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Measuring Sexual Violence Perpetration Acknowledgement: Testing the Effects of Label and Response Format

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Abstract
Individual acknowledgment of sexual assault and rape perpetration is extraordinarily low in prior research. Only about 1% of individuals report perpetrating rape, in contrast to the 6% perpetrating rape as estimated by using behaviorally specific items that exclude stigmatized words such as rape. The goal of this study was to examine two possible measurement mechanisms for increasing perpetration acknowledgment: label choice and response format. In Sample 1 (N = 292), participants completed two acknowledgment items which varied in label choice. One item used the term *rape*; one used the term *sexual assault*. Acknowledgment of perpetration using the label *sexual assault* was significantly higher than when using the term *rape* (6.38 to 1.71%, p = .01, Cohen's d = .44). In Sample 2 (N = 438), participants were presented with a scaled and a dichotomous sexual assault item at different parts of the overall survey. Sexual assault acknowledgment was higher on the scaled item compared to the dichotomous item (15.75 vs. 3.2%, p < .0001, Cohen's d = .64). Rates of sexual perpetration as measured behaviorally were higher for ambiguous acknowledgment types ("might or might not," "probably not") than for those reporting "definitely not," (76.81 vs. 29.0%, p < .0001, Cohen's d = .59). The two different measurement strategies tested here, using a less stigmatized label such as *sexual assault* and using a scaled response format, both increased rates of perpetration acknowledgment 3 – 15x greater than rates documented in prior research.

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Measuring sexual violence perpetration acknowledgment: Testing the effects of label and response format

Acknowledgment of sexual violence *perpetration*, or admitting to sexually harming someone, is a critical indicator for possible prevention and rehabilitation (Ward & Beech, 2016); one cannot change a behavior one denies. Repeated systematic reviews and meta-analyses suggest that, for adult men, there is no effective strategy to prevent perpetration, (DeGue et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2018) and that perpetration acknowledgment is very rare (Anderson et al., 2019). The difficulty in acknowledging perpetration is partially explained by social norms around masculinity and sexuality; most men who perpetrate see their behavior as normal because of hypermasculine sexual norms in other words, rape culture (Loh et al., 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2017). According to traditional, hypermasculine norms, men are *supposed* to aggressively seek sex (Loh et al., 2007).

Increasing acknowledgment of perpetration is a potential route to improved intervention development and efficacy. Yet, there is a major obstacle to advancement of the perpetration literature: measurement. Prior research has repeatedly demonstrated how minor wording differences can impact prevalence rates (Anderson et al., 2021) and even the strength of relationships with risk factors (Bouffard & Goodson, 2017). For example, using behaviorally specific wording to operationalize lack of consent (Rueff & Gross, 2017), and randomly assigning a scaled response format both independently double the number of cases of perpetration identified (Anderson & Cuccolo, 2021). Yet, this body of work on perpetration measurement has largely neglected the measurement of perpetration *acknowledgement*. The goal of this study was to examine how two promising mechanisms identified in prior research, acknowledgement label choice (sexual assault vs. rape) and response format (scaled vs. dichotomous), affect the assessment of acknowledgment of perpetration and explore gender differences between men and women.

