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Can Self-Affirmation Decrease Blame Toward a Victim of Sexual Assault?

Gregory J. Paquin
University of Rhode Island, gpaquin1@my.uri.edu

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CAN SELF-AFFIRMATION DECREASE BLAME TOWARD A VICTIM OF
SEXUAL ASSAULT?

BY

GREGORY PAQUIN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION
OF
GREGORY PAQUIN

APPROVED:

Thesis Committee:

Major Professor Andrea Paiva

Gary Stoner

William Krieger

Nasser H. Zawia
DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
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ABSTRACT

Victims of a sexual assault often do not report the assault for fear of being blamed for the sexual assault, particularly if they had been drinking. The current study aims to examine a method of decreasing blame of a victim of sexual assault, even when alcohol was involved, using a technique called self-affirmation: an activity that promotes the values, beliefs, and self integrity.

It was hypothesized that 1) Participants would likely place more blame upon the victim when she had been drinking compared to when she has not, 2) self-affirmed participants would place less blame upon the victim of sexual assault compared to non-self-affirmed participants, 3) the combination of self-affirmation and alcohol use together would affect different levels of victim blame, and 4) compared to the control condition, self-affirmed participants would more often download an electronic information pamphlet on sexual assault and alcohol offered via web link at the conclusion of the study. These hypotheses were tested using a 2 (self-affirmation x control) x 2 (alcohol x no alcohol) factorial design.

Two hundred eleven individuals were recruited from social media outlets to participate in an online study. After random assignment, those in the experimental condition self-affirmed by rating 11 traits in order of personal importance and explaining their top choice. Control participants ranked a list of foods and briefly described how to prepare their top choice. Participants then read a sexual assault and a political scandal scenario, each paired with respective questionnaires. Participants were randomly assigned to alcohol absent or alcohol present conditions within the sexual assault scenario. Participants were also offered the chance download a free

sexual assault and alcohol pamphlet by entering in their participant number (given at the beginning of the study). Participants were then debriefed.

Results indicated that participants blamed the victim of the assault more when she had been drinking and self-affirmed participants blamed the victim less compared to non-self-affirmed participants. Furthermore, results indicated that self-affirmed participants were more likely to download an informational packet on alcohol and sexual assault compared to non-affirmed participants.

Subsequent analyses revealed two important findings. First, when alcohol was present, self-affirmed participants answered similarly to non-self-affirmed participants in that they believed sex with force should not have occurred. However, when alcohol was absent, non-self-affirmed participants rated their belief that sex should have occurred even if force was used significantly higher compared to self-affirmed participants. Second, females tended to blame the perpetrator similarly in both the self-affirmed and non-self-affirmed conditions. However, self-affirmed males blamed the perpetrator to a greater extent compared to non-self-affirmed males. Implications are far reaching and include self-affirmation's usefulness for male-targeted sexual assault and reduction programs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many instances of sexual assault are not reported to the authorities, with some estimates suggesting that only 27% of all rape cases are ever reported (Walsh & Bruce, 2014). Furthermore, estimates suggest that 2.3% of college women who experience unwanted sexual contact report the experience to the police and between 5%-13% of college women who experience attempted or completed rape report the incident to the police (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000). Thus, sexual assault remains one of the most underreported violent crimes (Catalano, 2009).

Sabina and Ho (2014) found that reporting a sexual assault is even lower when alcohol and other substances were involved. Furthermore, research on sexual assault over the past two decades revealed a high frequency of co-occurrence of intoxication and sexual assaults, which suggests that alcohol plays a central role in some sexual assaults (Abbey, 2011; Graham et al., 2014) when consumed by either the perpetrator, the victim, or both (Abbey, 2002; Massie, 2013; Parkhill et al., 2009; Wood & Sher, 2002).

In particular, recent survey research has identified two important barriers of reporting sexual assault when alcohol was involved. Sabina and Ho (2014) found that often times the victim believed she was partially or fully responsible for the sexual assault due to intoxication. Perhaps even more importantly, many victims experienced or feared social reactions to reporting, including fear of being blamed due to

intoxication (Edwards et al., 2012, Perilloux et al., 2014). The results from these studies revealed a consistent relationship between alcohol intoxication, decisions to report (or not), and blame of the victim. Therefore, there is a need for research identifying factors that can help reduce victim blame in sexual assault scenarios involving alcohol; the topic of the next section.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Self-affirmation. Self-affirmation theory posits that an important goal in life is to experience oneself as a competent and moral person (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). In this way, self-affirmation is firmly aligned with the contemporary positive psychology movement in that self-affirmations promote strength and wellbeing. In other words, self-affirmations build personal strengths that allow individuals to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

With this theory in mind, self-affirmation at its most basic is *an act* people may do on their own that reinforces an individual's sense of adequacy (Steele, 1988) and integrity (Cohen & Sherman, 2006). According to Cohen and Sherman (2014), this act may range from monumental (e.g. scoring the winning goal of a championship game) to minute (e.g. reflecting upon the importance of one's family). In research, self-affirmation often takes the form of a guided self-reflection exercise, such as listing or rating important personal values (Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Notably, with self-affirmation, rewards and praise are secondary to the meaningful acts, thoughts, and feelings that are worthy of rewards and praise (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Thus, the focus of self-affirmation is to strengthen positive feelings of self, not to receive praise or rewards. In summary, self-affirmation purportedly confirms peoples' desire to be a good person by reaffirming personal values, rather than simply being told by another that they are a good person.

Self-affirmations in Experiments. McQueen and Klein (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of studies including experimental manipulations of self-affirmations. Participants typically self-affirmed by completing a short activity, most commonly ranking a list of personal values in order of personal import. McQueen and Klein also noted that participants were often asked to provide a brief explanation of their top choice. This self-affirming strategy will be referred to hereon as the “Values Approach.”

Self-affirmation and Attributions. Attributions are defined as processes in which a perceiver explains an event; these processes include judgments such as blame (Fiske, & Taylor, 1991). The following studies each examined the relations between self-affirmations and attributions.

Shea and Masicampo (2014) found that people having trouble moving around often judged distances to be further away than people without ambulatory difficulty. Therefore, Shea and Masicampo hypothesized that self-affirming could decrease the magnitude of bias in distance judgments in those with ambulatory difficulties. To test this hypothesis, they randomly assigned participants to either the Values Approach or to a control condition before randomly equipping the participants with either heavy or light backpacks, to emulate ambulatory burden. These participants then judged the distance to a walking destination. The results from this study revealed that burdened participants who self-affirmed made shorter distance estimates than burdened participants who did not self-affirm.

