POWERFUL OR PLAYFUL?: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
WALK A MILE IN THEIR SHOES EVENTS

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is any form of sexual contact forced upon another individual without his or her explicit consent (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). A range of activities are encompassed in this term, including unwanted touching, forced sodomy, and attempted or completed rape. Sexual violence has been associated with a wide range of medical complications, non-fatal injuries, and detrimental health conditions (Holmes, Resnick, Kilpatrick & Best, 1996; McFarlane, Malecha, Watson, Gist, Batten, Hall & Smith, 2005; Smith & Breiding, 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Most incidences of sexual violence occur between partners or acquaintances rather than strangers (Clay-Warner & Burt, 2005; Fisher, Cullen, & Daigle, 2005). With 63 percent of incidences going unreported to authorities, sexual violence is the most underreported crime (Rennison, 2002).

Although sexual violence is prevalent among both sexes, women are victimized at a disproportionately higher rate than men. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 18.3 percent of women have been raped during their lifetime and 5.6 percent have experienced other forms of sexual violence, compared to 1.4 and 5.3 percent of men (2014). In particular, an increasing number of women are experiencing sexual violence on college campuses across the United States (Baum & Klaus, 2005; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2005; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2009).
Several potential explanations exist for the high rates of sexual violence against women on college campuses. Some evidence suggests that college campuses succumb to a rape-accepting North American culture by communicating rape myths (Scully, 1990). Rape myths are defined as “culturally situated and socially learned ideologies that excuse sexual violence against women and advocate that women should accept responsibility for their sexual victimization,” (Deming, Covan, Swan, & Billings, 2013, p. 467). Rape myths perpetuate the occurrence of sexual violence by minimizing the severity of sexually violent crimes and discounting the realities of rape. Although rape myths exist beyond college campuses; athletics and fraternities, which are a staple of most universities, often accept rape myths more, and consequently, hold more rape-supportive attitudes and unfavorable attitudes toward women (Boeringer, 1999; Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Burnett, Mattern, Herakova, Kahl, Tobola, & Bornsen, 2009; Sanday, 2007; Schwartz & Nogrady, 1996). Consequently, a rape culture is created on college campuses in which rape becomes an accepted element of campus life (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993; Burnett et al., 2009; Sanday, 2007). Common rape myths include: when women say “no” they really mean “yes,” women are capable of resisting rape, in most rape cases the woman is being promiscuous, and women report being raped to save their reputations and take their anger out on someone else (Burnett et al., 2009).

Other evidence suggests that sexual violence on college campuses is a result of women being silenced from reporting their victimization. Nearly 97,000 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of date rape or sexually assaulted while intoxicated by the most commonly used date rape drug, alcohol (Hingson, Heeren,
Winter & Wechsler, 2005). However, the term “date rape” has a vague definition that is often misunderstood by victims (Burnett et al., 2009). Consequently, they do not report their victimization because they fail to recognize it. As well, even when victims recognize their sexual exploitation, the time and money needed to take legal action; along with rape myths that blame victims and label sexually active females as *sluts* make women want to keep their victimization a secret. Thus, a rape culture is maintained on college campuses where sexual violence is seen as an unavoidable occurrence. Consequently, its incidence increases.

Furthermore, these high numbers may be reflective of ineffective university policies for dealing with sexual violence. Prior to 1988, less than 4 percent of colleges in the United States reported campus crimes to the public. Since then, several legislative actions have been passed to ensure campus crimes, including sexual violence, are reported. In particular, the Clery Act, passed in 1990, requires higher education institutions that receive federal funding to annually report all criminal activity that ensues on and around their campuses; and the Campus Sex Crimes Prevention Act, passed in 2002, requires registered sex offenders to inform the state if they enroll or become employed at any higher education institution. (Gregory & Janosik, 2003; McMahon, 2008). Yet, even though sexual violence is receiving more attention on college campuses, several institutions still fail to effectively implement policies for dealing with these crimes. Overall, colleges need to better recognize and adhere to a time period for addressing sexual violence cases, evaluate the rights the victim and perpetrator hold, and regularly review university policies regarding sexual violence (Elrod, 2015).
Furthermore, men who perpetrate sexual violence against women often do it because they have support and backing from other men (Aronowitz, Lambert, & Davidoff, 2012). This theory, termed the male support theory, is evidenced in a recent study in which college males who were high school athletes were more likely to accept rape myths and violence and be sexually coercive toward women than their non-athlete counterparts (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka, & White, 2006). The male support theory holds particularly true on college campuses where fraternities and male athletic teams spend the majority of their time together and pass their beliefs among one another. This makes them especially susceptible to male support for sexual violence perpetration (Aronowitz et al., 2012).

Clearly, sexual violence against women on college campuses is a prevalent issue that stems from several factors. Campuses have been required for decades through the Clery Act to provide programming to reduce episodes of dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Recently, these prevention efforts have focused on men and their role in ending sexual violence against women (Brown & Messman-Moore, 2010; Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003; Macomber, 2012). However, though many studies have investigated these prevention efforts on college campuses (Ahrens, Rich, & Ullman, 2011; Chekwa, Thomas, & Jones, 2013; Coker, Cook-Craig, Williams, Fisher, Clear, Garcia, & Hegge, 2011; Fabiano et al., 2003; Gidycz, Orchowski, & Berkowitz, 2011; Moynihan, Banyard, Cares, Potter, Williams, & Stapleton, 2015; Paul & Gray, 2011), a lack of evidence exists demonstrating the effectiveness of these efforts.
At one sexual violence prevention event aimed at men, *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* (WaM), men literally walk a mile in high heels to playfully raise awareness on difficult topics, including gender relations and sexual violence against women. The event is part of a larger organization that helps organize and gather materials to throw marches throughout the country. The event aims to mobilize men to become part of the solution to combat sexual violence against women. Based on the saying “You can’t really understand another person’s experience until you’ve walked a mile in their shoes,” the event is “a playful opportunity for men to raise awareness in their community about the serious causes, effects and remediations to men's sexualized violence against women” (Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, n.d.).

For four years, the Office of Sexual and Relationship Violence Support Services (SRVSS) and the Women’s Center at Kent State University have hosted a *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* event on campus. This year, the name was changed to *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* in an effort to be inclusive of gender non-conforming students and recognize that sexual violence is committed and experienced by female- and male-identified individuals. However, whether this event is effective in achieving its intended purpose is under question. Recent research has found that by wearing high heels, men promote gender and sexual inequalities, frame sexual violence as a female issue, frame their association with sexual violence as a gender transgression, and gender feminism toward females (Bridges, 2010). As well, even when men claim to be activists in preventing sexual violence against women, they often instead perpetuate the problem, because they advocate for the cause
but still employ sexist mannerisms, refuse to be liable to women, and sometimes
perpetrate sexual violence themselves (Atherton-Zeman, 2009).