Prior Research on Perpetration Acknowledgment

According to a large systematic review, when using behaviorally-specific measures that avoid words like rape or sexual assault approximately 30% of college men engage in some type of sexual perpetration (Anderson et al., 2021). The gap between the prevalence rate of rape perpetration acknowledgment and actual rape perpetration specifically is large (1% vs. 5%: Anderson et al., 2021), suggesting that approximately 80% of college men who perpetrate do not acknowledge their behavior as such. This differential suggests a serious disconnect between behavior and perception. This disconnect is consistent with clinical research on treatment for sexual offending (e.g., those adjudicated for illegal sexual perpetration). Research has well documented the array of cognitive distortions that allow those who sexually offend to minimize and deny the impact of their behavior (Ward et al., 2016). Similar distortions and justifications are documented in college men who perpetrate (Wegner et al., 2015). For example, in a study of child pornography offenders, only 35% of offenders believed consuming child pornography was victimizing children demonstrating how these distortions relate to acknowledgment (Steel et al., 2021). Better understanding this disconnect between perception and behavior and targeting the mechanisms that facilitate it could greatly increase the efficacy of perpetration prevention programs much like effective sex offending treatment dismantles cognitive distortions (Ward & Beech, 2016). There is a great need for new intervention approaches for perpetration prevention. In addition to poor efficacy, multiple studies show that individuals who are at higher risk for perpetration or have perpetrated in the past, show little to no changes in rape myth acceptance, empathy to the victim, and attraction to sexual violence after intervention (Stephens & George, 2004; 2009). Furthermore, males who participated in tasks or interventions which threatened their gender status were more likely to show aggression and participate in aggressive activities after

(Bossen et. al., 2009). At present, perpetration acknowledgment is low, and high risk men experience iatrogenic effects in typical prevention programs (Malamuth et al., 2018). In other words, typical programs may actually make things worse for the most at-risk men suggesting new intervention routes are needed.

Yet, in contrast to dozens of studies on victimization acknowledgment (Wilson & Miller, 2016), we were only able to identify three studies that included perpetration acknowledgment (see Anderson et al., 2019 for a review). One reason for this lack of attention is that perpetration is typically measured with behaviorally specific items, purposefully avoiding face-valid labels that would indicate acknowledgement and potentially trigger impression management. Although this is entirely reasonable for many research purposes, it does present a possible barrier to behavior change as aforementioned. It is possible perpetration acknowledgment is understudied for practical reasons – it may be very rare. It is also possible it is understudied as an indirect result of perpetration research focusing on risk factors and descriptive science, rather than intervention. It is unclear whether perpetration acknowledgment is truly very rare or is obscured by ineffective measurement practices and a focus on non-intervention research. Better understanding the measurement of perpetration acknowledgment is a first step in understanding the behavior-perception gap and how to potentially ameliorate it.

Label Choice

The use of the word *rape* itself may be a barrier to perpetration acknowledgment research. When surveyed anonymously, 13.6% of college men report an intention to rape if they could (Edwards et al., 2014), and 35% report the same intention when the word rape is not used (Malamuth, 1981). There appears to be meaningful differences between those who endorse a behaviorally specific item that is consistent with rape and the label rape. Men who endorse willingness to use force to obtain sex but deny "rape" tended to hold generally positive attitudes towards women but callous sexual attitudes. Further this group of men were differentiated from those who would use force and use the rape label who held hostility towards women and callous sexual attitudes (Edwards et al., 2014).

Donde et al. 2018 found that the label "sexual assault" was used across a wider range of victimization experiences suggesting this word may be less stigmatized than "rape." Marchewka et al. (2022) found that 9.3% of women and 2.9% of men who were not identified as having victimization experiences on behaviorally specific questionnaires did acknowledge being sexually assaulted. We suggest being able to use some type of broad, encompassing label, whether it be the term sexual assault or something else (Donde et al., 2018), is important in intervention work because there is little hope of changing a behavior that one does not admit exists. Always using behaviorally specific language in an intervention setting can also be cumbersome and indirect language can lead to miscommunication. Moreover, if the goal is to prevent rape or sexual assault, not speaking these words is counterproductive. Thus, exploring whether using a less stigmatized term like "sexual assault" prompts greater acknowledgment is important for developing perpetration prevention interventions.

