they believe should teach their children this information, and whether parents will disclose their own experiences with sexual abuse and harassment with their children.

Importantly, researchers should consider how their research can contribute to decreasing the prevalence of sexual violence and be made accessible to victim service providers. In a 2019 article in *Violence Against Women*, McCauly et al. (2019) state researchers have been ineffective at disseminating research in a way that contributes to decreasing the prevalence of sexual violence. They suggest researchers partner with community organizations and policymakers and sharing research on social media. However, they do not discuss how non-researchers *access* research, which is a major oversight. Most research on violence is held behind a paywall, except for research funded by the federal government, making accessing current research cost prohibitive. Additionally, these articles are often written in academic language that does not clearly delineate the implications of research for practitioners, making it inaccessible to victim service providers. The Center for Victim Research[14] attempts to bridge this gap, building a library of victim research articles, synthesizing recent research on various victimization topics, and providing organizations with licenses to access research databases. Researchers can and should assist with this effort by sharing their research in an open access format such as a preprint, translating research articles into alternative publications such as easily digestible blogs, podcasts, and research briefs, and providing clear research-based recommendations to better disseminate their findings to victim service providers.

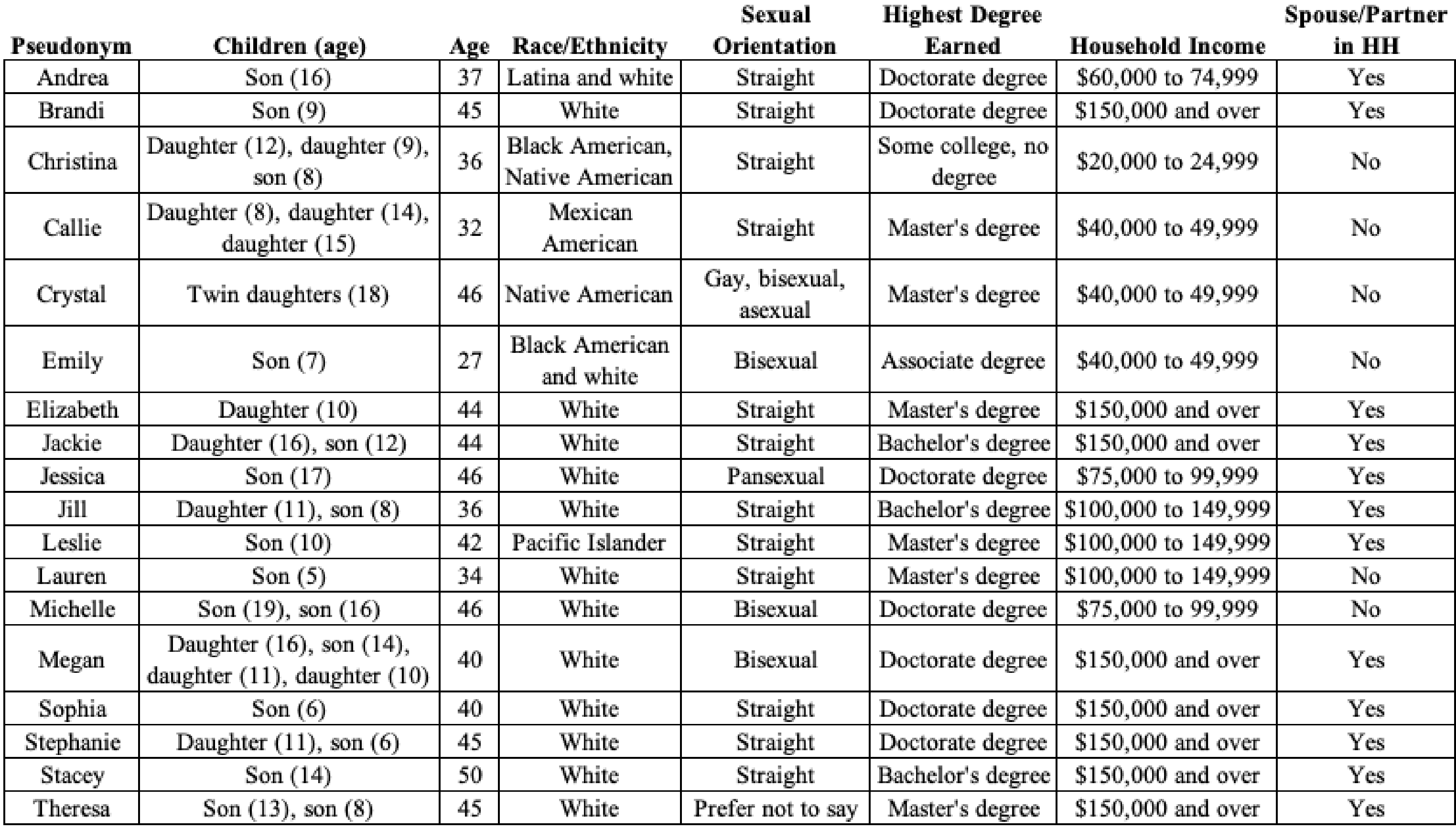
Finally, researchers should consider sharing their de-identified data – both quantitative and qualitative – to facilitate additional research and replicability. This practice is new, particularly for victim related research. There is some evidence that survivors of sexual assault want their data to be shared as a means of helping others (Campbell et al. 2022). Researchers should provide detailed information with participants during the informed consent process about deidentification, data sharing, and provide multiple opportunities for participants to withdraw consent to data sharing (Campbell et al. 2019).

---

[14] The Center for Victim Research was created to meet a need identified by the Office for Victims of Crime through its Vision 21 Initiative: the need for increased statistical data, evidence-based practices, and program evaluation to guide victim service providers, policymakers, and funders. See victimresearch.org for more information.

Appendix A. Mothers, their Children, and Demographic Characteristics

Table 2. Mothers, their Children, and their Demographic Characteristics



Pseudonym	Children (age)	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Highest Degree Earned	Household Income	Spouse/Partner in HH
Andrea	Son (16)	37	Latina and white	Straight	Doctorate degree	$60,000 to 74,999	Yes
Brandi	Son (9)	45	White	Straight	Doctorate degree	$150,000 and over	Yes
Christina	Daughter (12), daughter (9), son (8)	36	Black American, Native American	Straight	Some college, no degree	$20,000 to 24,999	No
Callie	Daughter (8), daughter (14), daughter (15)	32	Mexican American	Straight	Master's degree	$40,000 to 49,999	No
Crystal	Twin daughters (18)	46	Native American	Gay, bisexual, asexual	Master's degree	$40,000 to 49,999	No
Emily	Son (7)	27	Black American and white	Bisexual	Associate degree	$40,000 to 49,999	No
Elizabeth	Daughter (10)	44	White	Straight	Master's degree	$150,000 and over	Yes
Jackie	Daughter (16), son (12)	44	White	Straight	Bachelor's degree	$150,000 and over	Yes
Jessica	Son (17)	46	White	Pansexual	Doctorate degree	$75,000 to 99,999	Yes
Jill	Daughter (11), son (8)	36	White	Straight	Bachelor's degree	$100,000 to 149,999	Yes
Leslie	Son (10)	42	Pacific Islander	Straight	Master's degree	$100,000 to 149,999	Yes
Lauren	Son (5)	34	White	Straight	Master's degree	$100,000 to 149,999	No
Michelle	Son (19), son (16)	46	White	Bisexual	Doctorate degree	$75,000 to 99,999	No
Megan	Daughter (16), son (14), daughter (11), daughter (10)	40	White	Bisexual	Doctorate degree	$150,000 and over	Yes
Sophia	Son (6)	40	White	Straight	Doctorate degree	$150,000 and over	Yes
Stephanie	Daughter (11), son (6)	45	White	Straight	Doctorate degree	$150,000 and over	Yes
Stacey	Son (14)	50	White	Straight	Bachelor's degree	$150,000 and over	Yes
Theresa	Son (13), son (8)	45	White	Prefer not to say	Master's degree	$150,000 and over	Yes