Unzueta and Lowery (2008) examined White participants’ judgments of racism, specifically, whether or not racism is an individual or institutional problem.

According to Unzueta and Lowery, people often attribute their career success to personal achievements. Thus, the notion of White privilege can present a threat to their belief in personal success, as a belief in unfair hiring is contrary to career success via personal achievement. Unzueta and Lowery furthermore asserted that White Americans often avoid thinking of racism as an institutional problem and instead as an individual internal process in order to protect their personal success story. Therefore, Unzueta and Lowery hypothesized that self-affirming could decrease the threat to personal success incurred by the notion of White Privilege in White participants. Thirty-four self-identified White university participants agreed to complete a web-based experiment in exchange for three dollars. Before the survey, Unzueta and Lowery introduced the Values Approach or a control condition followed by a scale that assessed the extent to which the participant endorsed an individual or institutional racism belief. Results of a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of self-affirming, such that participants who self-affirmed endorsed an institutional conception of racism more so than participants who were not self-affirmed.

Lehmiller, Law, and Tormala, (2010) designed an experiment to assess self-affirmation as means of diminishing negative judgments of others' sexual preferences. One hundred and fifty four self-identified heterosexual college participants self-affirmed with the Values Approach or a completed a control exercise. Participants then completed a scale that assessed their attitudes towards individuals who identify as homosexual. Results indicated that the levels of prejudice did not differ between affirmed and non-self-affirmed conditions. But interestingly, on average, participants who self-affirmed with "family and friends" values were significantly more prejudiced

against homosexuality compared to those who endorsed another value, such as humor. In conclusion, Lehmiller, Law, and Tormala (2010) illustrated the importance of the content of self-affirmation activities. In this case, negative attributions of homosexuality significantly increased under certain circumstances.

Self-affirmation and Sexual Assault Victim Attributions. To the knowledge of the authors, Loseman & van den Bos (2012) conducted the only study exploring the relations between self-affirming and attributing blame to a victim in a sexual assault scenario involving alcohol use. The researchers' underlying assumption was that most people have a core "belief in a just world" (Lerner, 1977) where people get what they deserve, whether good or bad. According to Loseman and van den Bos, when individuals encounter a sexual assault scenario, their belief in a just world is threatened. As a result, people will often blame victims of sexual assault (i.e. think they must have deserved it) in order to resolve the conflict between the scenario and the belief in the just world.

Therefore, Loseman and van den Bos (2012) recruited 112 university students to experimentally test their hypothesis that self-affirming reduces victim blaming by reducing the impact of a sexual assault scenario to participants' belief in a just world. Respondents were told they would be taking part in a "social media perception" study. Participants read a sexual assault scenario disguised as a newspaper article. The individuals portrayed in the (fabricated) sexual assault scenario also attended the university where the research was conducted. Participants then self-affirmed by writing three positive characteristics about themselves before completing blame scales. The self-affirmation activity was disguised as a distractor task. Control

participants were asked to list three brands of detergent. Loseman and van den Bos manipulated the threat to participants' belief in a just world by concluding the scenario with the perpetrator being arrested (low threat) or getting away with the assault (high threat).

A 2 X 2 ANOVA conducted on the blame scale ratings revealed the expected interaction effect between the threat to belief in a just world and self-affirming. Though self-affirming diminished blame across both the high and low threat conditions, participants on average still blamed the victim significantly more when the perpetrator had not been arrested (high threat) compared to when the perpetrator had been arrested (low threat).

Two important limitations emerged from Loseman and van den Bos's (2012) study. First, two meta-analyses (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; McQueen & Klein, 2006) explicitly concluded that participants should self-affirm before a threat is introduced. Loseman & van den Bos strayed from the recommended order and introduced self-affirmations after they presented participants with the sexual assault scenario. Second, and also consistent in previous literature (See Cohen & Sherman, 2014), behavioral outcomes were not examined. In addition, as noted previously, victim blame for sexual assault is also heavily influenced by the victim's use of alcohol, a factor not considered in Loseman and van den Bos's (2012). Given the major shortcomings of this study, additional research is needed to examine the effects of self-affirming prior to scenario exposure and the effects of alcohol use by the victim, along with the examination of behavioral outcomes.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to experimentally examine if self-affirming can reduce blame toward the victim of a sexual assault, even when alcohol is involved. Specifically, considering the demonstrated relations between self-affirmation and attributions (Lehmiller, Law, & Tormala, 2010; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008) and most notably self-affirmation's diminishing effect on blame of a victim in a sexual assault scenario (Loseman & van den Bos, 2006) the study goals are fourfold:

Hypothesis 1. The first goal of this study is to explore the relationship between participants' blame of the victim and victim drinking, a frequently reported barrier to reporting a sexual assault (Edwards et al., 2012; Sabina & Ho, 2014). To that end, Hypothesis 1 posited that participants would be likely place less blame upon the victim when she had not been drinking compared to when she had been drinking.

Hypothesis 2. The second goal of this study was to re-examine the effects of self-affirmations on blame of a sexual assault victim. To that end, Hypothesis 2 asserted that on average, participants who self-affirmed would place less blame upon the victim of sexual assault compared to non-self-affirmed participants.

Hypothesis 3. A third goal of this study was to examine the interaction effect between self-affirming and alcohol use in a sexual assault scenario on victim blame. This hypothesis postulated that the combination of self-affirming and alcohol use in the scenario together would affect different levels of victim blame.

Hypothesis 4. While researchers have demonstrated positive behavior change after self-affirming, particularly in the fields of health and interpersonal relationships (See Cohen & Sherman, 2014), research exploring self-affirmation related behavior change related to alcohol, sexual assault, and blame was scarce if not non-existent. In

an important extension of prior research it was predicted that participants in the self-affirmation condition would be more likely than non-self-affirmed participants to seek information by downloading an e-pamphlet on alcohol and sexual assault.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Sample and recruitment. Participants were recruited from social media websites including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Announcements were posted that provided links to the online study. These announcements were hash-tagged and shared by others to increase the recruitment range. The announcements were posted several times over the course of two months. Incentives included a raffle with the following prizes: First place won a \$50 Amazon gift card. Second and third places each won a \$25 Amazon gift card. The scope of the present study encompassed participants ages 18 and up of all genders, ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations. All participants were free to leave the study at any time without penalty.