Therefore, this thesis employed a case study investigation of the effectiveness of
the fifth annual *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* Kent campus event hosted by the SRVSS
Office. Through this investigation, this thesis seeks to determine where the event may be
falling short in realizing its purpose, and propose solutions for how to improve it in future
years to become both a playful and powerful way of increasing talk on gender relations
and sexual violence against women. In this thesis, I provide a review of literature
discussing the history of sexual violence prevention efforts and reasons for men’s
involvement; I explain my use of gender theory as a theoretical framework; I discuss
findings from a qualitative case study of Kent State University’s *Walk a Mile in Their
Shoes* event that examined the outcomes and gendered meanings produced at the event in
the context of its intended purpose; and conclude with implications for future practice.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout history, rape and sexual assault have been widely acknowledged as consequential societal issues. Yet, society, particularly higher education, have only recently seen significant efforts to understand and lower the incidence of these violent crimes (Ellis, 1989; McDermott, Kilmartin, McKelvey, & Kridel, 2015). However, these undertakings, including but not limited to rape prevention trainings, demonstrations, and workshops, have reconceptualized societal meanings of rape and sexual assault and largely influenced present day sexual violence prevention efforts, including *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* marches. To understand the purpose of *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* and the growing importance of involving men in sexual violence prevention, it is important to understand the ways in which these past prevention efforts have guided present day strategies. Therefore, I will provide a critical review of these efforts, focusing specifically on growing efforts to include men in the prevention of sexual violence against women. However, before this is done, we must first understand how traditional views of women and sexual violence, standards of sexuality, and the newfound women’s movement initiated the feminist dissatisfaction that fueled efforts aimed at ending men’s sexual violence against women (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992).

**Traditional Views of Women and Sexual Violence**

It is important to note that *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* marches focus specifically on mobilizing men to take steps in preventing sexual violence against women. Therefore,
although both men and women are victimized, I will focus specifically on men’s sexual violence perpetration against women. For this review, any reference to a perpetrator is assumed to be male, and any reference to a victim is assumed to be female.

Historically, women have been subject to a patriarchal society that defined every aspect of their lives, including their sexuality and societal roles. This can be seen as early as the colonial period when the church had the greatest influence on behavior. The church denounced premarital sex and ordered that married couples have sex in moderation (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988). Consequently, sex was collectively considered a means for procreation and women were held to a standard of sexual chastity that governed every aspect of their lives, including their value in society and ability to marry (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992). The church helped maintain attitudes and standards of sexuality by excommunicating those who had premarital sex, and society reinforced these beliefs by denouncing sexuality outside of marriage. However, once married, women were expected to have children until menopause (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988).

Due to the importance of women remaining chaste until marriage; in the case of rape, women held sole responsibility in upholding their purity. Thus, rape was not considered a crime against the victim, but rather a crime against her purity. Unless victims had proof of physical and verbal resistance, they were blamed for their victimization (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992). If there were no evident, severe injuries, two witnesses had to verify that a sexually violent act had occurred. As well, if the victim showed any willingness to communicate with the perpetrator, or any sign that she did not put up a fight, it could be considered consent by the jury (Lindemann, 1984).
With the 19th century came a significant decline in the church’s power to regulate behavior. As a result, fewer constraints were placed on having sex outside of marriage, and individual freedom was valued over family control. But despite this, a female’s purity was still the number one standard to which she was held and the most important factor in finding a partner. Consequently, a woman who was raped was still nearly always blamed for her victimization and considered “depraved” (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992, p.11).

As the 20th century approached, several new theories emerged that guided ideas about the role men and women play in reproduction and rape. One theory was Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, which focuses on the unconscious aspects of personality, holds that humans have unconscious sexual desires that they do not act upon because their ego, or reality principle, keeps them in check with reality (Horney, 2013). Consequently, perpetrators became widely acknowledged as deviant men with faulty egos that could not control their unconscious sexual impulses. Perpetrators were treated as mental patients who needed psychological treatment rather than as criminals. They were sent to mental health hospitals rather than jails, and women’s victimizations were simply a result of their uncontrollable urges. With this, “rape was conceptualized primarily as an act of sex rather than an act of violence” (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992, p.12).

In addition, Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution framed rape as part of men’s fight for fitness and survival. According to Darwin, males compete against each other to gain sexual access to and pass on their genes to as many females as possible. Only the best succeed and reproduce. Women, alternatively, are primarily bred to reproduce. They
devote too much time to reproduction to have any energy for physical or mental growth. As a result, they serve as objects for competing men and are subject to their historical portrayals as nurturing, selfless, and innocent (Weitz & Weitz, 2007).

**The Rise of the Women’s Movement**

The U.S. women’s movement is a social movement fueled by the fundamental desire to achieve equality between men and women in society. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact roots of the women’s movement, it is largely believed to have two main sources. First, it largely grew from women’s dissatisfaction with the sexual and societal inequalities that limited their participation in society, confined them to a domestic lifestyle, and made them subordinates in a patriarchal society. Second, it was influenced by other reform movements, mainly the antislavery movement. Upon realizing that in order to earn rights they needed to form their own movement, women borrowed a goal of equality for women from antislavery ideology and extensively spread their revolutionary ideas (DuBois, 1999). Although systematic action on behalf of the women’s movement started in the United States in the mid-1800s, the most significant militant actions to improve the conditions of women in society did not begin until the mid-twentieth century (Ryan, 2013).

The first significant act of feminist militancy on behalf of the women’s movement took place at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. After two days of discussion, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote a document entitled *The Declaration of Sentiments*, which explicitly declared women’s equality to men in law, education, and employment, their independence in marriage, and laid out their first assertion to earn voting rights (Fox,
2013). This was the first feminist attempt to initiate a larger movement for women’s liberation (DuBois, 1999). From then on, women continued to fight for voting equality until they earned voting rights in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment (Braude, 2001).

It was not until around the 1960s that the women’s movement shifted its attention toward the disproportionately high rates of sexual violence against women in the United States (Ryan, 2013). This shift was largely due to the influx of women into the workforce during the 1960s. In 1952, 34 percent of women were employed full-time, and this number rose to nearly 50 percent by the end of the 1960s (Andersen, 1975; Donat & D’Emilio, 1992). However, this shift was not welcomed by many men, who considered women leaving their homemaker roles to become part of the public sphere “an attack on traditional roles and a defiance of chivalry” (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992, p.14). For these men, women who worked outside the home were “loose” for not adhering to traditionally defined roles. Consequently, they believed they should not be entitled to any male protection and deserved to be victims of sexual violence. Fueled by the militancy of the women’s movement, women began to assert their discontent with being defined by traditional definitions of acceptable feminine conduct (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992). Often called the anti-rape movement, several interest groups worked to redefine rape as a social problem and end its occurrence (Rose, 1977).

Women were highly successful in their efforts to reform the state of sexual violence at that time. Advocates of the women’s movement enacted several feminist initiatives. For one, women began forming informal consciousness raising groups as an
outlet to voice their concerns to other women regarding sex-role stereotyping, sexual harassment, and other sources of sexual discrimination. These groups became central to the development of the anti-rape movement (Rose, 1977; Donat & D’Emilio, 1992). In addition, the early 1970s saw the first rape workshops and conferences taking place throughout the United States, which soon functioned as channels to advance feminist ideology regarding rape. One of the most important developments of the anti-rape movement was the establishment of the first rape crisis center in Washington D.C. in 1972. This center paved the way for the addition of hundreds of more centers throughout the United States (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992). Now, a crisis telephone line for rape victims exists in virtually every major city and college campus (Rose, 1977).