Appendix B. Virtual Interviews During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I chose to do virtual interviews using the Zoom platform to adhere to social distancing guidelines and limit both mine and my participants exposure to COVID-19, which had both benefits and challenges. There is some recent research documenting the use of a virtual platform for qualitative interviewing and my experience aligns with the experience of other researchers conducting qualitative interviews using a virtual platform (Archibald et al. 2019; Gray et al. 2020; Jenner and Myers 2019; Oliffe et al. 2021). Zoom interviews have been shown to be helpful for increasing participant comfort with discussing a difficult topic. They also are cost saving by eliminating the need for travel costs to and from meeting with participants. However, issues with technology may make virtual interviews challenging.

In a study of men who experienced the end of a relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic, Oliffe et al. (2021) found that participants were relaxed and comfortable. They suggested that virtual interviews provide participants with a sense of control that is encourages openness. They can end the interview easily if they choose, retrieve water or a snack, and get up and move around their house. There is also no fear that they will be overheard by a member of the public, like when an interview is conducted in a coffee shop or an office. In my study, several participants also had a pet nearby or sat outside. In the same way the virtual interview promoted comfort in the participants chosen environment, it also presented unique challenges. There were often other family members in the house when the interview was conducted which sometimes resulted in children entering the room or a participant needing to respond to a member of the household during the interview. To mitigate this, at the start of the interview I asked participants if they were in a comfortable space for the interview and to let me know if they need to pause if someone came in the room. Additionally, one person was driving when we connected. As a result, I hesitated to ask her some of the more difficult questions because I did not want to upset her while she was driving.

There were limited technological issues when connecting with participants. Overall, they were able to access Zoom, likely because Zoom and other virtual platforms became common use during the early months of the pandemic and most people have now used them at some point. It is important to note that this skews my sample toward those who have access to reliable internet.

Appendix C. Background Survey

1. What is your name?
2. What year were you born?
3. How old are you? (in years)
4. Which state do you live in?
5. Is the area you live in:
    a. Rural
    b. Suburban
    c. Urban
6. What is your race or ethnic background?
7. Do you think of yourself as:
    a. Lesbian or gay
    b. Bisexual
    c. Straight, that is not lesbian or gay
    d. A sexual orientation not listed here (please specify)
8. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degrees you have received?
    a. Less than high school
    b. High school/GED
    c. Some college but no degree
    d. Associate degree
    e. Bachelor’s degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
    f. Master’s degree (For example, MA, MS, Meng, Med, MSW, MBA)
    g. Professional school degree (For example, MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JB)
    h. Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)
9. Which category represents the total combined income of your household during the 12 months prior to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus/COVID-19 in the U.S.? This includes money from jobs, net income from business, farm or rent, pensions, dividends, interest, social security payments, and any other money income received by members of your family who are 15 years of age or older.

    Less than $5,00,

    $5,000 to 7,499

    $7,500 to 9,999

    $10,000 to 1,499

    $15,000 to 19,999

    $20,000 to 24,999

    $35,000 to 39,999

    $40,000 to 49,999

    $50,000 to 59,999

    $60,000 to 74,999

    $75,000 to 99,999

    $100,000 to $149,999

$25,000 to $29,999

$30,000 to 34,999

$150,000 and over

Not Sure

10. What is your occupation?
11. What is your religion?
12. What is your political affiliation?
    a. Republican
    b. Lean Republican
    c. Independent
    d. Lean Democrat
    e. Democrat

13. List the adults in your household. Please include their relationship to you, gender, and age. Please do not include names (For example: mother, female, 68).

14. List all household and non-household children who are in your care during a typical week. Please include their relationship to you, if they live in your household, gender, and age. Please do not include names (For example: stepson who lives with me, male, 7).

Family Background

15. List the people who lived with you when you were a child. Please include their relationship to you and gender. Please do not include names (For example: sister, female).
16. Where did you grow up?
17. What was your family's religion growing up?
18. What is the highest level of school your parents have completed or the highest degrees your parents have received?
    a. Less than high school
    b. High school/GED
    c. Some college but no degree
    d. Associate degree
    e. Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
    f. Master's degree (For example, MA, MS, Meng, Med, MSW, MBA)
    g. Professional school degree (For example, MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JB)
    h. Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)
19. What were your parent's occupations?

Appendix D. Interview Guide

Reminders:

- About the study
- Informed consent
- Begin recording
- Record consent

Are you in a place you feel comfortable talking? Let me know if you want to pause if someone is nearby.

Change zoom name.

Home and Family Life

1. I would like to start by getting to know you a bit. What does a typical week look like for you?
    a. What do you do for work?
    b. What do you like to do in your free time?
    c. How does this compare to what you did prior to the pandemic?
2. What is your family like?
    a. Who lives in your house?
        i. Has this changed at all since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?
    b. What is a typical weekday like?
    c. How does your family spend the weekend?
    d. Tell me about your kids.
    e. How has your family changed or adapted since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Besides the people who live in your home, who else is important in your life?
    a. Are there other children besides your own for whom you play a significant role?
    b. If something exciting is going on in your life, who would you talk to about it? Why?
    c. If something difficult or challenging is happening in your life, who would you talk to about it? Why?

Socialization

1. Now I'd like to ask about your experiences when you were growing up. What was your family like when you were a kid?
    a. How did you spend your time outside of school?
    b. What kind of things were important to the members of your family?
2. How did your family handle difficult conversations?
    a. Who did you talk to when you had the big life questions? Why?
    b. What kind of topics were considered serious or tough in your family?
    c. How did your family handle talking about the body and body changes?
3. How did adults talk to you about sex when you were a kid?
    a. How has this informed the way you talk to your kids about sex?
4. How did you learn about sex?

    a. Can you describe the first time you learned what sex means?
    b. How did your family talk about sex with you?
    c. How did your school approach sex education?
    d. How did you talk about sex with your friends?
    e. How did consent fit into these conversations?
    f. How was sex part of what you read or watched on tv?
    g. How was consent or unwanted sexual contact part of these conversations?

Pause here – how are you doing? Feel free to grab a glass of water or stand up and stretch.