Lottery Incentive. In order to ensure that the data remained anonymous throughout the lottery process, the researcher programmed Millisecond software to provide each participant a unique code upon completion of the study. The list of valid completion codes was kept separate from the data. Upon completion of the study the participant could submit their unique code to the investigator, thus linking the name and the code without linking the name and the data. Importantly, the participant was free to remain anonymous by choice and not submit their unique code. Participant codes were entered into the lottery without any connection to the data. After the drawing, the winners were contacted directly and emailed their prizes.

Data Storage. Security of participant information was of the utmost importance during the online experiment (Maiti & Tripathy, 2013). To address this issue, online and anonymous research methods were carefully considered. Millisecond software and Inquisit Labs online laboratory met very strict confidentiality and security standards including the following: 1) All respondent data were anonymous. 2) Data were uploaded to a server via an encrypted SSL connection to a password protected database. 3) The software company maintains 24-hour surveillance of their servers and a response protocol is in place for breeches of security. 4) Only individuals with the unique password could access the data. 5) The data will be deleted after three years.

Self-affirmation Manipulation. As noted previously, according to McQueen and Klein's (2006) meta analysis, the most common Self-affirmation procedure is the *Values Approach*, during which participants rank a list of personal values and provide a brief written reason for their top choice. For a more in depth review on experimental Self-affirmation manipulations, please see Appendix L. The following list was adopted from Lehmiller, Law, & Tormala (2010): Relations with family, relations with friends, sense of humor, spontaneity, social skills, business/money, artistic skills, creativity, musical ability, problem solving skills, and kindness.

Sexual assault scenario. The sexual assault scenario was adopted from previous research (Norris & Cubbins, 1992; Osman, 2003; Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Sims, Noel, & Maestro, 2007), and was slightly modified for use in the current study. Modifications included a change in verb tense and removal of names to fit the

characteristics of an online news story, rather than the original phone conversation. All other information remained unchanged.

Participants read one of two versions of the following website news article. “Early Sunday morning (2:30 am, 2/15/15) a 17 year old female reported to the police that she had been assaulted at a party. She stated that she and the alleged perpetrator, a 17-year-old male, were mutually kissing in a bedroom, when she suggested to him that they stop. She then stated they went back to kissing for a while. She then tried to leave and the man proceeded to have sex with her anyway.”

Alcohol present condition: The alcohol present condition continued with, “Police reports indicated that the woman appeared to be intoxicated. Signs included bloodshot eyes, and the smell of alcohol was apparent. She reported that she and the alleged perpetrator had been doing tequila shots.”

Alcohol absent condition: The alcohol absent condition continued with, “The young woman stated that she had not been drinking. Police reports corroborated her report and indicated there were no apparent signs of alcohol consumption.”

Political corruption scenario. Consistent with the notion that participants were taking part in a study of media perceptions and not solely a study on sexual assault, participants also read the following news article adopted from Romney (2014): “State Sen. Dean Cortland on Tuesday pleaded not guilty to all charges stemming from a political-corruption and organized-crime probe, according to multiple local news outlets. Cortland, 65, who has been suspended with pay, was arrested last month with two dozen others in connection with a broad sweep targeting alleged organized crime and political corruption in San Francisco. A grand jury

released indictments against the men last week. Cortland faces a gun-trafficking charge and multiple counts of depriving the public of honest services.” As this report is being used as a filler activity to support the cover story (online media perception study), only one version of the scenario was employed and the corresponding (filler) scales were not included in analyses.

Measures.

Sexual Assault Blame Scale. The 7-item sexual assault blame scale was adopted from Loseman and van den Bos (2012) and Sims, Noel, and Maisto’s (2007) research. Loseman and van den Bos (2012) reported a reliability alpha .77.

Participants were asked to rate the following five questions on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 ‘definitely not’ to 7 ‘definitely.’ Do you think the young woman was flirting with the young man? Do you think she wanted to have sex with him? Do you think she was leading him on? Should he have had sex with her? Should he have continued to try to have sex with her, even if force was used? Did she do anything wrong? Did he do anything wrong? For the final two questions, participants were asked to indicate how much each character in the scenario was responsible for the outcome ranging from 1 ‘was not at all responsible’ to 7 ‘entirely responsible.’ These questions were: *To what extent is this the young woman’s responsibility? To what extent is this the young man’s responsibility?*

Political Scandal Blame Scale. This scale was developed to obscure the purpose of this study and thus was presented to *all* participants. This scale mimicked the format of the Sexual Assault Blame Scale. Participants were asked to rate the following five questions on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 ‘definitely not’

to 7 ‘definitely’. Questions were: Do you think the senator is guilty of all alleged crimes? Do you think the senator is guilty of some alleged crimes? Do you think the senator should be suspended *with* pay? Should the senator be tried by a jury of peers? Should the senator be afforded a lawyer? Did the senator receive proper due process? Did the senator receive penalties appropriate to the accusations? For the final two questions, participants were asked to indicate how much the senator was responsible for the crimes ranging from 1 ‘was not at all responsible’ to 7 ‘entirely responsible’. These questions were: To what extent do you think the senator was responsible for the crimes? To what extent do you think the senator was responsible for getting caught?

Design and Online procedures. This study was conducted entirely online. The researcher programmed Millisecond software to randomly assign participants to one of four conditions according to the study’s 2 (Affirmation; yes, no) X 2 (Sexual Assault Vignette; alcohol, no alcohol) factorial design.

The procedure was as follows: The online laboratory first provided an introduction to the study (See Appendix A), a consent form (See Appendix B), and a demographics questionnaire (See Appendix C). Participants read that the purposes of the current study were to develop materials for a future study (Self-affirmation) and to examine peoples’ perceptions of online news articles (Sexual Assault and Blame). The online software then randomly assigned participants to the control or self-affirmation conditions. Those assigned to the control condition ranked a list of 11 foods from least to most favorite and provided a short description about how to prepare their top choice (See appendix D). Participants in the Self-affirmation condition self-affirmed by completing the Values Approach (See appendix E).