**Sexual Violence Prevention and Self-Defense**

Prior to the women’s movement and for some time after, women were told they can avoid sexual violence by not staying out late, going out with a partner, and wearing appropriate clothing to avoid drawing attention toward themselves. However, as the movement began employing full force activism in the 1970s, beliefs on how to avoid sexual violence significantly changed. This is largely due to the emergence of self-defense training workshops in communities around the United States. Self-defense training was the first sign of a concrete program designed to prevent women from being victimized (Searles & Follansbee, 1984). During these trainings, women were urged to fight back when the situation required it (Until safety is guaranteed: Women and the fight against violence, n.d.).
Since the 1970s, self-defense training has become increasingly popular. Today, self-defense programs are still prevalent and offered by several organizations, including police departments, universities, rape crisis centers, and martial arts studios. Although they vary in focus, they accomplish a common goal of instilling in women physical and verbal tactics for resisting sexual assault (Hollander, 2014). Self-defense training has had several positive outcomes, including a decreased likelihood of being raped (Bart & O’Brien, 1985; Orchowski, Gidycz, & Raffle, 2008; Daigle, Fisher, & Stewart, 2009), as well as more self-reported assertiveness and a greater perceived ability to resist potential perpetrators (Weitlauf, Smith, & Cervone, 2000; Hollander, 2004; Daigle et al., 2009). Supporters of women’s self-defense also assert that it is empowers women by teaching them how to avoid sexual assault without limiting them (Hollander, 2004).

Yet, despite evidence for its positive outcomes, self-defense training for women has also undergone much criticism. Hollander (2009) identified three common types of resistance to women being taught self-defense. First is the belief that women’s resistance “is impossible” because women lack the physical ability to effectively defend themselves in an attack against a man (p.3). This belief, which largely stems from traditional views of men as dominant and women as submissive, is the origin of many adverse reactions to women’s self-defense (Hollander, 2001). Second is the belief that “it is too dangerous” (p.5). Some claim that women might resist self-defense training for fear that they will want to use it in violent ways. Others argue that by teaching women how to be violent, self-defense training poses a societal threat rather than an individual threat. Third is the belief that “it risks blaming the victim” because it suggests that women are responsible
for avoiding sexual victimization, and thus also responsible for controlling men’s perpetration (p.7).

The most commonly held argument against self-defense is that it is not a form of prevention at all, because true prevention should stop men from perpetrating violent acts all together (Hollander, 2009). Yet, it is widely agreed that men’s sexual violence perpetration cannot be prevented unless men become active participants in standing up against its occurrence (Fabiano et al., 2003; Flood, 2005; Bridges, 2010). For this reason, there has been a recent push to involve men in efforts to end men’s sexual violence against women (Fabiano et al., 2003).

**Men’s Involvement**

There are several reasons men should be targets of sexual violence prevention efforts. For one, although men can be victims of sexual violence, they are most often perpetrators (Flood, 2011). The lifetime prevalence of rape for females is nearly 18 times more than males (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014), which is especially evident on college campuses. According to Krebs and colleagues (2009), 19 percent of females experience at least one attempted or completed act of sexual violence while in college. As well, 37.4 percent of female rape victims were first raped between the ages of 18 and 24 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

Kaufman (2001) argues that if men are targeted for anti-violence programs it will instill in them a sense of ownership for the problem. This will make them feel closer to the issue, which will push them to work harder to prevent it. They will recognize that although they do not personally perpetrate sexual violence, other men do, and come to
understand gendered violence not as a “women’s issue,” but an issue for both men and women (Sweetman, 1997; Kaufman, 2001). Alan Berkowitz (2002) agrees that gendered violence should be an issue for both men and women. He argues that although a small number of men perpetrate sexual violence, all have a responsibility in reforming the culture that allows sexual violence to occur. Thus, sexual violence prevention can only be effective if it teaches men how to display disapproval of other men’s violence and examine their own potential for violence perpetration.

Further, much existing research has found that gendered violence stems from a patriarchal society that supports male dominance over women (Flood, 2011; Fulu, Warner, Miedema, Jewkes, Roselli, & Lang, 2013). When men internalize this sexual inequality, they recognize rape and sexual violence as a way to exert their control over women. In this case, rape serves as a manifestation of dominance guided by power and anger rather than passion (Brownmiller, 2013; Groth & Birnbaum, 2013). This is evidenced in families, where there is more likely to be high levels of violence against women when the male holds dominant decision-making power (Flood, 2011). In addition, men who hold traditional or adverse gender-based attitudes toward women are more likely to perpetrate physical or sexual aggression (Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981; Telch & Lindquist, 1984; Schumacher, Feldbau-Kohn, Smith Slep & Heyman, 2001; Carr & VanDeusen, 2004).

Others argue that men’s involvement is necessary because over the course of history, they have evolved mechanisms that make them more inclined to sexually assault and rape women (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000; McKibbin, Shackelford, Goetz, & Starratt,
2008; Thompson, 2009). According to this view, men take advantage of immediate opportunities to pass on their genes to fertile females (Thompson, 2009). However, just because these psychological rape mechanisms are present does not mean that rape is inevitable. Rather, just as men can choose a healthier food option over an appetizing cheeseburger, they can also choose to inhibit their evolved inclination to rape (McKibbin et al., 2008). Sexual violence prevention programming may teach men how to better control their sexually coercive desires.

Clearly, there are several reasons men have been targeted for programs intended to educate, assemble, and prevent sexual violence perpetration (Casey & Smith, 2010). However, men’s involvement in prevention efforts is useless unless they are being effectively reached. The effectiveness of prevention efforts largely depends on the way we incorporate men. Efforts have been made to involve men in various ways. Some argue that men should be treated as allies, and that producing empathy should be the most important goal (Scheel, Johnson, Schneider, & Smith, 2001; Foubert & Perry, 2007). Others have included men as targets of anti-violence campaigns, active members in sexual violence education programs, and activists in changing public policies toward rape and sexual violence (Flood, 2011). At Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, men publicly take a stand against sexual violence by walking a mile in high heels. Walk a Mile in Her Shoes was created in 2001 by founder Frank Baird. The first walk included a few men walking around a park to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of men’s sexual violence against women and raise money for nonprofit organizations that assist rape survivors. Quickly, the event turned into a worldwide movement. Now, marches are held
throughout the world with tens of thousands of men marching to raise money and awareness. The mission of *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* is to “co-creat[e] a united Gender Movement, [where] men will be a part of the solution to ending men's sexualized violence against women” (Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, n.d.).

*Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* is a respected event. However, the political efforts employed at the event are often questionable (Bridges, 2010). For instance, Bridges (2010) found that using drag, which are performances of gender and sexual transgressions in which an individual dresses as the opposite sex, or in this case, wears shoes of the opposite sex, and acts with an exaggerated feminine demeanor, does not produce empathy. Rather, it promotes and highlights gender and sexual inequalities, and frames men’s participation in feminist issues as a gender transgression. In addition, when men wear heels but keep the rest of their masculine apparel, it exhibits an androgynous masculinity that “soften[s]…the gender line at the risk of sacrificing the appeal the ‘we’re still real men, just not rapists’ discourse could have to an audience of mainstream US men” (Masters, 2010, p. 43).

This thesis has been designed to better understand the experiences of those involved in *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* at Kent State University in the context of the intended purpose and objectives for the purpose of outlining where the event may be falling short in achieving its mission and proposing solutions for how to improve it in future years to become both a playful and powerful way of increasing talk on gender relations and sexual violence against women.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Conceptual Framing

This study is conceptually framed by gender theory, defined as “a body of theories that examines how cultural expectations about femininity and masculinity shape understandings of women and men as gendered selves” (Allan, 2004, p. 278). According to this theory, masculinity and femininity are expressions of gender that are constructed, learned, and performed, rather than biologically fixed (Allan, 2004; Lorber, 2004). When constructed, these differences are used to emphasize the necessity of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Goffman (1977) recognizes several contexts through which our “essential genders” can be acted out, such as public restrooms and single-sex schools, both of which are separated by sex on the basis of biological reasons, even though they serve similar purposes for both men and women.

Dominant gender constructions create a hegemony of maleness and femaleness (Lazar, 2005), which is essential to this study. Hegemonic masculinity is “the culturally idealized form of masculine character (in a given historical setting), which may not be the usual form of masculinity at all” (Connell, 1990, p. 141). Hegemonic masculinity naturalizes certain ways of performing maleness and criticizes alternative expressions of masculinity, especially those related to femininity (Connell, 1987). A central component of hegemonic masculinity is that women are sex objects for which men compete with each other (Donaldson, 1993). Yet, when “hybrid masculinity,” which involves
integrating features of femininity into hegemonic masculinity, is performed, it has the potential to disrupt dominant gender norms (Arxer, 2011; Messner, 2007; Yeung, Stombler, & Wharton, 2006). This thesis seeks to examine the ways in which adopting hybrid masculinity, specifically walking in high heels, disrupts hegemonic masculinity.

**Context: The Event**

In January of 2015, I began attending bi-weekly *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* planning meetings. Although attendance at each meeting varied; the event director, Women’s Center program coordinator, four individuals recruited from on-campus offices, and myself were typically in attendance, while others showed up occasionally. At Kent State University, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* follows the objectives of the larger organization stated on the official website, but also establishes some of its own. The stated goals for the event were “[an] enriched experience for those who participate, increase[d] faculty and staff participation, better marketing, future funding sources, and increase[d] shoe donations.”

Three months later on a mild April day, men and women began to gather outside the Kiva at Kent State University for *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*. With three registration tables, including one for Greek life, one for pre-registered walkers, and one for those registering at the event, participants checked-in and collected their complimentary bags. While men headed inside to pick out shoes and participate in games, including limbo, hula hoop, and relay races, women headed inside to view the spectacle of men attempting to play games in high heels.
The event commenced with a welcome speech delivered by the event director, followed by speeches from the Undergraduate Student Government Executive Director and an athletic coach. Participants were then directed outside to march down the University Esplanade. Of the approximately 300 participants, the majority were white males, of traditional college age, and from Greek life or athletics. Several females also walked, but were not required to wear high heels. The walk concluded at the University Fashion Building with prizes for the Best Shoe, Highest Heel, First to Fall, Laziest Shoe, Best Runway Walk, and Ugliest Shoe.

**Data Collection**

With rates of sexual assault and rape higher than ever, particularly on college campuses, there is a growing need for effective sexual violence awareness events. Therefore, it is important to know where *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* may be falling short in realizing its purpose. By knowing this, event staff can work to improve the event in future years, and learn how to more effectively mobilize individuals, particularly men, to become activists against its occurrence.

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board approved this study. The principal investigator, Susan Iverson, and co-investigator, Kristina Kamis, were certified through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program (CITI). By receiving CITI training and IRB approval, the principal investigator and co-investigator learned research education, developed integrity, and ensured the research was being conducted with ethical concerns in mind.
To comprehensively understand the experiences and thoughts of those involved with the event, four methods of data collection were employed. Questions were based on the literature and designed to produce responses that address the research purpose. All questions were carefully reviewed by the principal investigator and co-investigator and approved by the IRB prior to their release. Surveys were created via Qualtrics. All survey and interview participants were recruited via email; and were told their participation was voluntary, their responses would be kept anonymous, they could skip any questions, and could stop their participation at any time. No emails or identifying information were collected as part of the surveys or interviews. The following explain the multiple points of data collected as part of this study:

1. Planning committee members were invited to participate in pre- and post-event interviews. Four event staff consented to participate (one female, three males). Pre-event interviews were conducted during the week prior to the event, and included six questions assessing the staff member’s goals for the event, strategies for increasing attendance, targeted groups, and why s/he thinks high heels are a part of the event. Post-event interviews were conducted for two weeks following the event and included five questions assessing the staff member’s reflections of the event, whether the event achieved his or her goals, what s/he believes men took away from the event, and what s/he thinks can be done to improve the event.

2. Pre-registered walkers were invited to complete a pre-event survey (see Appendix A), which was made available one week prior to the event and stayed available until the day of the event. Nine walkers completed the pre-event survey.
The survey included eight questions assessing the walker’s motivation for attendance, perception of the event’s purpose and use of high heels, beliefs about Feminism, and knowledge of Bystander Training.

3. All walkers, both pre-registered and on-site registrants, were invited to complete a post-event survey or interview.

   a. Twelve walkers completed the post-event survey (see Appendix B). The post-event survey was made available three days following the event and stayed available for one week. The survey included eight questions assessing the walker’s reflections of the event, ways in which s/he had been impacted, ways in which s/he will apply what s/he learned at the event to everyday life, and what s/he thinks can be done to improve the event.

   b. Post-event interviews were conducted to supplement survey data with more in-depth, honest responses from a small group of individuals, providing a more vivid, comprehensive depiction of the event. Five walkers participated in post-event interviews (four female, one male). Post-event interviews were conducted for two weeks following the event, and included five questions assessing the walker’s reflections of the event, motivations for attendance, ways in which s/he had been impacted, and ways in which s/he will apply what s/he learned at the event to everyday life. The male was also asked an additional question about how he felt walking in high heels.
4. I took field notes of my observations during the event. Specifically, I focused on participants’ interactions, the ways in which speakers and event staff communicated the event’s purpose and mission, and the overall logistics of the event. In total, I had three pages of field notes.