Sexual Experiences

1. Now I want to talk about experiences with sex and relationships.
2. What do you think people should think about before deciding to have sex with someone?
    a. Why do you think these things are important?
3. How do you communicate with your partner (s) about your needs related to sex?
    a. How do you feel about these conversations?
4. Describe a time you had a good sexual experience.
    a. What made this experience positive?
    b. How did you feel about your partner after this experience?
    c. Is this something you discussed with others? How did that go?
5. Now describe a time you had a bad sexual experience.
    a. What made this experience negative?
    b. How did you feel about your partner after this experience?
    c. Is this something you discussed with others? How did that go?
6. Has anyone ever touched you in a sexual way that you didn't want?
    a. Can you tell me about that experience (s)?
7. Can you walk me through your thought process after this experience?
    a. How did it make you feel?
    b. Have you shared this experience with anyone? How did that go?
    c. How have your thoughts about this experience changed over time?
8. Were there other times that happened? (Return to 5a if yes)
    a. You can share as many or as few experiences as you would like.
9. Have other people close to you talked about experiences like this? How did those conversations go?

Talking to Kids About Sex and Sexual Behavior

1. Next, I would like to talk about parenting. What kinds of things are important to you when it comes to parenting?
2. If you are unsure about how to approach something as a parent, how do you prepare for those decisions or conversations?
    a. Who do you talk to about these issues?
    b. Do you do research using the internet, in books, etc.?
3. Next, I would like to talk about parenting decisions related to sex education. How has sex or sexual behavior come up so far as you've been raising your kids?

4. How do you [and your partner] approach conversations about sex with your kids?
    a. Whose role is it to have these conversations?
    b. How do your partner's views on sex and sexual behavior compare to yours?
    c. What do you do if you and your partner disagree about how to handle these issues?
5. Describe for me the conversations you've had with your kids about sex and sexual behavior.
    a. What did you feel was important to convey to them?
    b. How was consent part of these conversations?
    c. How is unwanted sexual contact part of these conversations?
    d. What prompted these conversations?
    e. How does the gender of your child factor into these conversations?
6. [If multiple children] How have conversations about sex been different for each of your children?
7. How do you plan to approach conversations about sex and sexual behavior in the future?
    a. What haven't you talked about with your kids yet that you would like to discuss with them?
    b. How does the age of your kids factor into these conversations?
    c. What topics, if any, do you plan to avoid discussing with your kids?
    d. How are sexual harassment, sexual assault, or nonconsensual touching part of your conversations?
8. How have your previous sexual experiences shaped your conversations with your kids?
    a. What did you wish you knew about sex that you want to make sure your kids know?
9. How has your thinking about how you would talk to your kids about sex changed over time?
    a. How have 'sexting' and online interactions played a role in your conversations about sex with your child?
    b. How have stories in the news or on social media changed the way you talk to your kids about sex?

Pause –Do you need a break or would you like to keep going? There is one topic left.

Contemporary Conversations about Sexual Violence

1. I want to shift to talk more about how the news and social media relate to sexual assault and harassment. How do you keep up with what is happening in the world?
    a. What does using social media look like for you?
    b. Has your media use shifted since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?
    c. What role does the news and social media play in your life?
2. What news stories about sexual harassment and assault have caught your attention in the last few years?
    a. What about these stories got your attention?
    b. How did these stories make you feel?
    c. What did these stories make you think about?
    d. How did other people in your life think about these stories?

        e. How did you first learn about these stories?
3. How do you feel about women speaking publicly about sexual assault?
4. How have news articles and media coverage about sexual harassment and assault changed how you think about your own past experiences?
    a. Did these incidents cause you to think more about past experiences?

Wrapping Up

1. Now that we've talked about your personal experiences, do you have any reflections to add about how this might have affected your approach as a parent?

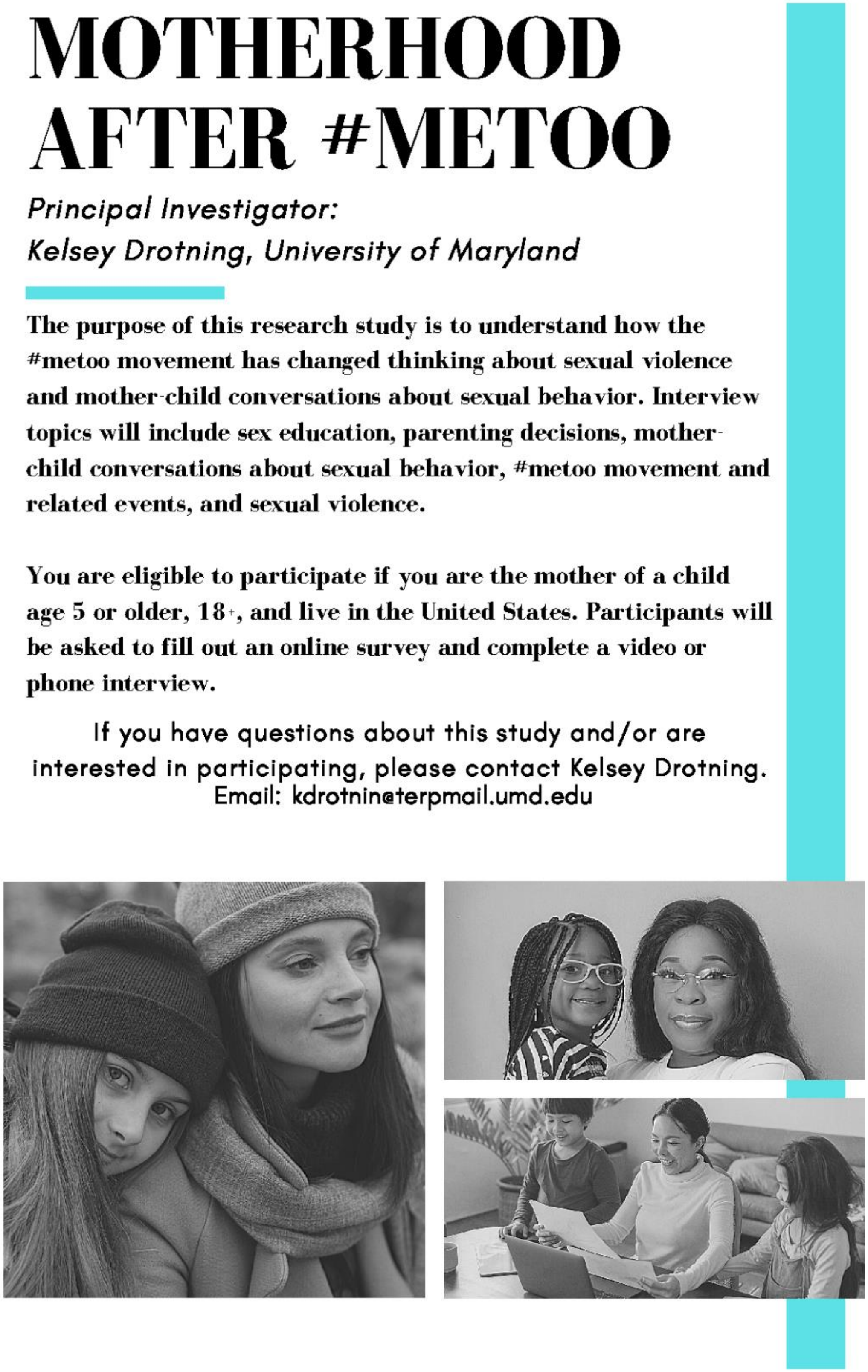
That's the end of my questions.
Do you have anything else you'd like to share?
Thoughts that have come up as we have talked?
Questions for me?