Response Format

The match-motivation model of sexual *victimization* acknowledgment suggests acknowledgment will increase and decrease based on whether the incident matches social scripts of what "rape" is and whether there are motivational pressures to acknowledge (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). For example, someone who endorses many rape myths would be less likely to acknowledge an incident of alcohol-facilitated rape perpetrated by a romantic partner as that does not "match" stereotypical depictions of rape. Although this model has not been applied to sexual perpetration, some aspects of it are likely relevant. For example, in the case of perpetration, the motivational pressures are at least equally strong in discouraging

acknowledgment – acknowledgment would carry not only social stigma but potentially legal conse-
quences. For example, someone who perpetrates rape against an intoxicated friend at a party might believe
that situation does not "match" with society's image of an anti-social offender who uses physical force to
restrain victims who are strangers. Experimental research with men has found similar results (Davis, 2010).
Men who perpetrate may also be motivated to avoid the negative emotions associated with acknowledg-
ment (Brennan et al., 2018). Given these pressures, Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004 suggest using a scaled
response format to measure acknowledgment.

Anderson & Cuccolo, 2021 found that, without changing the wording of the items, randomly as-
signing participants to a scaled response format instead of a dichotomous (yes/no) increased reported per-
petration behavior on the order of 1.7-9x more cases identified. Hamby et al., 2006, focusing on intimate
partner sexual perpetration, found similar results – in a scaled response format condition, prevalence rates
were 3x higher than the dichotomous condition (7.5 vs. 22.5%). The exact reason why scaled response
formats increase responding is unclear, but survey research suggests that the chosen response format im-
plies to respondents what the perceived normative range of the behavior is (Schwarz et al., 1991). By using
a scaled response format, researchers are implying that it is normal to engage in perpetration behavior
multiple times which could serve to facilitate disclosure. Thus, response format is a small, structural change
that appears promising for increasing perpetration acknowledgment.

Acknowledgment and Gender

Rape is gendered in the risk of experiencing victimization and in risk of engaging in perpetration
(Black et al., 2011; Stemple et al., 2017). While a gendered lens is important, entirely excluding the study
of women who perpetrate is problematic. Prior research has demonstrated how including only men in the
development of perpetration questionnaires resulted in excluding the types of sexual assaults most often
perpetrated by women – made to penetrate assault (Anderson et al., 2020). Thus, individuals of all genders
should be included in basic descriptive research on perpetration. Taking a more inclusive lens to perpetra-
tion research could potentially result in more effective interventions and a more comprehensive under-
standing of perpetration. Given the low efficacy of perpetration interventions, a paradigm shift is needed.

The Current Study

Despite perpetration acknowledgment being a potentially important target for rape prevention in-
terventions, little research has examined how to optimally measure perpetration acknowledgment. Further,
given the paucity of the literature, it is unclear whether perpetration acknowledgment is very rare or
whether estimates are hindered by suboptimal measurement practices or a combination thereof. Thus, we
propose the following research questions; gender differences will be interrogated and documented within
each:

Aim 1, investigating label choice: Will using the term sexual assault rather than rape affect ac-
knowledgment? We hypothesize that sexual assault acknowledgment will be greater than rape acknowl-
edgment (consistent with Donde et al., 2018).

Aim 2, investigating response format: Theoretical models suggests acknowledgment functions on
a scaled response (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011), yet acknowledgment is not traditionally measured this
way. Considering perpetration acknowledgment, does using a scaled response format increase acknowl-
edgment? We hypothesize that a scaled response format will increase acknowledgment and we will explore
how the dichotomous responses compare to scaled responses.

Aim 3, relationship between acknowledgment and actual perpetration. Finally, we also provide
descriptive data on the degree to which acknowledgment, across the different types of acknowledgment
tested, relate to behaviorally-specific perpetration behaviors.

Method

Participants

Sample 1

This sample contained 292 participants recruited from MTurk in April 2018. Of the sample, 44.5% (n = 130) of participants were men and 53.4% (n = 156) were women and 2.1% (n = 6) participants identified as another gender identity. The average age of participants was 32.20 (SD 8.37). Most participants identified as heterosexual (82.9%), with some identifying as bisexual (11.6%), a few as gay (3.8%) (the sample had both men and women respond identifying themselves as gay), and a small number as another identity not listed (1.7%). Most participants were White (79.1%), some were African American (11.3%), some Asian American (7.9%), some identified as Hispanic (11.6%), and a few identified as another identity not listed (3.8%). Another study using this sample has been published examining various strategies to assess acts of made-to-penetrate sexual violence (Anderson et al., 2020), but that study did not use any of the data presented here.