In total, data were collected from 30 participants. The list of questions can be found in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Through pre- and post-event surveys, interviews, and field notes of my observations at the event, I gathered data in an attempt to understand the experiences of those involved with the event in the context of the event’s intended purpose and objectives. After collecting data, my interviews were transcribed by the Research & Evaluation Bureau in the College of Education, Health and Human Services. In total, 33 pages of interviews were transcribed, with ten pages from pre-event interviews with event staff, nine pages from post-event interviews with event staff, and fourteen pages from post-event interviews with walkers. Then, I coded for themes and patterns consistent with my research purpose. I used select quotes and magnified moments, defined as “episodes of heightened importance, either epiphanies, moments of intense glee or unusual insight, or moments in which things go intensely but meaningfully wrong. In either case, the moment stands out, it is metaphorically rich, unusually elaborate, and often echoes,” (Hochschild, 1994, p.4) to illustrate the themes and patterns I came upon. This case study was theoretically framed by gender theory, which informed my interpretation of the data.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

Several themes related to motivation, goals, impact, gendered meanings, and the extent to which the event achieved its mission emerged. These themes include: a disconnect between motivations, reinforcement of gender and sexual inequalities, misperceiving the purpose of high heels, an over focus on increasing participation, and ineffective bystander training promotion.

**Disconnect Between Motivations**

An individual is intrinsically motivated when he or she partakes in an activity or behavior simply for personal satisfaction, without receiving any external rewards (Brown, 2007; Deci, 1971). When participants at Walk a Mile in Their Shoes were interviewed and surveyed about their motivations for attending the event, the majority described intrinsically driven motivations, particularly their desire to support a good cause or passion for the message of the event. For instance, one walker stated “I think it has a very powerful message behind it and I have always wanted to participate.” Similarly, another walker reported being “passionate about supporting awareness of sexual assault and violence.” Interestingly, one walker attributed her motivation to both her passion for the message and her affiliation with other sexual assault prevention efforts, stating that she participated because she is “a member of Students Against Sexual Assault and [is] passionate about the message behind the event.” Many event staff similarly
attributed their involvement with the event to their passion for the message. For instance, one staff member stated “This was an issue that I just felt really strongly about personally, certainly there’s events and there’s groups all over campus that you can get involved in. Whatever you’re passionate about, whatever it is, whatever societal cultural issue it is that you really feel passionate about. For me, this is pretty much that issue.”

Yet, as I observed the event, it became apparent that passion and support were not the motivations guiding the majority of participants’ attendance. Rather, the majority attended due to the influence of other people or sources, with little knowledge of the event’s true purpose. Most often, walkers were required to attend for athletics, Greek life, or a class requirement. For instance, when asked what motivated her to attend, one athlete reported that “My coach suggested I, along with my teammates do it.” This became especially clear at registration time, when there were three registration tables: one for pre-registered walkers, one for those registering at the event, and one for Greek life. The Greek life table was the most crowded and headed by a Greek life administrator who checked in and awarded “Greek points” to participating fraternities and sororities. The pre-registration table was occupied mostly by athletes who had been forced to register by their coaches, likely as a way to promote the image of Kent State athletics. This is evidenced in an article entitled “Kent State Student-Athletes Participate in Walk a Mile in Their Shoes,” which was published on kentstatesports.com five days after the event to publicize the presence of Kent State athletes at the event (2015). The table for those registering at the event had the least amount of traffic. However, when participants did register at the event, they were most often motivated by extrinsic consequences not in
line with the event’s mission. For instance, as two girls approached the registration tables to investigate what was going on, one said to the other “Will you register with me? I just want a shirt.” Another girl approached me before registering for the event and asked how she could receive proof of attendance for a class. After telling her she would be given proof of attendance at the end of the event, she sighed and walked away, obviously disappointed she could not simply get a signature and leave.

Interestingly, “fun” was rarely reported as a sole motivation for attendance. Rather, walkers’ motivations were twofold, reporting being motivated by “fun” and also the opportunity to help out a good cause. For instance, one walker stated “Besides the fact that it’s a worthy cause to support, I saw a photo in the e-Inside with several guys in heels and it looked like it would be fun.” Similarly, another walker commented “I had heard about the event before and it sounded like it was for a really good cause. Plus, I already like to walk around campus so I thought it would be fun!” Another walker shared “It looked like it would be a fun event, plus it is spreading a great message and I wanted to be a part of it.”

**Participation: Publicity or Power?**

A common goal among event staff was to increase participation at the event. For instance, one staff member’s goal was to “get more students involved, make it bigger, and hopefully reach students and try to make a difference…but hopefully we can expand our reach.” Similarly, another staff member stated “I’d like to see increased turn out…So again, if we can increase the numbers from last year, I think that would be a step in the right direction. I would say that’s my primary goal, is just to see more students involved.”
Additionally, another staff member stated “My goals for the event this year include participation.”

Some event staff believed that to increase participation, campus groups and organizations should be required to attend like Greek life and athletics. For instance, one staff member stated “I know that through traditional students selecting to show up, we know that the group tends to be small, so if we could find other groups with some sense of obligation…” Similarly, another staff member stated “Even though we are heavy on the athletes and heavy on Greek life, you kind of have like the bread and butter…but then seeing how we can get the participation like that from other groups… [m]andating that peer tutors or mentors or other people show up.”

Often, staff mentioned size and publicity, but overlooked impact. For instance, one staff member stated “I’d love to see more people take part in it to make it such a bigger event.” Another staff member interestingly focused on Greek life’s involvement as an important publicity stunt, stating that “Greek life has been huge… I know that with Greek systems in the overall media are fairly poorly portrayed that Kent State has been working, not just the Women’s Center, but also Greek life has been trying to improve that image and by getting these populations involved, helping bring that awareness in from those who might be most in need.”

Interestingly, some staff seemed to think a positive association existed between participation and event impact, meaning they believed that if attendance increased, more individuals would be impacted. For instance, one staff member stated “I think the goals are to get more people involved so we can engage and impact more students on campus
and faculty and staff.” However, as evidenced in walkers’ responses to the question “What impact did the event have on you?” this is not the case. For instance, one walker who was not significantly impacted stated “I felt that the event impacted me but not to the extreme as Green Dot training did.” Another walker who felt no impact at all stated “I felt that there was a disconnect between ‘men walking in heels’ and making an actual impact on gender violence.” Furthermore, another walker was impacted in a way not in line with the event’s mission, because rather than recognizing high heels as a symbol of sexual violence, he took a surface level understanding of their physical pain. He stated “I can’t really criticize anymore ‘cause it’s like, more power to you for like, stomping up and down the esplanade in those stilettos because I can’t do it. You know what I mean?”

**Reinforcement of Gender and Sexual Inequalities**

“At a Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event there is no distinction between performer and audience” (Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, n.d.). Rather, the event is intended to equally involve and educate all individuals in attendance, both male and female. However, for this to occur, everyone must feel equally obligated to the issue. Therefore, sexual violence must be transformed from a “women’s issue” into an issue for everyone.