Would you be willing to share with anyone in your network?

Thank You

I just wanted to let you know that I've sent you a list of resources in case you would like to seek additional support following this interview. These kinds of topics can be hard to talk about and I really appreciate you being willing to share your perspective with me. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions, concerns, or additional things you would like to share. Thank you so much for your time.

Appendix E. Recruitment Flyer



MOTHERHOOD AFTER #METOO

Principal Investigator:
Kelsey Drotning, University of Maryland

The purpose of this research study is to understand how the #metoo movement has changed thinking about sexual violence and mother-child conversations about sexual behavior. Interview topics will include sex education, parenting decisions, mother-child conversations about sexual behavior, #metoo movement and related events, and sexual violence.

You are eligible to participate if you are the mother of a child age 5 or older, 18+, and live in the United States. Participants will be asked to fill out an online survey and complete a video or phone interview.

If you have questions about this study and/or are interested in participating, please contact Kelsey Drotning.
Email: kdrotnin@terpmail.umd.edu

References

Aequitas. 2019. “Charging Considerations in the Prosecution of Marital Rape.” *Strategies in Brief* 34: 1-8.

Aho, Timo and Marja Peltola. 2022. “Doing Respectable Heteromasculinities in Boys and Young Men’s Interview Talk on Sexual Encounters.” *Men and Masculinities* 0(0):1–19.

Ahrens, Courtney E., Laura Carolina Rios-Mandel, Libier Isas, and Maria del Carmen Lopez. 2010. “Talking About Interpersonal Violence: Cultural Influences on Latinas’ Identification and Disclosure of Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence.” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 2(4): 284-295.

Ahrens, Courtney E., Libier Isas, and Monica Viveros. 2011. “Enhancing Latinas’ Participation in Research on Sexual Assault: Cultural Considerations in the Design and Implementation of Research in the Latino Community.” *Violence Against Women* 17(2): 177-188.

Akers, Aletha Y., Michael Yonas, Jessica Burke, and Judy C. Chang. 2011. “Do You Want Somebody Treating Your Sister Like That?’ Qualitative Exploration of How African American Families Discuss and Promote Healthy Teen Dating Relationships.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26(11): 2165-2185.

Alcid, Sara. 2013. “Navigating Consent: Debunking the ‘Gray Area’ Myth.” *Everyday Feminism,* January 4. https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/01/navigating-consent-debunking-the-grey-area-myth/.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., Miriam Gleckman-Krut, and Lanora Johnson. "Silence, Power, and Inequality: An Intersectional Approach to Sexual Violence." Annual Review of Sociology 44(1): 99-122.

Baker, Katie J.M. 2016. “Here’s the Powerful Letter the Stanford Victim Read to Her Attacker.” *Buzzfeed,* June 3. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/katiejmbaker/heres-the-powerful-letter-the-stanford-victim-read-to-her-ra.

Baldwin-White, Adrienne and Brooke Bazemore. 2020. “The Gray Area of Defining Sexual Assault: An Exploratory Study of College Students’ Perceptions.” *Social Work* 65(3):257–65.

Bergen, Raquel Kennedy. 2006. “Marital Rape: New Research and New Directions.” *VAWnet Applied Research Forum*: 1-13.

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center. 2010. “There is No Such Thing as ‘Gray Rape.’” March 17. https://barcc.org/blog/details/there-is-no-such-thing-as-gray-rape.

Brockbank, Maddie. 2019. “The Myth of the Gray Area in Rape: Fabricating Ambiguity and Deniability.” *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 4(4):1–17.

Brown, Anna. 2022. “More Than Twice as Many Americans Support Than Oppose the #MeToo Movement.” *Pew Research Center,* https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/09/29/more-than-twice-as-many-americans-support-than-oppose-the-metoo-movement/.

Brown, Melissa, Rashawn Ray, Ed Summers, and Neil Fraistat. 2017. “#SayHerName: A Case Study of Intersectional Social Media Activism.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40(11):1831–46.

Brownmiller, Susan. 1975. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Simon & Schuster.

Bumiller, Kristin. 2008. *In an Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Assault*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Burke, Tarana. 2021. *Unbound: My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement*. Flatiron Books.

Cahill, Ann J. 2016. "Unjust Sex vs. Rape." *Hypatia* 31(4):746–61.

Campbell, Rebecca, Sharon M. Wasco, Courtney E. Ahrens, Tracy Sefl, and Holly E. Barnes. 2001. "Preventing the "Second Rape": Rape Survivors' Experiences with Community Service Providers." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 16(12): 1239-1259.

Campbell, Rebecca, Adrienne E. Adams, Sharon M. Wasco, Courtney E. Ahrens, and Tracy Sefl. 2009. "Training Interviewers for Research on Sexual Violence: A Qualitative Study of Rape Survivors' Recommendations for Interview Practice." *Violence Against Women* 15(5):595–617.

Cambpell, Rebecca, Rachael Goodman-Williams, and McKenzie Javorka. 2019. "A Trauma Informed Approach to Sexual Violence Research Ethics and Open Science." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 34 (23-24): 4765-4793.

Campbell, Rebecca, Rachael Goodman-Williams, McKenzie Javorka, Jasmine Engleton, and Katie Gregory. 2022. "Understanding Sexual Assault Survivors' Perspectives on Archiving Qualitative Data: Implications for Feminist Approaches to Open Science." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 0 (0).

Calarco, Jessica Mc Crory, Emily Meanwell, Elizabeth M. Anderson, and Amelia S. Knopf. 2021. "By Default: How Mothers in Different-Sex Dual-Earner Couples Account for Inequalities in Pandemic Parenting." *Socius* 7: 1-15.

Canan, Sasha N., Alejandra M. Kaplan, and Kristen N. Jozkowski. 2022. "A National US Study of 906 Women's Qualitative Accounts of Their Reactions During Sexual Assault." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*.

Chen, Yingyu and Sarah E. Ullman. 2010. “Women’s Reporting of Sexual and Physical Assaults to Police in the National Violence Against Women Survey.” *Violence Against Women* 16(3):262–79.

Chua, Lynette J. and David M. Engel. 2019. “Legal Consciousness Reconsidered.” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 15: 335–53.

Cleere, Colleen and Steven Jay Lynn. 2013. “Acknowledged Versus Unacknowledged Sexual Assault Among College Women.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 28(12): 2593-2611.