Sample 2

Sample 2 included 438 participants, 46.3% women (n = 203) and 49.1% men (n = 215), 1.8% as gender minority identities including non-binary/genderqueer (n = 5). Data were collected in April 2018 online via Amazon's MTurk website. The average age of the participants was 32.46 (SD 7.35). Most participants identified as heterosexual (82.8%), 10.1% identified as bisexual, 3.7% as gay (the sample had both men and women respond identifying themselves as gay), and .9% as another identity not listed. Most participants were White (82.7%), with some being African American (10.8%), some Asian American (6.6%), a few being Native American (1.1%), and a small portion identifying as another identity not listed (2.1%). Another study using this sample has been published; this study reported on the psychometric properties of sexual violence questionnaires (Anderson et al., 2021).

Procedure

Because this study is a secondary data analysis, only data relevant to the Aims described above are included, although general procedures are outlined here for the sake of transparency and open science. Aim 1, label choice, was investigated in Sample 1. Questionnaires in Sample 2 did not include both questions of rape and sexual assault acknowledgment that could be directly compared, as such Sample 2 could not be used to investigate Aim 1. Aims 2 (response format) and 3 (type of acknowledgment and actual behavior) were investigated in Samples 1 and 2. In Sample 1, three total questionnaires (demographics, two perpetration questionnaires) were administered in a randomized order. For the purposes of this study, we present data from the acknowledgment items and one questionnaire. In Sample 2, six questionnaires (demographics, nutrition, two victimization, two perpetration) were administered in a randomized order. For the purposes of this study we present data from the acknowledgment items and one questionnaire.

Both studies were advertised as "Questionnaires about Sexual Behavior # (3 or 4) – KENT STATE UNIVERSITY" via MTurk in April 2018. This research was supervised by the IRB of Kent State University. Workers were compensated $0.75 for completing the study questionnaires; workers were not barred from completing more than one study. Participants were not asked to consent to public posting of their data at the time of data collection; therefore, data is available by individual request to the first author.

Materials

Sample 1

Perpetration Acknowledgment Items

In Sample 1, all participants completed two acknowledgment items representing the two different possible labels (rape and sexual assault). Participants completed the traditional rape acknowledgment perpetration item on a dichotomous scale (do you think you may have ever raped someone? yes, no) as part of one of the experimental perpetration questionnaires. The sexual assault perpetration acknowledgment item was administered as an independent block after the other study questionnaires. The sexual assault perpetration item reads: do you think you may have ever sexually assaulted someone? The response format for this item was randomly assigned as dichotomous (yes, no) or scaled (definitely yes, probably yes, might or might not, probably not, definitely not).

Sample 2

Perpetration Acknowledgment Item

In Sample 2, participants completed *both* a dichotomous and a scaled response format version of the sexual assault perpetration acknowledgment item thus testing the response format hypothesis while holding the label constant. The dichotomous item was included at the end of an experimental perpetration questionnaire. The scaled response format item was included at the end of the Post-Refusal Sexual Persistence Scale-Perpetration (PRSPS-P).

The Post-Refusal Sexual Persistence Scale-Perpetration (Struckman-Johnson et al., 2019; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003)

The PRSPS-P was administered in both Samples to assess behaviorally specific instances of perpetration behavior. The PRSPS-P contains 22 items with each item describing a tactic used to potentially coerce a broad range of sexual behavior. Items are administered in a randomized order. Participants are asked, "Which of the following strategies have you used to convince or try to convince a person to have sex"; and then, sex is broadly defined, including making out, oral/anal sex, sexual touching, and intercourse. Prior research suggests adequate test-retest reliability (Anderson et al., 2021) and construct validity; in Struckman-Johnson et al. (2003), participants' written descriptions of incidents corresponded to endorsed items approximately 80% of the time.