For this reason, high heels are a major part of the event. As an erotic fashion statement associated with femininity, high heels exemplify the socially constructed nature of gender and sexual inequalities. No doubt, many women do not regularly wear heels, and those who do wear heels do not belong to a strict classification of masculinity or femininity. However, due to a societal gender binary that assumes sex and gender expression are interconnected, all women are assumed to be feminine, and thus, also
assumed to wear heels (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013). Consequently, men who wear heels are thought to be wearing women’s shoes. Therefore, by wearing heels at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*, men are creating a space where gender and sexual distinctions are ill-defined for the purpose of eliminating gender and sexual boundaries (Bridges, 2010).

Yet, at the event, this was not the case. For instance, when a photographer asked one male walker for a picture in his heels, he instantly posed in a feminine fashion, leaning to one side with his hand on his hip. Another male walker commented “I’m a pretty woman” while putting on his shoes. In addition, during the opening ceremony in the Kiva, a speaker asked for “girls to come to stage to teach these guys to walk in heels.” Further, the underlying assumption that femininity and feminism are exclusively for females was largely apparent in conversations with event staff. For instance, on event day, one staff member mentioned that “It’s so great to see how many men decided to come out. Women are more connected to the issue, so it’s almost their obligation to come. But men, they don’t have as much a reason to be here and support this women’s issue.”

**Walking in “Women’s” Shoes**

High heels have long been culturally associated with sexual promiscuity (Workman & Orr, 1996). For instance, one study found that when college students were asked to rate a female’s personality based on her clothing, students rated the female in more revealing clothing, which included high heels, as more flirtatious, sexy, promiscuous, and seductive compared to the female dressed in less revealing clothing (Abbey, Cozzarelli, McLaughlin, & Harnish, 1987). Other studies have found that
women who dress in seductive clothing, such as high heels, are perceived as being more susceptible to rape (Edmonds & Cahoon, 1986; Terry and Doerge, 1979). Consequently, high heels are largely a symbol of gender and sexual inequalities often used as rationale to blame women for their experiences of rape and sexual assault.

In pre-event surveys, few walkers were able to recognize the heel as a symbol of gender and sexual inequalities. For many, high heels were instead understood as a symbol of women. For instance, one walker stated that high heels “represent a powerful woman.” Another walker stated “High heels are a classic symbol of women and using them helps men understand what it’s like to wear them.” Furthermore, another walker stated “High heels are associated with women and what better way to ‘walk a mile in their shoes’ then by wearing their shoes!” This response is particularly interesting, because even though the event’s name was changed from Walk a Mile in Her Shoes to Walk a Mile in Their Shoes to be more inclusive of all genders, gender identities, and sexual orientations, the participant still perceived Their as referring specifically to women.

Several participants seemed to perceive high heels as a surface level way of experiencing a woman’s world. This is especially illustrated in one post-event interview with a male walker. While he was reflecting on his experience he stated that “As soon as I left the Kiva with the heels, I knew it was gonna be…a struggle.” Continuing, he said “And I was telling…some of the friends I was walking with…I’ll never ever talk about girls…in their heels again…I now understand…sometimes…my friends will be walking around and…the girl friends will be…in heels why sometimes they’d be behind…so walking around like, to do this event, you know, it was all in good character, it was fun,
challenging, especially when we got to the hill portion of the event…there was a sign that said feel free to take off your heels for the duration of the hill and I was like, no, I wanna make it.”

**Bystander Training: What’s That?**

Bystander intervention trainings aim to spread the notion that everyone has a role in preventing sexual violence and alter the environments that support its occurrence. To do this, the programs utilize a variety of strategies that train individuals how to intervene in potentially dangerous situations (Coker et al., 2011). Kent State University offers bystander training workshops called “Green Dot.” Green Dot bystander workshops are designed to provide individuals with knowledge and abilities that help them actively utilize proactive and reactive bystander behaviors in their everyday lives (Green Dot Bystander Workshop, n.d.).

When walkers were asked what they know about bystander training, many reported being completely unfamiliar with the training or its purpose. Some responses include “I do not know what Bystander Training is,” “I’m not familiar with this term,” and “[I know] nothing.” Other walkers were aware the training is offered but were unfamiliar with its purpose. For instance, one walker stated “I only know that training is offered by the Women’s Center.” Only one surveyed walker reported having ever received bystander training.

Further, Green Dot was ineffectively advertised at the event. While participants gathered in the Kiva before the event, a Power Point was running that included a slide about Green Dot. However, due to the games occurring on stage, all of which were meant
to be humorous showcases of men struggling in heels, few people paid attention to the slides. In addition, during pre-event speeches, two speakers mentioned green dots, red dots, and Green Dot training. However, they failed to provide an explanation of green and red dots and never emphasized the importance of undergoing Green Dot training. For instance, one speaker concluded her speech with “The power of Green Dot is simple, red dots are bad, green dots are good. You decide what you want to do in our community,” but failed to provide further explanation.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although event staff for *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* had objectives to increase sexual violence awareness among participants and rally them to take action against its occurrence, the findings from this study reveal that the strategies employed to achieve these objectives left the event falling short. In this section, I outline where *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* fell short in its purpose and offer recommendations for further practice.

*Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* is intentionally scheduled to occur during Greek Week, which is “a week in the spring semester when all campus Greek organizations celebrate the positive aspects of Greek life, through games, community service projects, and other activities” (Panhellenic Council Kent State University, n.d.). By participating in these activities, Greek organizations receive “Greek points,” with the ultimate goal of receiving the most points by the end of the week to earn recognition for their chapter. *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* is one such event in which members of Greek life can participate to earn “Greek points.” No doubt, as evidenced in the large showing of students from Greek life at the event, “Greek points” were an effective incentive for increasing attendance. However, consistent with previous studies which have found that persuading individuals to take part in an activity for an incentive decreases his or her intrinsic motivation toward the activity and effort while participating (Bonner, Hastie, Sprinkle, & Young, 2000; Bonner & Sprinkle, 2002; Camerer & Hogarth, 1999; Gneezy,
Meier, & Rey-Biel, 2011; Jenkins Jr, Mitra, Gupta, & Shaw, 1998), my findings revealed that “Greek points” persuaded members of Greek life to attend for external rewards with little regard for the purpose of the event. This in turn reduced the event’s ability to enrich their experiences and mobilize them to take action against sexual violence.

In addition to Greek life, athletics had a large presence at the event. Since an athletic team is a reflection of its coach and its athletic program, coaches are often largely motivated to uphold the positive image of their team in order to maintain their own image. According to Ariely, Bracha, & Meier (2009), when individuals are motivated to uphold a positive image, they often have a tendency to be influenced in part by others’ opinions. Therefore, coaches often attempt to flaunt qualities of their team that are considered “good” based on societal standards. Consistent with Ariely and colleagues’ (2009) research, my findings revealed that coaches often forced their teams to attend Walk a Mile in Their Shoes to enhance their own image as well as the overall image of Kent State athletics.