Coles, Jan, Jill Astbury, Elizabeth Dartnall, and Shazneen Limjerwala. 2014. “A Qualitative Exploration of Researcher Trauma and Researchers’ Responses to Investigating Sexual Violence.” *Violence Against Women* 20(1):95–117.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1998. “The Tie that Binds: Race, Gender, and US Violence.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21(5): 917-938.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2005. B*lack Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.

Connell, R.W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

ConsentEd. 2021. “Myth: Grey Rape.” http://www.consented.ca/myths/grey-rape/.

Corrigan, Rose. 2013. *Up Against a Wall: Rape Reform and the Failure of Success.* New York: New York University Press.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1: 139-1637.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299.

Dardis, Christina M., Kathryn M. Kraft, and Christine A. Gidycz. 2021. "'Miscommunication' and Undergraduate Women's Conceptualizations of Sexual Assault: A Qualitative Analysis." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36(1–2):33–61.

Deblinger, Esther, Reena R. Thakkar-Kolar, Eloise J. Berry, and Christine M. Schroeder. 2010. "Caregivers' Efforts to Educate Their Children About Sexual Abuse: A Replication Study." *Child Maltreatment* 15(1): 91-100.

Deterding, Nicole M. and Mary C. Waters. 2018. "Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach." *Sociological Methods & Research*: 1-32.

Diaz, Jaclyn. 2022. "Where the #MeToo Movement Stands, 5 Years After Weinstein Allegations Came to Light." *NPR*, October 28. https://www.npr.org/2022/10/28/1131500833/me-too-harvey-weinstein-anniversary.

DiIorio, Colleen, Erika Pluhar, and Lisa Belcher. 2003. "Parent-Child Communication About Sexuality: A Review of the Literature from 1980-2002." *Journal of HIV/AIDS Prevention & Education for Adolescents & Children* 5(3): 7-32.

Dinos, Sokratis, Nina Burrowes, Karen Hammond, and Christina Cunliffe. 2015. "A Systemeatic Review of Juries' Assessment of Rape Victims: Do Rape Myths Impact on Juror Decision Making?" *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 43: 36-49.

Dow, Dawn Marie. 2016. "The Deadly Challenges of Raising African American boys: Navigating the Controlling Image of the "thug." *Gender and Society* 30(2): 161-188.

Du Mont, Janice, Karen-Lee Miller, and Terri L. Myhr. 2003. "The Role of "Real Rape" and "Real Victim" and "Real Victim" Stereotypes in the Police Reporting Practices of Sexually Assaulted Women." *Violence Against Women* 9(4): 466-486.

Edwards, Frank, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito. 2019. "Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race-Ethnicity, and Sex." *PNAS* 116(34): 16793-16798.

Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act of 2021, 9 U.S.C. § § 401 – 402 (2022).

Estrich, Susan. 1987. *Real Rape*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Evans, David. 1993. *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities.*

Ewick, Patricia and Susan S. Silbey. 1998. *The Common Place of Law: Stories from Everyday Life*. University of Chicago Press.

Faludi, Susan, Shauna Shames, Jennifer M. Piscopo, and Denise M. Walsh. 2020. "A Conversation with Susan Faludi on Backlash, Trumpism, and #MeToo." *Signs* 45(2):336–45.

Felstiner, William L. F., Richard L. Abel, and Austin Sarat. 1980. "The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming . . ." *Law & Society Review* 15(3/4):631–54.

Felton, Lena. 2022. "Chanel Miller's Inconceivable Reality, 5 Years After #MeToo." *Popsugar,* https://www.popsugar.com/celebrity/chanel-miller-profile-49010319.

Flores, Dalmacio and Julie Barroso. 2017. "21st Century Parent-Child Sex Communication in the U.S.: A Process Review." *Journal of Sex Research* 54(4-5): 532-548.

Flores, Andrew R., Lynn Langton, Ilan H. Meyer, and Adam P. Romero. 2020. "Victimization Rates and Traits of Sexual and Gender Minorities in the United States: Results from the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017." *Science Advances* 6(40).

Frankham, Jo. 2006. "Sexual Antimonies and Parent/Child Sex Education: Learning from Foreclosure." *Sexualities* 9(2): 236-254.

Freedman, Estelle B. 2013. *Redefining Rape*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Friedersdorf, Conor. 2018. "How #MeToo Can Probe Gray Areas with Less Backlash." *The Atlantic*, January 18. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/how-metoo-can-probe-gray-areas-with-less-backlash/550559/.

Garvey, Teresa M., Holly M. Fuhrman, and Jennifer Long. 2019. "Charging Considerations in the Prosecution of Marital Rape." *AEquitas*

Gavey, Nicola. 2005. *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape.* Routledge.

Gleeson, Jessamy and Breanan Turner. 2019. "Online Feminist Activism As Performative Consciousness-Raising: A #MeToo Case Study." *MeToo and the Politics of Social Change* 53–69.

Gonzalez, Shannon Malone. 2019. "Making it Home: An Intersectional Analysis of the Police Talk." *Gender & Society* 33(3): 363-386.

Graf, Allyson S. and Viviane Johnson. 2021. "Describing the 'Gray' Area of Consent: A Comparison of Sexual Consent Understanding Across the Adult Lifespan." *Journal of Sex Research* 58(4):448–61.

Gray, Emma. 2018. "On Aziz Ansari and Sex that Feels Violating Even When It's Not Criminal." *Huffpost*, January 16. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/aziz-ansari-sex-violating-but-not-criminal_n_5a5e445de4b0106b7f65b346.

Greene, Linda S., Lolita Buckner Inniss, Bridget J. Crawford, Mehrsa Baradaran, Noa Ben-Asher, I. Bennett Capers, Osamudia R. James, and Keisha Lindsay. 2019. "Talking About Black Lives Matter and #Metoo." *Wisconsin Journal of Law, Gender, and Society* 34:1–69.

Gronert, Nona Maria. 2019. "Law, Campus Policy, Social Movements, and Sexual Violence: Where Do We Stand in the #MeToo Movement?" *Sociology Compass* 13(6):1–20.

Gross, Terry. 2021. "Anita Hill Started A Conversation About Sexual Harassment. She's Not Done Yet." *NPR*, September 28. https://www.npr.org/2021/09/28/1040911313/anita-hill-belonging-sexual-harassment-conversation.

Grossman, Jennifer M., Lisa J. Jenkins, and Amanda M. Richer. 2018. "Parents' Perspectives on Family Sexuality Communication from Middle School to High School." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15(1).

Guhin, Jeffrey, Jessica McCrory Calarco, and Cynthia Miller-Idriss. Forthcoming. "Whatever Happened to Socialization?" *Conditional Accept Annual Review of Sociology,* https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/zp2wy/.

Guidry, Jeanine P. D., Ashlee N. Sawyer, Kellie E. Carlyle, and Candace W. Burton. 2021. "#WhyIDidntReport: Women Speak out about Sexual Assault on Twitter." *Journal of Forensic Nursing* 17(3):129–39.

Gunnarsson, Lena. 2018. "'Excuse Me, But Are You Raping Me Now?' Discourse and Experience in (the Grey Areas of) Sexual Violence." *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 26(1):4–18.