After participants completed either the self-affirmation or control activities, the software randomly assigned participants to the alcohol present or alcohol absent news scenarios (See appendix F) followed by the blame scale (See Appendix G). Immediately after, ALL participants read the political scandal article (See Appendix H) and completed the media perception questionnaire (See Appendix I). Of note, the political scandal article and the media perception scale were fillers to lend credence to the study cover story. Because we were not concerned with order effects, the sexual assault vignette and the blame questionnaire were always be presented first.

After participants read the scenarios and answered the respective questionnaires, the online lab software presented the option to download an e-pamphlet containing educational information about sexual assault and alcohol (See Appendix K). In order to download the e-pamphlet, participants were asked to identify whether or not they would like to download the information. Then participants were prompted to enter their participant numbers, which redirected them to a download page. The debriefing and study reaction forms completed the participants' study requirements (See Appendix J).

Statistical methods. All analyses were conducted using SAS Software 9.3, (SAS Inc., Cary, NC). Interaction effects (3 and 2 way) were examined using the general linear model with the GLIMMIX procedure. When interactions effects were not found to be significant, independent samples t-tests were conducted using the TTEST procedure. Model assumptions were examined using residual scatter plots, histograms of the residuals, and Q-Q plots. When there was evidence of model assumption violations, Wilcoxon tests were conducted using the NPAR1WAY

procedure. Significance was established at the 0.05 level and all interval estimates were calculated for 95% confidence.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Sample. The sample ($N=211$) ranged in age from 18 to 68 ($M = 34$) and consisted of 63.5% female ($n=127$), 84.4% White/Caucasian ($n=178$), 3.3% Black or African American ($n = 7$), 3.7% Asian ($n = 8$), 1.4% American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 3$), and 4.7% other ($n = 10$) participants. Five participants (2.3%) chose not identify any provided racial category. Ninety two percent ($n = 194$) identified as not Hispanic or Latino and 4.7 % ($n = 10$) identified as Hispanic or Latino. Seven participants (3.3 %) did not answer the question regarding ethnicity. Eleven participants were excluded from analyses due to incomplete responses resulting in a final sample of 200. Study Reaction Forms indicated that no participant had any knowledge of the purpose of the study.

Hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that more blame would be placed upon the victim who had been drinking compared to the victim who had not been drinking. As previously done in Sims, Noel, and Maisto (2007), blame was calculated from a single 7-point question on the scale: “Did she do anything wrong?” where 1 indicated not at all responsible and 7 indicated entirely responsible. Data from both groups (alcohol present, alcohol absent) evidenced a right, or positive skew. Therefore, these data were analyzed using both t-tests and the Wilcoxon two-sample test (though the results of both tests were similar). Results from the one-tailed Wilcoxon test indicated that participants blamed the victim slightly less when she had not been drinking $n = 104$, M

= 1.96 (median= 1.0) 95% CI [1.67, 2.25] compared to when she had been drinking $n = 96$, $M = 2.4$ (median = 2.0) 95% CI [2.05, 2.7], $z = -1.78$, $p = .0243$, Cohen's $d = -.27$. Notably, the results of a t-test were also significant, $t(198) = -1.94$, $p = .0271$.

Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that participants in self-affirmation condition would attribute less blame to the victim compared to the control condition (non-self-affirmed). Again, as was done in Sims, Noel, and Maisto (2007), blame was calculated from a single 7-point question on the scale: "Did she do anything wrong?" where 1 indicated not at all responsible and 7 indicated entirely responsible. Data from both groups (Self-affirmed, Non-Self-Affirmed) evidenced a positive skew. Results from the one-tailed Wilcoxon test approached significance suggesting that self-affirmed participants ($n = 98$, $M = 2.03$ (median= 1.0) 95% CI [1.72, 2.34]) may have blamed the victim less compared to the non-self-affirmed (control) participants ($n = 102$, $M = 2.30$ (median = 2.0) 95% CI [1.98, 2.63], $z = -1.60$, $p = .0546$, Cohen's $d = -.17$). T test results were not significant, $t(198) = -1.21$, $p = .1133$.

Hypothesis 3. A significant interaction effect was hypothesized such that the combination of self-affirmation and alcohol use together would affect different levels of victim blame. Results from a 2X2 ANOVA on the main blame scale item, "Did she do anything wrong" indicated that there was no significant interaction effect between Self-affirmation and alcohol on victim blame, $F(1, 196) = 1.55$, $p = .2148$, $r^2 = .03$. When gender was added and a three way ANOVA model was run, no significant interaction effect was found $F(1, 192) = .13$, $p = .7208$, $r^2 = .056$.

Hypothesis 4. It was hypothesized that participants in the self-affirmation condition would be more likely than non-self-affirmed (control) participants to

download an e-pamphlet on alcohol and sexual assault. A logistic regression indicated that of the participants who self-affirmed, 27.55% downloaded the e-pamphlet versus a 9.9% download rate for non self-affirmed (control) participants; thus the odds of downloading the e-pamphlet were 3.5 times greater for self-affirmed participants compared to control participants, (OR: 3.5, 95% CI [1.6, 7.6]), $p = .002$, $\phi = .23$.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As outlined previously, four hypotheses were examined: 1) Victims who had been drinking would receive more blame from participants compared to victims who had not been drinking, 2) self-affirmed participants would place less blame on the victim compared to non-self-affirmed participants, 3) the combination of self-affirmation and alcohol use together will affect different levels of victim blame, and 4) self-affirmed participants would be more likely to download an e-pamphlet on alcohol use and sexual assault compared to non-self-affirmed participants, thus demonstrating a subtle pro-social behavior.

Overall, analyses supported hypothesis 1 and approached significance for hypothesis 2. In other words, participants assigned statistically different levels of blame toward the victim when she had been drinking and there was some evidence that self-affirmation changed participants' assignment of blame to the victim, though results only approached significance. There was no evidence to support that self-affirmation and alcohol use had an interaction effect on blame. For the fourth hypothesis, results indicated that self-affirmed participants were significantly more likely to download the e-pamphlet compared to non-self-affirmed participants.