Data Quality and Data Analytic Plan

Only MTurk workers with high ratings and high task completion averages (>90%) were allowed to participate. Participants who answered the acknowledgement items and at least one item on the PRSPS-P were included; most who were excluded for missing data also failed two attention check items. Specifically, 1 participant was excluded on the basis of data quality in Sample 1 (final N = 291). In Sample 2, 28 participants were excluded for low data quality (final N = 438). We used chi-square or Fisher's exact tests to test for differences in prevalence rates.

Results

Descriptive findings

In Sample 1, 43.5% of the sample reported some type of perpetration via behaviorally specific items on the PRSPS-P. There were gender differences in the rates of perpetration reported via behaviorally specific items, 35.3% of women reported perpetration in contrast to 53.4% of men, $\chi^2(1) = 9.571$, $p = .002$. There were no gender differences in rates of acknowledgment across the three possible acknowledgment items [dichotomous rape, $\chi^2(1) = .051$, $p = .821$; dichotomous sexual assault, $\chi^2(1) = 2.785$, $p = .095$; scaled sexual assault, $\chi^2(1) = 6.683$, $p = .154$].

In Sample 2, 38.8% of the sample reported perpetration via behaviorally specific items on the PRSPS-P. There were gender differences in reported rates of perpetration; 30.5% of women reported perpetration whereas 47.9% of men reported perpetration, $\chi^2 (1) = 15.819$, $p < .001$. There was no gender difference in sexual assault perpetration acknowledgment on the scaled item, $\chi^2(4) = 6.769$, $p = .149$ but there was on the dichotomous item such that more men acknowledged (5.3% of men compared to 1.5% of women), $\chi^2(1) = 4.437$, $p = .035$. Table 1 summarizes rates of acknowledgement by item type and gender for both Samples.

Table 1

Rates of Acknowledgment across Item Type and Gender

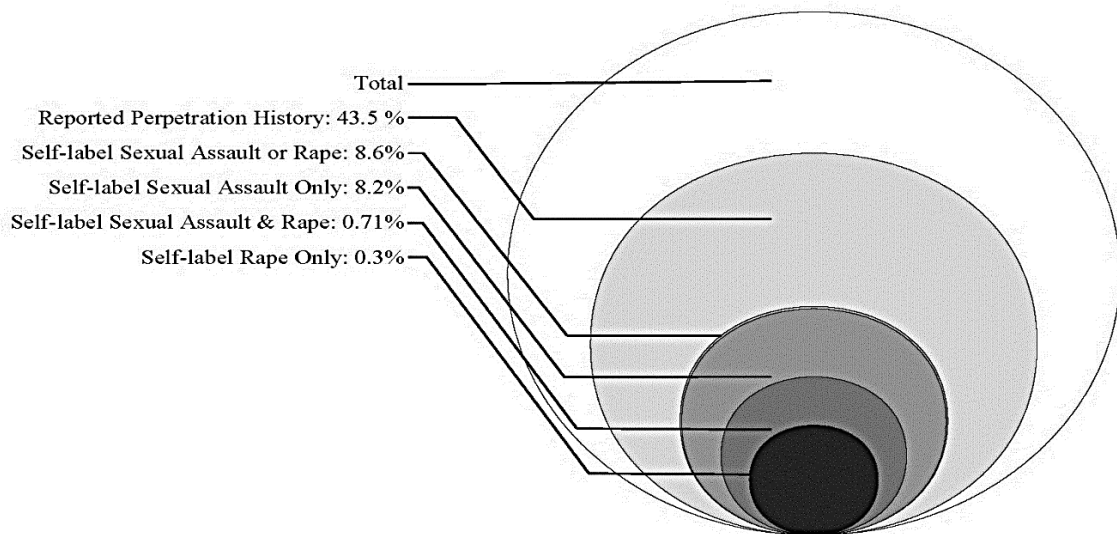| S	Item	Sample Prevalence %	Men Prevalence %	Women Prevalence %	Statistical Test for Gender Differences in Acknowledgment Rates
1	rape, dichotomous	1.71	1.92	2.33	$\chi^2 = .056$, $p = .814$
1	sexual assault, dichotomous	3.68	2.67	9.23	$\chi^2 = 2.785$, $p = .095$
1	sexual assault, scaled	11.26	6.17	16.92	$\chi^2 = 6.829$, $p = .145$
1	sexual assault, combined*	8.93	4.49	13.85	——
2	sexual assault, dichotomous	3.20	5.31	1.49	$\chi^2 = 4.437$, $p = .035$
2	sexual assault, scaled	15.75	24.28	12.15	$\chi^2 = 6.769$, $p = .149$