Further, while most sampled participants reported having intrinsically driven motivations for attending the event, the interactions and behaviors of walkers at the event revealed the opposite. Thus, there may be a disconnect between participants’ self-reported motivations and their actual motivations. This became especially apparent in participants who self-reported “fun” as a motivation for attending the event. “Fun” was rarely reported as a sole motivation for attendance. Rather, participants reported being motivated by “fun” and also the opportunity to help out a good cause. According to Festinger (1957), when individuals hold two cognitions that are relevant to each other but
are inconsistent, such as these twofold motivations, they are experiencing cognitive dissonance. As a result, s/he will experience a degree of psychological discomfort, and will try to eliminate this discomfort by changing the cognition to make it consonant with his or her beliefs (Festinger, 1962; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Levy, 2015). Since *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* addresses the serious topic of sexual violence against women, participants may have felt dissonant attending solely to have fun. Therefore, they may have mentioned the good cause aspect to put their reported motivations more in line with their beliefs.

Events have the ability to create a lasting impression on what the host of the event can deliver. Thus, having a large turnout at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* positively reflects on the SRVSS Office, Women’s Center, and the University. If the turnout is high, it can motivate those in attendance to spread word of its success and attend other events hosted by the SRVSS Office and Women’s Center in the future. However, when turnout is low, it makes the event and the message behind it seem unimportant. For this reason, it is easy to understand why increasing participation at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* was a shared goal among event staff. However, when event staff focused too much on participation, they ignored the event’s potential to positively impact participants. Instead, they focused solely on increasing participation to make the event bigger and more renowned. In addition, some staff suggested that campus groups and organizations should be required to attend like Greek life and athletics. However, as previously mentioned, this threatens the event’s ability to educate individuals, enrich their experiences, and mobilize them to
take action against sexual violence (Bonner et al., 2000; Bonner & Sprinkle, 2002; Camerer & Hogarth, 1999; Gneezy et al., 2011; Jenkins Jr et al., 1998).

Further, some event staff seemed to think that if attendance increased, more individuals would be impacted. However, among those I sampled, this was not the case. Nearly 300 walkers participated in *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*. Yet, despite this large number, several sampled participants reported not being significantly impacted, receiving no impact at all, or being impacted in a way not in line with the event’s mission. Since the event could not impact these walkers, it may not be able to impact a larger audience with its current structure. Although it has this potential, this would require restructuring and more effort on behalf of event staff.

According to West and Zimmerman’s theory of “doing gender,” Gender is “something that one does, and *does* recurrently” (p. 140, italics in original). We “do gender” through our dress, the way we walk and talk, and the way we perceive men and women (1987). Thus, individuals uphold their gender identities through their appearance. Wearing an article of clothing related to the opposite gender, such as men wearing high heels, disrupts the gender and sexual boundaries governing how men and women are supposed to dress and act. For this reason, men are supposed to wear high heels at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*. As opposed to other clothing items associated with women, high heels are used because having long been associated with sexual promiscuity (Workman & Orr, 1996), they stand as a symbol of gender and sexual inequalities used to blame women for their experiences of rape and sexual assault. However, when asked in pre-event surveys “Why do you think high heels are part of the *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*
event?” most participants failed to recognize the heel as a symbol of gender and sexual inequalities. Instead, consistent with West and Zimmerman’s theory of “doing gender” (1987), they recognized high heels as a symbol of women.

However, one mission of Walk a Mile in Their Shoes is to educate those in attendance about the true reason men are encouraged to wear high heels at the event. Effective strategies to do this should alter participants’ perceptions, so they can understand the true symbolic meaning of high heels, as well as the role they play in eliminating gender and sexual boundaries that contribute to the occurrence of men’s sexual violence against women. However, in post-event interviews, many participants and event staff perceived heels as a superficial way for men to experience the physical pain women endure wearing heels rather than as a symbol of gender and sexual inequalities. Thus, the strategies utilized to change participants’ perceptions regarding the use of high heels at the event may need some improvement.

Overall, Walk a Mile in Their Shoes did little to dismantle gender and sexual inequalities that distance men from the issue of sexual violence against women. Rather, high heels were used in a way that reinforced gender and sexual inequalities, as well as men’s lack of affiliation and obligation for the cause. Asking “girls to come to stage to teach these guys to walk in heels,” during the opening ceremony not only reinforced gender inequalities, but also supported the binary notion that femininity is exclusively female and men cannot be feminine. In addition, many men often jokingly engaged in conventional feminine behaviors and described themselves in terms such as “I’m a pretty woman.” Thus, rather than undermining social constructions of gender and sexuality,
these men instead reinforced their heterosexual, male identities to show that their sexual breach in behavior was atypical. Through the use of high heels, men performed femininity rather than actually being feminist. Further, event staff often constructed men’s participation as a sacrifice and helping hand for women whose participation is expected. Thus, rather than using the event as an opportunity to bring men and women together to discuss challenging issues, men were instead praised for coming out to support an issue in which their involvement was considered atypical. With this, the event did little to demonstrate how men can be feminist and support feminist issues in the same way as women.

*Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* is just one of several prevention efforts put on by the SRVSS Office and Women’s Center at Kent State University each year. Another program growing in popularity at both Kent State and nationwide are Green Dot bystander training workshops. Green Dot bystander training is a national bystander intervention program aimed at equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to engage in effective bystander behaviors, with the ultimate goal of reducing all forms of violence (Green Dot Inc. etcetera, n.d.). Existing research has found bystander intervention trainings to be highly effective in reducing rape myths, and increasing sexual assault knowledge, prosocial bystander attitudes, bystander efficacy, bystander behaviors, and beliefs about being able to intervene in risky situations (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007). Thus, if implemented effectively, bystander training can increase sexual violence awareness among those who partake in the training and mobilize them to take action against its occurrence, both of which are goals of *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes.*
Since they strive to achieve similar outcomes for participants, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* has the potential to be an effective outlet for promoting Green Dot. This is especially true at this particular event, because many sampled participants reported being unfamiliar with Green Dot training or its purpose, and most had not received any type of bystander training. As well, as a larger-scale event, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* can promote Green Dot to several individuals. Although some attempts were made to promote the workshops at the event; due to games, ineffective explanations from speakers, and a lack of emphasis on its importance, these attempts were not as effective as they could have been. Thus, improvements need to be made in attempts to promote Green Dot at the event.

Based on these findings, I offer some recommendations for further practice:

1. Orient planning team members. The logistics of event planning are important and necessary to ensure an event runs smoothly. However, at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*, staff focused so much on logistics, specifically on increasing participation, that they overlooked the overarching mission of the event. To fix this, event staff should spend more time becoming oriented to the event’s mission. This will facilitate more discussion about overall goals and strategies for effectively impacting and enhancing the experiences of individuals in attendance. One way to do this is by assigning staff members to read an article related to the cause (e.g., Bridges, 2010). Another way to do this is by assigning planning team members to fulfill various positions. This way, more individuals can focus on developing strategies that enhance individual experiences and promote the event’s mission rather than on logistics and details. The official *Walk a Mile*
in Her Shoes website suggests assigning individuals to the following positions: a Media Coordinator to handle press releases and interviews, a Public Education/Outreach Coordinator to distribute flyers and give promotional presentations, a Volunteer Recruitment Coordinator to direct and follow up with volunteers following the event, a Logistics Manager, a Walk Manager to manage walk activities on the day of the event, and a Security Manager to maintain order during the march (Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, n.d). In addition to these positions, I also suggest forming an Engagement Committee responsible for developing strategies that increase participant engagement, and a Mission Outreach Committee responsible for developing strategies to achieve the overarching mission of the event.