Alcohol use and victim blame. Consistent with previous researchers (Edwards et al., 2012; Perilloux et al., 2014; Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Sabina & Ho, 2014), our findings indicated that the victim received slightly more blame when

she had been drinking. It appears as though our society, or at least a significant portion of it, has imbedded in itself the notion that alcohol use by the victim of a sexual assault is somehow related to victim fault. Perhaps many people hold the belief that a victim of a sexual assault should not have consumed enough alcohol to render herself vulnerable to an assault (if that even was the case); an interesting belief given that, in a hypothetical party situation such as our scenario, it can be assumed that many people had reached varying and comparable degrees of intoxication. Furthermore, the victim in our scenario was aware of the consequences to the extent that she attempted to discontinue the sexual contact.

Clearly, a demonstrated need presented itself insofar as researchers need determine a way to alter this apparently culturally embedded belief. The current research examined only speculations of victim blame. Perhaps future research may take a qualitative approach and examine the reasons behind the victim blame. For example, using grounded theory approaches (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), one could collect and codify responses to the question, “Why do you think she was to blame?”

Self-affirmation and victim blame. Our results indicated that participants who self-affirmed may have blamed the victim relatively less compared to non-self-affirmed participants. These findings were consistent with previous research (Loseman & van den Bos, 2012), which found that self-affirmation caused the blaming of innocent victims to attenuate in comparison to participants who did not self-affirm.

Consistent with the current Positive Psychology literature (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), it appears that self-affirmation may indeed imbibe

individuals with resilience and strength in a challenging moral situation, which can lead to prosocial behavior (i.e. not blaming a victim of sexual assault). At the present moment, it is unclear the extent of self-affirmation that took place and if the degree of self-affirmation is related to blame of a sexual assault victim. More research is needed in the areas of self-affirmation measurement and the relations between degrees of self-affirmation and victim blame.

Self-affirmation, alcohol use, and victim blame. As discussed above, results did not support the hypothesis that the combination of Self-affirmation and alcohol use together would affect different levels of victim blame. Interestingly, Loseman and van den Bos (2012) did find a difference between self-affirmed and non-self-affirmed participants regarding blame of the victim. However, the difference only emerged in light of high vs. low threat to the participants' belief in a just world. These participants had also engaged in an ego depletion task (i.e. a task that would reduce their ability to self-regulate). In other words, self-affirmed and ego-depleted participants blamed victims less when the threat to their belief in a just world was high. Self-affirmation could have had an attenuating effect on either ego depletion or the threat to a belief in a just world. Their results could not differentiate between those two possibilities.

Our reasons for using self-affirmation rested on a different foundation. It was our assumption that self-affirmation would strengthen the better aspects of the self according to the tenets of Positive Psychology and, thus decrease blame for sexual assault victims. Thus, we may have expected self-affirmation to be a more robust technique than it may actually be. Upon examination of the results, it was clear that

there was no evidence for self-affirmation being able to overpower the presence of alcohol in the scenario. Perhaps future research may wish to have participants self-affirm differently. For example, where we asked participants to rate positive qualities about themselves, perhaps other researchers may wish to have participants self-affirm directly to traits related to morality and social justice.

Self-affirmation and the choice to download an e-pamphlet. Results from the current study supported the hypothesis that self-affirmed participants would more likely download an e-pamphlet on sexual assault and alcohol compared to non-self-affirmed participants. Indeed, self-affirmed participants in this study were several times more likely to download the information compared to non-self-affirmed participants. Results of the current study were consistent with the health behavior change research (See Cohen & Sherman, 2014) in that self-affirmation plays a positive role in behavior change, in this case seeking more information about alcohol and sexual assault.

Limitations of the Current Research. While interesting results were found from this study and many new questions were raised regarding future research, limitations of the design and measures must be discussed. First, recruitment was limited to online social media sites and though the network was large, recruitment was limited to a narrow racial/ethnic profile and to individuals interested in furthering research interests. Second, though the blame scale was adopted from previous research (Sims, Noel, and Maisto, 2007) to match the scenario that was adopted from the same study, measurement of said blame remains a limitation of this research. More specifically, blame was assessed by examining one item on the scale. Many of

the other items assessed a different construct (e.g. “Did *he* do anything wrong? Do you think he should have continued to have sex with her, even if force was used?”). As such, single item analysis is often unreliable and does not contain enough variance to discover an effect should one exist.

Limitations of the Field. The remaining limitations of the current study are nested in the limitations of the larger self-affirmation literature base. For example, researchers have not yet determined how to measure if or to what extent self-affirmation happened. Indeed, overviews of the self-affirmation literature have echoed this sentiment (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; McQueen & Klein, 2006) and have recommended that researchers determine self-affirmation measurement methods. Also, given that self-affirmation is an emerging field of research, particularly as it applies to victim blame in a sexual assault scenario, the field as a whole would benefit from development of valid and reliable scales to measure blame that do not rely upon a single item.

Conclusion. Though more research is required to gain a complete understanding of Self-affirmation’s attenuating effect on victim blame and its positive effect on prosocial behavior, the findings from the current study demonstrated that self-affirmation can 1) reduce victim blaming in a of a sexual assault scenario, 2) increase male participants’ blame of the perpetrator, and 3) increase prosocial behavior (seeking information on sexual assault and alcohol). Perhaps, as shown above, self-affirmation may also quell the belief that sex should be completed with force in any situation.

APPENDICES

Table 1:

Summary of Results

Question/Factor(s)	Degrees of Freedom		Test Value	P Value
<i>1 Way Model (T Test)</i>	DF		T	P
Alcohol	198		-1.94	.0271
Self-affirmation	198		-1.21	.1133
<i>1 Way Model (Wilcoxon)</i>	DF		Z	P
Alcohol	198		-1.78	.0243
Self-affirmation	198		-1.60	.0546
<i>2 Way Alcohol*SA Model</i>	Num DF	Den DF	F	P
Alcohol*SA	1	196	1.55	0.2148
Alcohol	1	196	3.86	0.0507
Self Affirmation	1	196	1.37	0.2432
<i>3 Way Alcohol*SA*Gender Model</i>	Num DF	Den DF	F	P
Alcohol*SA*Gender	1	192	0.13	0.7178
Alcohol*SA	1	192	1.35	0.2463
Alcohol*Gender	1	192	0.28	0.5996
SA*Gender	1	192	2.42	0.1216
Alcohol	1	192	4.24	0.0408
Self Affirmation	1	192	3.34	0.0694
Gender	1	192	2.02	0.1568

Table 2:

Descriptive Statistics

Alcohol	N	Mean	Lower	Upper	Median	Min	Max
Absent	104	1.96	1.67	2.25	1	1	7
Present	96	2.4	2.05	2.74	2	1	7
Self A	N	Mean	Lower	Upper	Median	Min	Max
No	110	2.3	1.98	2.63	2	1	7
Yes	101	2.03	1.72	2.34	1	1	7

Appendix A

Study Introduction

Hello. As a requirement for my PhD in psychology I have designed a study at the University of Rhode Island to assess perceptions of online media. Though research is conducted primarily online, the study will take place at the University of Rhode Island campus. Because social media sites have become the prevailing forum of news sources, and news presented in these forums tends to be compressed compared to traditional reports, I am interested in people's perception of this novel presentation of current events.