Note. S = sample; *combines dichotomous and scaled conditions

Aim 1: Effects of label choice

Sample 1 participants completed two acknowledgment items (rape, sexual assault) at different points in the survey. To examine the effect of label choice, we compared the prevalence rates of acknowledgment for rape (entire sample) to those who were randomly assigned to the dichotomous, sexual assault acknowledgment condition (approximately half the sample) so that label would vary while response format (dichotomous) was held constant. Five of 292 or 1.71% of the sample acknowledged *rape* perpetration. Considering the dichotomous sexual assault condition only, 9/141 or 6.38% acknowledged *sexual assault* perpetration. This is a significant difference in the rate of acknowledgment, $\chi^2 (1) = 6.618$, $p = .01$, Cohen's d (N = 141) = .44. All participants who acknowledged sexual assault perpetration also acknowledged rape perpetration although there was one participant who acknowledged rape but not sexual assault. Figure 1 shows the relationships between types of acknowledgment and is scaled to proportion.

Figure 1

Overlap between the use of the perpetration terms in Sample 1, N = 291

Total

Reported Perpetration History: 43.5 %

Self-label Sexual Assault or Rape: 8.6%

Self-label Sexual Assault Only: 8.2%

Self-label Sexual Assault & Rape: 0.71%

Self-label Rape Only: 0.3%

Aim 2: Effects of response format

Sample 1 differences between experimental conditions

Considering that using the term sexual assault was effective in increasing acknowledgment, we next tested whether response format affected responses while holding the label (sexual assault) constant. In Sample 1, Participants were randomly assigned to *either* a dichotomous or scaled response format of the question, "do you think you may have ever sexually assaulted someone?". The dichotomous response condition prevalence rate was 6.38% (see Aim 1). In the scaled condition, 1 participant endorsed "definitely yes," 2 "probably yes," 4 "might or might not," and 10 "probably not," for a total of 11.26% [17 (1+2+4+10)/151] in the scaled condition who acknowledged perpetration to some degree (e.g., did not definitely deny). There was no difference in the number of participants who acknowledged sexual assault perpetration between the dichotomous or scaled conditions, (e.g., comparing 6.38% to 11.26%), χ^2 (1, 292) = 2.134, p = .144, Cohen's d = .172. Combining responses across conditions, 26 participants or 8.93% of the sample acknowledged *sexual assault* perpetration. This is significantly greater than using the term rape in prior research (1% in Anderson et al., 2019), χ^2 (1) = 48.849, p < .0001, Cohen's d (N = 292) = .89.

Relationship to PRSPS-P. Next, we examined the relationship between sexual assault acknowledgment and endorsement of behaviorally specific perpetration as measured by the PRSPS-P, see Table 2. Endorsement of behavioral items included questions asking how many times "Since age 14, which of the following strategies have you used to convince or try to convince a person to have sex (kissed, fondled, genital touching, oral sex, anal sex, or sexual intercourse) after they initially said "no"? The items that follow included using threat of physical violence, tying the other person up, getting them drunk or high, etc.

Amongst the scaled sexual assault acknowledgment types, between 60-100% (*M* = 70.59%) of those who acknowledged sexual assault reported perpetration of some type on the behaviorally specific assessment (e.g., the PRSPS-P). Amongst the "definitely not" respondents 31.34% reported perpetration of some type of sexual assault, a statistically significant difference compared to the average of the acknowledged types (70.59%), χ^2 (1) = 10.050, p = .0015, Cohen's d = .38.