Guttmacher Institute. 2022. "Sex and HIV Education." https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/sex-and-hiv-education.

Hamilton, Laura T., Elizabeth A. Armstrong, J. Lotus Seeley, and Elizabeth M. Armstrong. 2019. "Hegemonic Femininities and Intersectional Domination." *Sociological Theory* 37(4): 315-341.

Hansen, Lauren. 2019. "Motherhood Muzzled: The Challenges in Recruiting Mothers of Preschool-Aged Children." *Methodological Innovations* 12(3).

Harding, Sandra. 2004. "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate." In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge.

Hayes, Rebecca M., Rebecca L. Abbott, and Savannah Cook. 2016. "It's Her Fault: Student Acceptance of Rape Myths on Two College Campuses." *Violence Against Women* 22(13): 1540-1555.

Herron, Brigette A. 2022. "40 Years of Qualitative Feminist Interviewing: Conceptual Moments and Cultivating Ecosystems of Care." *Qualitative Inquiry* 00(0):1–10.

Hill, Anita. 2021. *Believing: Our Thirty-Year Journey to End Gender Violence.* Viking.

Hill, Marc Lamont. 2020. "Marc Discusses 'Sexual Citizens' with Columbia University Professors Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan." *Coffee and Books,* November 22. https://anchor.fm/coffee-and-books/episodes/Marc-discusses-Sexual-Citizens-with-Columbia-University-Professors-Jennifer-Hirsch-and-Shamus-Khan-elt6cc.

Hindes, Sophie and Bianca Fileborn. 2020. "'Girl Power Gone Wrong': #MeToo, Aziz Ansari, and Media Reporting of (Grey Area) Sexual Violence." *Feminist Media Studies* 20(5):639–56.

Hirsch, Jennifer S. and Shamus Khan. 2020. *Sexual Citizens: A Landmark Study of Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus.* New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Hirshman, Linda. 2019. *Reckoning: The Epic Battle Against Sexual Abuse and Harassment.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Hlavka, Heather R. 2014. "Normalizing Sexual Violence: Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse." *Gender & Society* 28(3): 337-358.

Humphreys, Terry. 2007. "Perceptions of Sexual Consent: The Impact of Relationship History and Gender." *Journal of Sex Research* 44(4):307–15.

Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault. nd. "Rape Myths." http://www.icasa.org/docs/rapemyths_fact_sheet.pdf

Jacobson, Danielle and Nida Mustafa. 2019. "Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality in Critical Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18:1–12.

Jeffrey, Nicole K. and Paula C. Barata. 2019. "The Intersections of Normative Heterosexuality and Sexual Violence: University Men's Talk about Sexual Behavior in Intimate Relationships." *Sex Roles*.

Johnson, Andrea, Samone Ijoma, and Da Hae Kim. 2022. "#MeToo Five Years Later: Progress & Pitfalls in State Workplace Anti-Harassment Laws." *National Women's Law Center,* https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/final_2022_nwlcMeToo_Report-MM-edit-10.27.22.pdf.

Kahn, Arnold S., Jennifer Jackson, Christine Kully, Kelly Badger, and Jessica Halvorsen. 2003. “Calling it Rape: Differences in Experiences of Women Who Do or Do Not Label Their Sexual Assault as Rape.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 27: 233-242.

Kantor, Jodi and Megan Twohey. 2019. *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story that Helped Ignite a Movement*. London: Penguin Group.

Kantor, Leslie and Nicole Levitz. 2017. “Parents’ Views on Sex Education in Schools: How Much Do Democrats and Republicans Agree?” *PLoS ONE* 12(7):1–9.

Karlsson, Lena. 2019. “Towards a Language of Sexual Gray Zones: Feminist Collective Knowledge Building through Autobiographical Multimedia Storytelling.” *Feminist Media Studies* 19(2):210–24.

Khan, Shamus R., Jennifer S. Hirsch, Alexander Wamboldt, and Claude A. Mellins. 2018. “‘I Didn’t Want to Be 'That Girl’’: The Social Risks of Labeling, Telling, and Reporting Sexual Assault.” *Sociological Science* 5(1):432–60.

Kennedy, Merrit and Joe Hernandez. 2021. “Bill Cosby is Released from Prison After Court Overturns Sexual Assault Conviction.” *NPR*, June 30. https://www.npr.org/2021/06/30/1011799764/bill-cosbys-conviction-for-sexual-assault-is-overturned-by-a-pennsylvania-court.

Kim, Tiffany, Claire B. Draucker, Christine Bradway, Jeanne Ann Grisso, and Marilyn S. Sommers. 2017. “Somos Hermanas Del Mismo Dolor (We Are Sisters of the Same Pain): Intimate Partner Sexual Violence Narratives Among Mexican Immigrant Women in the United States.” *Violence Against Women* 23(5): 623-642.

Koss, Mary P., Thomas E. Dinero, and Cynthia A. Seibel. 1988. “Stranger and Acquaintance Rape: Are There Differences in the Victim’s Experience?” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 25(12):1–24.

LaFree, Gary. 1989. *Rape and Criminal Justice: The Social Construction of Sexual Assault*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Langenderfer-Magruder, Lisa., N. Eugene Walls, Shanna K. Kattari, Darren L. Whitfield, and Daniel Ramos. 2016. “Sexual Victimization and Subsequent Police Reporting by Gender Identity Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Adults.” *Violence and Victims* 31(2): 320-331.

Langton, Lynn. 2012. “Victimization Not Reported to the Police, 2006-2010.” *Bureau of Justice Statistics* :1-17.

Leahy, Meghan. 2022. “Our Toddler Shouldn’t Have to Hug Relatives. How Do We Hold Boundaries?” *Washington Post*, November 16. https://www.washingtonpost.com/parenting/2022/11/16/toddler-hug-family-boundaries-thanksgiving/.

Lee, Cari Beth, "The Influence of Relationship History on Sexual Consent: a Comparison of Idealized and Actual Sexual Experiences" (2021). Theses and Dissertations. 2689. https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/2689.

Let’s Talk. 2014. “Parents and Teens Talk About Sexuality: A National Survey.” *Planned Parenthood and New York University’s Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health,* https://www.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer_public/ac/50/ac50c2f7-cbc9-46b7-8531-ad3e92712016/nationalpoll_09-14_v2_1.pdf.

Leung, Rebecca and Robert Williams. 2019. "#MeToo and Intersectionality: An Examination of the #MeToo Movement through the R. Kelly Scandal." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 43(4): 349-371.

Lindberg, Laura D. and Leslie M. Kantor. 2022. "Adolescents' Receipt of Sex Education in a Nationally Representative Sample, 2011–2019." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 70(2):290–97.

Lira, Luciana Ramos, Mary P. Koss, and Nancy Felipe Russo. 1999. "Mexican American Women's Definitions of Rape and Sexual Abuse." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 21(3): 236-265.

Littleton, Heather, Carmen Radecki Breitkopf, and Abbey B. Berenson. 2007. "Rape Scripts of Low-income European American and Latina Women." *Sex Roles* 56: 509-516.