Anyone 18 years of age or older may participate in this study. *You must be at least 18 years old.* If you continue to the study the first thing you will be asked to do is help us develop a measure for a future study by rating personal characteristics. This will also serve to make your mind somewhat busy, as our minds usually are when we are browsing social media sites. After the first task, you will be asked to read two short news articles and answer some questions about each one.

When you complete those requirements you will be presented with a debriefing form thanking you and presenting you with more information about the study. The debriefing form will include a completion certificate to hand into a professor for extra credit if applicable. Your participation should take approximately 30 minutes. Benefits to you, the participant, are minimal. However, your participation will be part of scientific progress in this field. You may benefit from increased awareness of research and social media news presentation.

Upon completion of the study, you will be automatically entered into a raffle by receiving a unique completion code. The following prizes are: 1st drawing = \$50 Amazon gift card, 2nd drawing = \$25 Amazon gift card, and 3rd drawing = \$25 Amazon gift card.

This research has been approved by The University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board. Thank you again for participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Andrea Paiva (Principal Investigator)
Greg Paquin, MA
University of Rhode Island
gregorypaquin@gmail.com

Appendix B
Consent form

The University of Rhode Island
Department of: Psychology
Address: Chafee Hall
10 Chafee Road
Kingston, RI 02881
Title of Project: Perceptions of Online Media

Dear Participant:

You have been invited to take part in the research project described below. If you have any questions, please feel free to call (*Gregory Paquin: 401-330-0203*) or (*Andrea Paiva, 874-9066*), the people mainly responsible for this study.

The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions of web-based media by reading two online news articles and answering a short series of questions about each one. Responses to these items will be confidential and kept in a locked, secure location.

YOU MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OLD to be in this research project.

If you decide to take part in this study, your participation will involve first completing a distraction task followed by reading two online news articles and answering a short series of questions pertaining to each one. These activities together should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal, although you may feel some embarrassment answering questions about private matters, rest assured your answers will be kept private and confidential in a secure, locked location.

Although there are no direct benefits of the study other than a raffle entry, your answers will help increase the knowledge regarding perceptions of online media and you may receive extra course credit for your participation if you are enrolled in a course with a professor who accepts research participation as extra credit.

Your participation in this study is confidential. That means that you will be assigned a participant number and your responses will be associated with that number and not your name. Your data will be kept in a locked file cabinet for up to five years. Scientific reports will be based on group data and will not identify you or any individual as being in this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. You may also choose to leave the study before completion without penalty.

Participation in this study is not expected to be harmful or injurious to you. However, if this study causes you any injury, you should write or call Greg Paquin or Andrea Paiva at the University of Rhode Island at (401) 874-2193.

If you have any more questions or concerns about this study, you may contact University of Rhode Island's Vice President for Research, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, URI, Kingston, RI, (401) 874-4328.

Your continued participation in the study indicates the following: You are at least 18 years old. You have read the consent form and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. Your participation indicates consent.

Appendix C
Demographics Questionnaire

First, I'd like to ask you some general questions about yourself.

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your gender?
 - i. Male
 - ii. Female
 - iii. Other
3. What is your race?
 - i. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - ii. Asian
 - iii. Black or African American
 - iv. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - v. White/Caucasian
 - vi. Other
4. Would you say your ethnicity is Hispanic or Latino?
 - i. No, not Hispanic or Latino
 - ii. Yes, Hispanic or Latino
5. Where do you get the majority of your news?
 - i. Newspapers
 - ii. TV News Networks
 - iii. Online News Networks
 - iv. Facebook
 - v. Twitter
6. On what device are you completing this study?
 - i. Desktop computer
 - ii. Laptop computer
 - iii. Tablet
 - iv. Cell Phone

Appendix D
Control Condition

Please rank the following 11 foods from most to least favorite, where 1 is your favorite choice and 11 is your least favorite. Then please write a short description about how to prepare your favorite choice.

- _____ : Steak
- _____ : Pasta
- _____ : Chicken
- _____ : Sushi
- _____ : Burrito
- _____ : Curry
- _____ : Fish
- _____ : Salad
- _____ : Couscous
- _____ : Soup
- _____ : Hummus

Preparation of top choice:

Appendix E Self-affirmation

Please rank the following eleven values from most to least important using numbers, where 1 is your most important value and 11 is your least important of the list. Then choose your most important value and provide a paragraph or two about why you made this choice.

- _____ : Relations with family
- _____ : Relations with friends
- _____ : Sense of humor
- _____ : Spontaneity
- _____ : Social skills
- _____ : Business/money
- _____ : Artistic skills
- _____ : Creativity
- _____ : Musical ability
- _____ : Problem-solving skills
- _____ : Kindness

Description of top choice:

Appendix F1

Sexual Assault Scenario

Participants will read the following:

“Early Sunday morning (2:30 am, 2/15/15) a 17 year old female reported to the police that she had been assaulted at a party. She reported that her and the alleged perpetrator, a 17-year-old male, were mutually kissing in a bedroom at the party, when she suggested to him that they stop. She then stated they went back to kissing for a while. She then tried to leave and the man proceeded to have sex with her anyway.

Alcohol present condition Participants will read, “Police reports indicated that the woman appeared to be intoxicated. Signs included bloodshot eyes, and the smell of alcohol was apparent. She reported that she had been doing tequila shots.”

Alcohol absent condition

Participants will read, “The young woman stated that she had not been drinking.

Police reports corroborated her report and indicated there were no apparent signs of alcohol consumption.”