Sample 2 differences within participants

We next examined whether response format effects could be replicated *within* participants in another sample. In Sample 2 (N = 438), participants completed *both* a dichotomous and a scaled response format version of the sexual assault perpetration acknowledgment item. We first tested for potential order effects considering all participants completed both dichotomous and scaled versions of the item. Neither responses to the scaled item, $\chi^2(4) = 1.66$, $p = .798$ nor the dichotomous item were affected by which item came first, Fisher's exact = .420, $p > .05$.

According to the dichotomous item, 14 participants (3.20%) reported sexual assault perpetration. When examining how the same participants responded using a scaled option, 5 participants reported "definitely yes," 5 "probably yes," 11 "might or might not," and 8 "probably not" for a total of 69 participants (15.75%) who acknowledged to some degree (e.g., did not definitively deny perpetration) using a scaled response format. The difference between the dichotomous and scaled response rates for sexual assault perpetration acknowledgment was significantly different, $\chi^2(1) = 40.169$, $p < .0001$, Cohen's $d = .64$. Table 2 details the comparison of dichotomous to scaled responses within participants, note there were 19 participants who completed the scaled item but skipped the dichotomous item.

Relationship to PRSPS-P. The average rate of perpetration detected by behaviorally specific items on the PRSPS-P across the four acknowledged groups (sexual assault "definitely yes" to "probably not") was 76.81% compared to 29.0% in the "definitely not" group, $\chi^2(1) = 48.547$, $p < .0001$, Cohen's $d = .71$, see Table 3. This analysis suggests the "probably not" sexual acknowledgment group is more similar to other acknowledged perpetrators than non-perpetrators. To wit, the rate of perpetration detected by the PRSPS-P in the "probably not" group was 70.83% compared to 29.0% in the "definitely not" group, a significant difference, $\chi^2(1) = 33.128$ $p < .0001$, Cohen's $d = .59$.

Discussion

For decades, acknowledgement has been a construct of interest in the study of recovery following rape (Wilson & Miller, 2016; Koss, 1985). Yet, there is a comparative dearth of research on the acknowledgment of perpetration, particularly investigating measurement practices. Precise and appropriate measurement techniques are critical in the efforts to study whether perpetration acknowledgement could be a useful indicator for perpetration prevention interventions. This paper sought to examine the effects of label choice (rape vs. sexual assault) and scaled response format on the assessment of perpetration acknowledgment.

Label Choice

In a one-to-one within-participants comparison, participants were more likely to acknowledge perpetration behavior when the label *sexual assault* was provided rather than the label *rape*. Considering all three instances of sexual assault perpetration acknowledgment tested in this study, all documented higher prevalence rates than the average rape perpetration acknowledgment rate reported in the Anderson et al., 2019 systematic review. Thus, at least in these two studies, the label *sexual assault* increases acknowledgment for perpetration. Our findings are consistent with the few studies documenting this effect with victimization acknowledgement (Donde et al., 2018, Marchewka et al., 2022), and research suggesting that the term sexual assault is used to label a broader range of behavior than the term rape (Donde et al., 2018).

Response Format

Using a scaled response format also appeared to better detect perpetration acknowledgment. We tested the effects of response format both between and within participants. Although numerically different

(6.38 vs. 11.26%), in the between-subjects experimental test, a scaled response format did not produce statistically higher prevalence rates. Within-subjects, however, the scaled response format elicited higher sexual assault acknowledgment than a dichotomous response format (3.21 vs. 15.75%). Notably, the between-subjects test had nearly half the number of participants as the within-subjects test and therefore lack of statistical significance may be related to lower statistical power.