Lonsway, Kimberly A. and Louise F. Fitzgerald. 1994. "Rape Myth In Review." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18: 133-164.

Lorber, Judith. 1994. *Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

MacKinnon, Catharine A. 1982. "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory." *Signs* 7(3):515–44.

MacKinnon, Catherine A. 1983. "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence." *Signs* 8(4): 635-658.

MacKinnon, Catherine A. 1991. "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?" *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 4(1): 13-22.

MacKinnon, Catherine A. 2005. *Women's Lives, Men's Law.* The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Mahan, Margo Myra. 2017. “The Racial Origins of U.S. Domestic Violence Law.” https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0zs890k1.

Mahoney, Martha R. 1992. “Whiteness and Women, In Practice and Theory: A Reply to Catherine MacKinnon.” *Yale Journal of Law &Feminism* 5(2): 217-251.

Mardorossian, Carine M. 2002. “Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape.” *Signs* 27(3): 743-775.

Martin, Patricia Yancey. 2016. “The Rape Prone Culture of Academic Contexts: Fraternities and Athletics.” *Gender & Society* 30(1): 30-43.

Martin, Karin A. 2009. “Normalizing Heterosexuality: Mothers’ Assumptions, Talk, and Strategies with Young Children.” *American Sociological Review* 74(2):190–207.

McCauly, Heather L., Rebecca Campbell, NiCole T. Buchanan, and Carrie A. Moylan. 2019. “Advancing Theory, Methods, and Dissemination in Sexual Violence Research to Build a More Equitable Future: An Intersectional, Community Engaged Approach.” *Violence Against Women* 25(16): 1906-1931.

McGuffey, C. Shawn. 2010. “Blacks and Racial Appraisals: Gender, Race, and Intraracial Rape.” Juan Battle and Sandra Barnes (Eds.), In *Black Sexualities,* p. 273-298. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

McGuffey, C. Shawn. 2013. “Rape and Racial Appraisals: Culture, Intersectionality, and Black Women’s Accounts of Sexual Assault.” *Du Bois Review* 10(1): 109-130.

Mellins, Claude A., Kate Walsh, Aaron l. Sarvet, Melanie Wall, Louisa Gilbert, John S. Santelli, Martie Thompson, Patrick A. Wilson, Shamus Khan, Stephanie Benson, karimata Bah, Kathy A. Kaufman, Leigh Reardon, and Jennifer S. Hirsch. 2017. “Sexual Assault

Incidents Among College Undergraduates: Prevalence and Factors Associated with Risk." *PLoS One* 12(11): 1-23.

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller. 2018. "#MeToo and the Promise and Pitfalls of Challenging Rape Culture Through Digital Feminist Activism." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25(2): 236-246.

Menning, Chadwick L. and Mellisa Holtzman. 2014. "Processes and Patterns in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Sexual Assault: A Multimethodological Assessment." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 29(6): 1071-1093.

Miller, Chanel. 2019. *Know My Name: A Memoir*. New York, NY: Viking Press.

Morgan, Rachel E. and Barbara A. Oudekerk. 2019. "Criminal Victimization, 2018." *Bureau of Justice Statistics,* https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv18.pdf.

Nenoff, Ann. 2020. "#MeToo: A Look at the Influence and Limits of 'Hashtag Activism' to Effectuate Legal Change." *University of Illinois Law Review* (4):1327–60.

Nisttahuz, Christian. 2018. "Fifty Shades of Gray: A Comparative Analysis of Revenge-Porn Legislation throughout the United States and Texas's Relationship Privacy Act." *Texas Tech Law Review* 50:333–73.

Oberweis, Trish, Dayna Henry, Stacey Griner, and Ekaterina Gorislavsky. 2021. "Making the Call: College Students' Legal Consciousness and Hypothetical Activation of Police for Sexual Assaults." *Violence Against Women* 27(12–13):2399–2423.

Onwuachi-Willig, Angela. 2018. "What About #UsToo?: The Invisibility of Race in the #MeToo Movement." *The Yale Law Journal Forum* 128:105–20.

Peterson, Zoe D. and Charlene L. Muehlenhard. 2004. "Was It Rape? The Function of Women's Rape Myth Acceptance and Definitions of Sex." *Sex Roles* 51(3):129–44.

Phillips, Lynn. 2000. *Flirting with Danger*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Phipps, Alison. 2009. "Rape and Respectability: Ideas about Sexual Violence and Social Class." *Sociology* 43(4): 667-683.

Petts, Richard J., Daniel L. Carlson, and Joanna R. Pepin. 2021. "A Gendered Pandemic: Childcare, Homeschooling, and Parents' Employment during COVID-19." *Gender, Work and Organization* 28(S2):515–34.

Planty, Michael, Lynn Langton, Christopher Krebs, Marcus Berzofsky, and Hope Smiley-McDonald. 2013. "Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010." *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, NCJ 240655.

Projansky, Sarah. 2001. *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Reavy, Paula and Brendan Gough. 2000. "Dis/Location Blame: Survivors' Constructions of Self and Sexual Abuse." *Sexualities* 3(3): 325-346.

Reeves, Richard V. 2022. *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why it Matters, and What to Do About it.* Brookings Institution Press.

Richardson, Diane. 1998. "Sexuality and Citizenship." *Sociology* 32(1):83–100.

Richardson, Diane. 2000. "Constructing Sexual Citizenship: Theorizing Sexual Rights." *Citizenship Rights* 20(200002):433–64.

Richardson, Diane. 2017. "Rethinking Sexual Citizenship." *Sociology* 51(2):208–24.

Richie, Beth E. 2012. *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation.* New York: New York University Press.

Ritchie, Andrea. 2017. *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and women of Color*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Risman, Barbara J. and Georgiann Davis. 2013. “From Sex Roles to Gender Structure.” *Current Sociology Review* 61(5-6): 733-755.

Romano, Aja. 2016. “This Feminist’s Most Famous Quote has Been Sold All Over the Internet. She Hasn’t Seen a Cent.” *Vox,* August 12. https://www.vox.com/2016/8/12/12406648/flavia-dzodan-my-feminism-will-be-intersectional-merchandise

Rossetto, Kelly R. and Andrew C. Tollison. 2017. “Feminist Agency, Sexual Scripts, and Sexual Violence: Developing a Model for Postgendered Family Communication.” *Family Relations* 66(1):61–74.

Roupenian, Kristen. 2017. “Cat Person.” *New Yorker,* December 4. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/cat-person.

Russell, Diana E. H. 1990. *Rape in Marriage.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ryan, Barbara. 1992. *Feminism and the Women’s Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement Ideology and Activism*. Routledge.

Schalet, Amy T. 2011. *Not Under My Roof: Parents, Teens, and the Culture of Sex.* University of Chicago Press.

Schaefer, Valorie. 1998. *The Care & Keeping of You: The Body Book for Girls.* American Girl.

Schumer, Amy. 2016. *The Girl with the Lower Back Tatoo.* Gallery Books.

Setty, Emily. 2022. “Educating Teenage Boys About Consent: The Law and Affirmative Consent in Boys’ Socio-Sexual Cultures and Subjectivities.” *Sex Roles* 87:515–35.