Appendix F2

Alcohol Present Sexual Assault Screenshot

ASLA News 12 Investigative x

www.asla.com/story/28037171/asla-news-12-police-investigate-possible-sexual-assault

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Police Investigate Possible Sexual Assault

Posted: Feb 16, 2015 4:37 PM EST
Updated: Feb 16, 2015 6:34 PM EST

By Erin Shirley [CONNECT](#)

Elio Motors announced in 2013, they'd be building their 3 wheeled vehicles at the old GM plant in Shreveport.

Early Sunday morning (2:30 am, 2/15/15) a 17 year old female reported to the police that she had been assaulted at a party. She reported that her and the alleged perpetrator, a 17 year old male, were mutually kissing in a bedroom at the party, when she suggested to him that they stop. She then stated they went back to kissing for a while. She then tried to leave and the man proceeded to have sex with her anyway. Police reports indicated that the woman appeared to be intoxicated. Signs included bloodshot eyes, and the smell of alcohol was apparent. She reported that she had been doing tequila shots.

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Appendix F3

Alcohol Not Present Sexual Assault Screenshot

Appendix G

Sexual Assault Blame Scale

Please rate the following questions on a seven point Likert scale where 1 is definitely not and 7 is definitely:

1. Do you think the young woman was flirting with the young man?
2. Do you think she wanted to have sex with him?
3. Do you think she was leading him on?
4. Should he have had sex with her?
5. Should he have continued to try to have sex with her, even if force was used?
6. Did she do anything wrong?
7. Did he do anything wrong?

For the final two questions, participants will be asked to indicate how much each character in the scenario was responsible for the outcome that occurred. To that end, the following two questions will be presented where 1 is not at all responsible and 7 is entirely responsible:

8. To what extent is this the young woman's responsibility?
9. To what extent is this the young man's responsibility?

Appendix H1

Political Corruption Scenario.

Participants will read the following: “State Sen. Dean Cortland on Tuesday pleaded not guilty to all charges stemming from a political-corruption and organized-crime probe, according to multiple local news outlets. Cortland, 65, who has been suspended with pay, was arrested last month with two dozen others in connection with a broad sweep targeting alleged organized crime and political corruption. A grand jury released indictments against the men last week. Cortland faces a gun-trafficking charge and multiple counts of depriving the public of honest services.”

Appendix H2

Political Scandal Screenshot

hwch.com: The Leading News Source in the Heart of the South

www.hwch.com/news/politics/senator-pleads-not-guilty-to-organized-crime-charges/31493844

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Senator Pleads Not Guilty to Organized Crime Charges

By Antoine Paquette

POSTED: 08:58 AM CST Feb 10, 2015 | UPDATED: 01:10 PM CST Feb 10, 2015

WASHINGTON - State Sen. Dean Cortland on Tuesday pleaded not guilty to all charges stemming from a political-corruption and organized-crime probe, according to multiple local news outlets. Cortland, 65, who has been suspended with pay, was arrested last month with two dozen others in connection with a broad sweep targeting alleged organized crime and political corruption. A grand jury released indictments against the men last week. Cortland faces a gun-trafficking charge and multiple counts of depriving the public of honest services.

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Eyewitness News This Morning

COMMUNITY
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6:05 PM 2/27/2015

Appendix I

Political Blame Questionnaire

Please rate the following questions on a seven point Likert scale where 1 is definitely not and 7 is definitely:

1. Do you think the senator is guilty of all alleged crimes?
2. Do you think the senator is guilty of some alleged crimes?
3. Do you think the senator should be suspended *with* pay?
4. Should the senator be tried by a jury of peers?
5. Should the senator be afforded a lawyer?
6. Did the senator receive proper due process?
7. Did the senator receive penalties appropriate to the accusations?

For the final two questions, participants will be asked to indicate how much the senator was responsible for the crimes. To that end, the following two questions will be presented where 1 is not at all responsible and 7 is entirely responsible:

8. To what extent do you think the senator was responsible for the crimes?
9. To what extent do you think the senator was responsible for getting caught?

Appendix J1
Study Reaction Form

Hello Participant,

Thank you for your participation in our study. We would like to ask you a few questions about your reactions to the study. After you answer these questions, you will have completed your research requirements and we will send you a completion notice as part of the debriefing form that you will submit to your professor/instructor for research credit and your participant number will be automatically entered into the raffle. This should only take about five minutes of your time.

Please answer the following question. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as open and honest as you can. Your feedback is important to us and is very much appreciated.

1. In your words, what was the purpose of this study?
2. What did you think about the news articles?
3. What did you think about the questionnaires?
4. What is your overall response to the study?
5. Please feel free to share any other thoughts you have about the study.

Thanks again for your participation in our study!
Sincerely,
The Media Perception Research Team

Appendix J2

Debriefing Form

Media Perceptions

We thank you for participating in this study. You filled out a demographics questionnaire, completed a Self-affirmation exercise, and completed assessments including the Sexual Assault and Political Scandal Blame Scales. The purpose of this study was to assess a Self-affirmation exercise as it relates to blaming a victim of sexual assault. You were originally unaware that meaning. This was necessary because awareness of the variables of interest before the study began would have changed our results. All news articles were fabricated.

We want to remind you that ALL DATA ARE CONFIDENTIAL and will not be linked with your name. Any results will be published anonymously as group data.

If any part of this study has caused you any stress there are available resources. You may choose to seek counseling by contacting the counseling center at the University of Rhode Island.

Counseling Center
217 Roosevelt Hall
90 Lower College Road
Kingston, RI 02881
Phone: 401-874-2288
Fax: 401-874-5010

If you would like any information about the results or have specific concerns regarding the study feel free to contact us using the information listed below.

Gregory Paquin, M.A.
gregorypaquin@gmail.com
Or
Andrea Paiva, Ph.D.
apaiva@uri.edu

If you are interested in learning more about the study you may find the following reference helpful. They may be found at the URI library or online in the library database:

Loseman, A., & van den Bos, K. (2012). A self-regulation hypothesis of coping with an unjust world: Ego-depletion and Self-affirmation as underlying aspects of blaming of innocent victims. *Social Justice Research*, 25, 1-13.

Appendix K

Alcohol and Sexual Assault E-Pamphlet.

Reporting Sexual Violence

People who wish to report an allegation of sexual violence have options:

- Notify a Title IX Coordinator or ODR.
- Contact the Harvard University Police Department (HUPD) or the local police where the alleged incident occurred.
- Notify both.