Although perpetration acknowledgment was generally low in our study, it was much higher than in prior research, on the order of 3-15x higher prevalence rates than those documented in the Anderson et al. 2019 systematic review. Estimates of effect size suggest that both label and response format are medium-sized effects. However, in combination these effects appear greater, as suggested by the 15.75% average sexual assault acknowledgment rate. These findings are consistent with other studies suggesting a scaled response format increases affirmative responding for both perpetration (Anderson & Cuccolo, 2021; Hamby et al., 2006) and victimization experiences (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011; Hammond & Calhoun, 2007). Although the exact mechanism is unclear, especially when comparing reporting perpetration versus victimization, it is likely that by providing a large numerical range, participants infer that disclosing perpetration behaviors is at least somewhat normative.

Correspondence with Actual Behavior

At first, we struggled with how to interpret the degree of acknowledgment in responses like, "probably did not sexually assault someone." However, after examining how the degree of acknowledgment relates to actual behavior, we are convinced that even this very slight admission is meaningful. In both samples, the rates of behaviorally-specific endorsements of perpetration behavior were twice as high in the "probably not" group as in the "definitely not" groups (Sample 1: 60.0 vs. 31.31%, Sample 2: 70.83 vs. 29.0%). Such admission, no matter how slight, may be associated with unique affective states (e.g., guilt) potentially more amenable to intervention as evidenced by analyses of offenders' justifications for and emotional responses to perpetrating sexual assault (Brennan et al., 2018; Wegner et al., 2015). Hopefully, future research can further characterize this group of individuals and suggest how intervention programs can better target how individuals perceive and monitor their own perpetration behavior.

Gender

Although we found differences in behaviorally-specific rates of perpetration behavior, we found few gender differences in acknowledgment between men and women. Of the four acknowledgment items tested, we only found one statistically significant effect for gender. When presented with the traditional, dichotomous rape perpetration acknowledgment item, men were more likely to response "yes" than women were. Given the inconsistency of this finding, it is difficult to interpret, but on the whole suggests gender may not be a central aspect of perpetration acknowledgment. This is somewhat surprising given the large gender differences in rates of acknowledgment for victimization (Artime et al., 2014). It is possible that gender is an important determinant of acknowledgment but our study lacked statistical power to detect the effect.

Clinical & Research Implications

Researchers and clinicians would benefit from measuring sexual assault acknowledgement in addition to or perhaps in place of rape acknowledgement to maximize the number of people identified for potential intervention. Given the high prevalence rates of perpetration in this study and in college student samples (Anderson et al., 2021), it is gallingly evident that even so-called "normal" individuals perpetrate. Therefore, even clinicians who do not specialize in sexual offender treatment or rehabilitation would ben-

efit from assessing this behavior and providing factual, non-stigmatizing counseling around this issue. Particularly for perpetration intervention, acknowledgement of wrongdoing is important to encourage individuals to monitor and subsequently change their behavior. Some perpetration prevention efforts prompt a doubling down, or obstinate response in attitude change toward sexual violence wherein high-risk men end the intervention endorsing more violent and antagonistic attitudes (Malamuth et al., 2018). Thus, a scaled response may be more appropriate as it allows for more subtle admission and less associated stigma.

Limitations

Both samples were comprised of mostly White, heterosexual participants, limiting the generalizability of these findings to a larger sample. Future research should look to replicate the current study within diverse groups. Rates of perpetration acknowledgement were low; so, although sexual assault acknowledgement far exceeded rape acknowledgement, both percentages were so low that a meaningful distinction between label endorsements was not possible. There is concern about the response effort put forth by participants in an exclusive MTurk sample, but community and college samples have demonstrated similar rates of problematic responding, suggesting the results are no less interpretable (Necka et al., 2016).

Conclusions

Sexual assault acknowledgment was higher than rape acknowledgment in this study. Acknowledgment on a scaled response format was higher than when using a dichotomous response format suggesting acknowledgment is not as stark as the traditional dichotomous choice measurement paradigm would suggest. For many individuals, acknowledgement is better understood on a continuous scale. Overall, our findings suggest perpetration acknowledgment is more common than previously thought and may be an important target for intervention.

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Data Availability
Because participants did not consent to public posting of their data at the time of data collection, data is available upon request from Dr. Anderson.

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