Shaw, Jessica, Rebecca Campbell, and Debi Cain. 2016. “The View from Inside the System: How Police Explain Their Response to Sexual Assault.” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 58(3–4):446–62.

Shinton, Symone. 2017. "Pedophiles Don't Retire: Why the Statute of Limitations on Sex Crimes Against Children Must be Abolished." *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 92(1): 317-352.

Sigurvinsdottir, Rannveig and Sarah E. Ullman. 2016. "Sexual Orientation, Race, and Trauma as Predictors of Sexual Assault Recovery." *Journal of Family Violence* 31: 913-921.

Silbey, Susan S. 2005. "After Legal Consciousness." *Annual Review of Law and Soc* 1:323–68.

Simon, Anne E. 2003. "Alexander v. Yale, An Informal History." *In Directions in Sexual Harassment Law.*

Smith, Erika. 2019. "What Do We Mean by Grey Rape?" *Refinery29,* October 4. https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2019/10/8515346/what-is-grey-rape-consent.

Smith, Sharon G., Xinjian Zhang, Kathleen C. Basile, Melissa T. Merrick, Jing Wang, Marcie-jo Kresnow, and Jieru Chen. 2018. "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence survey: 2015 Data Brief – Updated Release." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

Slater, Hannah. 2013. "LGBT-Inclusive Sex Education Means Healthier Youth and Safer Schools." *Center for American Progress,* https://www.americanprogress.org /article /lgbt-inclusive -sex-education-means-healthier-youth-and-safer-schools/.

Speak Out Act, 4524 U.S.C. § § (2022).

Spohn, Cassia and Julie Horney. 1992. *Rape Law Reform: A Grassroots Revolution and Its Impact.* New York: Plenum Press.

Stepp, Laura Sessions. 2007. "A New Kind of Date Rape." *Cosmopolitan,* September 11.

Steinberg, Stacey. 2016. "#Advocacy: Social Media Activism's Power to Transform Law." *Kentucky Law Journal* 105(3):2.

Stemple, Lara, Andrew Flores, and Ilan H. Meyer. 2017. “Sexual Victimization Perpetrated by Women: Federal Data Reveal Surprising Prevalence.” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 34:302–11.

Stotzer, Rebecca L. 2014. “Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Personnel Interactions with Transgender People in the United States: A Literature Review.” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 19: 263-277.

Suarez, Eliana and Tahany M. Gadalla. 2010. “Stop Blaming the Victim: A Meta-Analysis on Rape Myths.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 25(11): 2010-2035.

Swartout, Kevin M. 2013. “The Company They Keep: How Peer Networks Influence Male Sexual Aggression.” *Psychology of Violence* 3(2): 157-171.

Tarzia, Laura, Sonia Srinivasan, Jennifer Marino, and Kelsey Hegarty. 2020. “Exploring the Gray Areas between ‘Stealthing’ and Reproductive Coercion and Abuse.” *Women and Health* 60(10):1174–84.

Temkin, Jennifer. 1987. *Rape and the Legal Process.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tharp, Andra Teten, Sarah deGue, Linda Anne Valle, Kathryn A. Brookmeyer, Greta M. Massetti, and Jennifer L. Matjasko. 2012. “A Systematic Review of Risk and Protective Factors for Sexual Violence Perpetration.” *Trauma, Violence, Abuse* 14(2): 133-167.

The Opportunity Agenda. 2022. “Sexual Violence, the #MeToo Movement, and Narrative Shift.” https://www.opportunityagenda.org/messaging_reports/shifting-the-narrative/case-4/.

Thompson, Martie, Dylan BS Sitterle, George Clay MEd, and Jeffrey Kingree. 2007. “Reasons for Not Reporting Victimizations to the Police: Do They Vary for Physical and Sexual Incidents?” *Journal for American College Health* 55(5):277–82.

Tillet, Salamishah and Cindi Leive. 2021. "Because of Anita." Brooklyn: *Pineapple Street Studios and The Meteor* Podcast. https://pineapple.fm/because-of-anita.

Tjaden, Patricia and Nancy Thoennes. 2006. "Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Rape Victimization: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey." *National Institute of Justice* :1-62.

Trott, Verity. 2021. "Networked Feminism: Counterpublics and the Intersectional Issues of #MeToo." *Feminist Media Studies* 21(7):1125–42.

UK Department of Education. 2019. *Statutory Guidance: Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education,* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education.

US Department of Justice. 2014. "Crime in the United States 2013." *Uniform Crime Report, Federal Bureau of Investigation.* https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/violent-crime/rape.

Vagianos, Alanna. 2017. "The 'Me Too' Campaign Was Created by a Black Woman 10 Years Ago." *Huff Post,* October 17. http://www.huffington post.com/entry/the-me-too-campaign-was-created-by-a-black-woman-10-years-ago_us _59e61a7fe4b02a215b336fee [https://perma.cc/NZ7F-T8FS].

Vasquez, Jessica M. 2014. "Blurred Borders for Some but not "Others": Racialization, "Flexible Ethnicity," Gender, and Third-Generation Mexican American Identity." *Sociological Perspectives* 53(1): 45-72.

Wade, Lisa. 2017. *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Wahab, Stéphanie and Lenora Olson. 2004. "Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault in Native American Communities." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 5(4):353-366.

Walters, Mikel L., Jieru Chen, and Mathew J. Breiding. 2013. "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation." *Center for Disease Control and Prevention.*

Way, Katie. 2018. "I Went on a Date with Aziz Ansari. It Turned into the Worst Night of My Life." *Babe,* January 13. https://babe.net/2018/01/13/aziz-ansari-28355.

West, Robin. 2017. "Consensual Sexual Dysphoria: A Challenge for Campus Life." *Journal of Legal Education* 66(4):804–21.

Wells, William, Bradley Campbell, and Cortney Franklin. "Unsubmitted Sexual Assault Kits in Houston, TX: Case Characteristics, Forensic Testing Results, and the Investigation of COIDS Hits, Final Report." *Sam Houston State University.*

Williams, Linda S. 1984. "The Classic Rape: When Do Victims Report?" *Social Problems* 31(4): 459-467.

Wilson, Laura C. and Katherine E. Miller. 2016. "Meta-Analysis of the Prevalence of Unacknowledged Rape." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 17(2): 149-159.

Without My Consent. 2019. "Without My Consent Winding Down." https://withoutmyconsent.org/blog/2019-12-17-without-my-consent-winding-down/

Woodard, Elise. 2022. "Bad Sex and Consent." Pp. 301–24 in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sexual Ethics*.

Woody, Jane D., Amanda D. Randall, and Henry J. D'Souza. 2005. "Mothers' Efforts Toward Their Children's Sex Education: An Exploratory Study." *Journal of Family Studies* 11(1): 83-97.

Yavorsky, Jill and Liana C. Sayer. 2013. "Doing Fear': The Influence of Hetero-Femininity on (Trans) women's Fears of Victimization." *Sociological Quarterly* 54(4): 511-533.