While the University encourages reporting to both, the choice belongs to each individual, as does the decision about whether to file criminal charges.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT RESOURCES

- Title IX Coordinators and Title IX Officer diversity.harvard.edu/title-ix-coordinators-school
- Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) (617) 495-3786 – odr.harvard.edu
- Sexual Harassment/Assault Resources and Education (SHARE) central information web portal – share.harvard.edu
- Counseling and Mental Health Services confidential-huhs.harvard.edu
- Harvard University Chaplains – confidential-617-495-5529-chaplains.harvard.edu
- Harvard University Police Department Urgent: (617) 495-1212
Business: (617) 495-1215
Longwood: (617) 432-1212
hupd.harvard.edu
- Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (OSAPR) – confidential-617-496-5636-osapr.harvard.edu
- College Only: SASH Tutors and Office of Student Life Staff – osl.fas.harvard.edu
- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) confidential-800-841-8371-barcc.org

SCHOOL TITLE IX COORDINATORS

Who they are

Title IX Coordinators are neutral parties at each of Harvard's Schools who receive ongoing training and are committed to addressing complaints of sexual discrimination in our community. You may have concerns about events you were involved in or an incident you observed or were told about involving another member of the community. Or you may have questions about the investigative process. We encourage you to have a conversation with a Title IX Coordinator.

What they can do for you

- Help arrange interim measures—the supports to help continue with studies and participate in all aspects of campus life at Harvard.
- Help access ODR and/or learn more about the complaint process.

Discretion and Sensitivity

Title IX Coordinators are trained to handle sensitive information with appropriate discretion. Although not a confidential resource, they protect and respect privacy to the greatest extent possible, sharing information only on a need-to-know basis, for example, to evaluate interim measures or to enable the University to take action to ensure the safety of the community.

Your Title IX Coordinator

diversity.harvard.edu/title-ix-coordinators-school

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Office for Sexual and Gender-Based
Dispute Resolution

Sexual Harassment: Sexual Violence

INFORMATION FOR HARVARD STUDENTS

- Unwelcome Conduct
- Sexual Violence
- Incapacitation
- Reporting
- Resources

Smith Campus Center, Suite 935
1350 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 495-3768
Email: odr@harvard.edu
Website: odr.harvard.edu

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, and dating violence, is a form of sexual harassment. Sexually violent acts may violate not just Harvard's policy, but also state criminal law and federal law, including Title IX.

Harvard's Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy prohibits all forms of sexual harassment.

To read the full policy and procedures, please visit diversity.harvard.edu/policies

For information about conduct that may constitute a violation under state criminal law, please visit: hupd.harvard.edu/rape-and-indecent-assault-and-battery

Important Points Regarding Unwelcome Conduct

THAT MAY CREATE A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

- The absence of a "no" does not by itself mean "yes."
- Welcomeness cannot be inferred from clothing.
- Welcomeness cannot be inferred from gender, race, or sexual identity.
- A person may stop welcoming sexual contact at any time.
- A person may welcome sexual acts on one occasion, but not on a later occasion.
- A person may welcome particular sexual acts but not others.
- A dating, marital, and/or sexual relationship is not a blanket invitation to engage in sexual activity at any time.
- Sexual conduct is unwelcome if the person is obviously or known to be so impaired as to be incapable of requesting or inviting it.

WHEN IS A PERSON INCAPACITATED?

A person is incapacitated when so impaired as to be incapable of requesting or inviting sexual conduct.

Someone who is generally incapable of making decisions is generally incapable of requesting or inviting sexual activity.

Incapacity may be a result of:

- Alcohol
- Drugs
- Sleep
- Unconsciousness

Reactions to drugs or alcohol may be different from one person to the next. Some signs of incapacity may include stumbling or difficulty maintaining balance, vomiting, inability to focus eyes, disorientation, unresponsiveness, inability to communicate coherently, and unconsciousness.

Engaging in sexual activity with a person when you know—or reasonably should know—that person is incapable of requesting or inviting the activity is a violation of Harvard's policy.

SEXUAL CONDUCT CAN BE UNWELCOME, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER PHYSICAL FORCE WAS USED.

See the Policy for more information.

Have all parties indicated a willingness to participate in sexual activity?

Appendix L

Experimental Self-affirmation Manipulations

McQueen and Klein's (2006) meta-analysis of experimental manipulations of Self-affirmation was relied upon for the present review. McQueen and Klein focused on research with experimental manipulations of Self-affirmation exercises. Of the methods varied significantly across the studies under review.

In a majority of the studies, participants self-affirmed by rank ordering personal qualities according to perceived importance. Lists included theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious values. Participants were then asked to write a short essay or brief description about why they chose their most important value, purportedly to enhance their act of self-affirming.

As another method self-affirmation, McQueen and Klein (2006) noted that several participants wrote about a positive characteristic or life experience. McQueen and Klein found one study during which participants unscrambled self-affirming sentences and one other study during which participants visualized someone who liked them and wrote about the reason why they believed the person liked them. However, the latter two acts of self-affirmation were rare cases in the larger Self-affirmation literature base.

The remaining methods reviewed by McQueen and Klein (2006) deviated from the vast majority of Self-affirmation research in that they employed external sources of praise rather than asking participants to self-affirm. For example, several researchers attempted to affirm participants by presenting self-esteem measures or performance tasks, such as driving, and providing bogus (inflated) positive feedback.

However, as noted in Cohen and Sherman's (2014) literature review on Self-affirmation, the act of affirming is itself the desired intervention and reinforcement methods such as praise rank secondary in importance.

McQueen and Klein (2006) reached mixed conclusions regarding Self-affirmation exercises. While they found that rating scales and short writing exercises were the most common Self-affirmation exercises, the authors noted wide variation in Self-affirmation methodology. Despite such variation, Self-affirmation research has shown consistently positive effects on attitude change after dissonance arousal, acceptance of counter-attitudinal arguments, prejudice in interpersonal contact situations, and health related behavior change. McQueen and Klein noted that it was unclear which technique was preferred or seen as less suspicious and more psychologically realistic to participants.

Time is an important factor when considering Self-affirmation exercises. For example, most researchers introduced Self-affirmation exercises before any threat or induced dissonance and have seen positive results (McQueen & Klein, 2006). However, several studies in Cohen and Sherman's (2014) review introduced the exercise after the threat. These researchers often failed to achieve statistically significant results, suggesting that the timing of the manipulation is critical to achieving the desired effects.

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