2. Incorporate reflection and dialogue. In order to learn from your experiences it is important to reflect on them (Boud & Walker, 1993). Thus, engaging participants in effective post-event dialogue is important. During the closing ceremony of Walk a Mile in Their Shoes, a staff member attempted to engage participants in reflective dialogue. However, the disorganization, noise, and lack of direction during the ceremony diverted participants’ attention away from the speaker and toward other happenings. To ensure that participants hear and absorb the reflective dialogue given by the speaker, the planning committee should develop better strategies for hosting a more organized closing ceremony. For one, the ceremony should take place in an auditorium. This way, everyone will be in an enclosed area, the speaker will be the center of attention on stage, and participants can sit rather than stand aimlessly in a lobby. In addition, interactive activities; including interactive dramas, role-playing, and worksheets, have all been
shown to be effective at improving rape attitudes, rape awareness, behavioral intentions, sexual assault knowledge, rape myth acceptance, empathy, sexual beliefs, and/or sexual victimization (Vladutiu, Martin, & Macy, 2010). Thus, event staff should incorporate an interactive activity into the closing ceremony. Further, previous research has observed the importance of giving male students opportunities to identify the effects of traditional male socialization and the ways in which “men are traditionally socialized to believe in hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and to adopt sexist, homophobic, and unhealthy attitudes” (Lester and Harris, 2015, p. 163). Thus, event staff should create reflective prompts that can be sent to participants who pre-register, as well as a discussion guide for coaches and others who require men to partake in the event that they can use to facilitate pre- and post- event discussion. “This deeper engagement may lead men to view their involvement in Walk a Mile in Their Shoes, and thus their role in sexual violence prevention, as more than episodic” (Kamis & Iverson, forthcoming).

3. In whose shoes? Walk a Mile in Their Shoes was named Walk a Mile in Her Shoes for the first four years it was hosted at Kent State University. However, the name was changed this year in an attempt to be inclusive of gender non-conforming students, recognize that sexual violence is committed by both sexes, and recognize that victims are female- and male-identified. However, as evidenced by participants’ notion of high heels as a symbol of women rather than of gender and sexual inequalities, changing this pronoun was not enough to eliminate dominant gender constructions. Event organizers must develop ways to challenge participants’ assumptions about who are victims and
perpetrators and educate those in attendance about the true reason men are encouraged to wear high heels at the event.

4. Focus on changing rape myth acceptance. Much evidence has suggested that rape myth acceptance interventions are effective at reducing rape myth acceptance among college men (Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Foubert, 2000; O’Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003). Rape myths are widely accepted ideologies that justify sexual violence against women and make them liable for their sexual victimization (Deming et al., 2013). Several studies have found that when rape myths are accepted on college campuses, sexual assault is more likely to occur (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Hamilton & Yee, 1990; Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; Carr & VanDeusen, 2004). Since men are more likely than women to accept rape myths, reducing rape myth acceptance among college men is an important focus of many sexual assault interventions on college campuses (Sawyer, Thompson, & Chicorelli, 2002; McMahon, 2010; Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011; Aronowitz et al., 2012). In one study, undergraduate males watched a video designed to reduce rape myth acceptance. Those who watched the video had greater immediate changes in rape myth acceptance compared to those who did not watch the video (O’Donohue et al., 2003). Similarly, college men taking part in a sexual assault education program showed a decrease in rape myth acceptance both immediately and two months following completion of the program (Foubert & Marriott, 1997). Thus, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* may benefit from focusing on changing walkers’, particularly men’s’, acceptance of rape myths.
5. Incorporate aspects of the Men’s Program. Scholars widely agree that men’s sexual violence perpetration cannot be stopped unless men become active participants in its prevention (Fabiano et al., 2003; Flood, 2005; Bridges, 2010). For this reason, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* targets men. However, the strategies utilized to educate men in attendance about men’s sexualized violence against women and mobilize them to take action against its occurrence fell short. Thus, it may be beneficial to incorporate aspects of *The Men’s Program* into *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*. *The Men’s Program* is designed to teach men how to help female rape victims, use bystander interventions in high-risk situations, and alter their rape-supportive actions while encouraging others to do the same (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Foubert, Brasfield, Hill, & Shelley-Tremblay, 2011; The Men's Program, n.d.). Typically, each program starts with a powerful empathy component followed by bystander training, both delivered by experienced men to an all-male group (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2011). *The Men’s Program* has been found to effectively increase men’s empathy, sexual violence awareness, and likelihood to intervene in a questionable situation, and decrease their rape-supportive behaviors, rape myth acceptance, and likelihood to rape (Chapleau, 2015; Foubert & Perry, 2007; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2011; Schewe, 2007). Thus, I suggest that event staff recruit a male presenter to exclusively address the male attendees at the event using a variety of activities adopted from *The Men’s Program*. Some activities from *The Men’s Program* they might incorporate include: presenting real-life rape experiences to the audience in order to develop their empathy toward rape and rape survivors, teaching effective strategies for intervening in rape situations, and facilitating a conversation for
males to discuss ways in which they would apply newly-learned intervention strategies to various rape situations (The Men's Program, n.d.).

6. What’s Your Green Dot? Bystander intervention training aims to teach individuals methods for effectively intervening in a situation perceived to be risky or potentially harmful to another individual (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004). Although most men do not perpetrate sexual violence, women are victimized more than men, and thus, men are more often in a position to prevent sexual violence perpetration by other men. For this reason, bystander intervention training is most appropriate for males (Gidycz et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, Green Dot is a national bystander training workshop offered at Kent State University designed to equip students and staff with the knowledge and skills to engage in effective bystander behaviors (Green Dot Bystander Workshop, n.d.). Since Walk a Mile in Their Shoes and Green Dot both focus more attention on men and strive to achieve similar outcomes for participants, Walk a Mile in Their Shoes is a useful outlet for promoting Green Dot, but only if done effectively. To better promote Green Dot at Walk a Mile in Their Shoes, several actions should be taken. First, the post-event games that occurred on stage should be moved outside so participants can fully focus on the Power Point in which Green Dot is advertised. Second, speakers need to more effectively explain Green Dot, emphasize its importance, define key terms, and motivate individuals to sign up for Green Dot bystander workshops. Further, incorporate interactive activities that will educate about and spark interest in Green Dot. For instance, hand participants literal “Green Dots,” where they can write down bystander behaviors they have already performed or would
commit to performing. In addition, set up a table where individuals can sign up for upcoming Green Dot bystander workshops.

7. Make groups works for incentives. Too many participants attended *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* to receive incentives, such as “Greek points” or extra credit for a class. Although incentivizing participants achieves the short-term goal of increased attendance, it reduces participants’ intrinsic motivation toward the event (Deci, 1972; Gneezy et al., 2011). To foster intrinsic motivation in participants, it is important to create situations that are interpersonally rewarding and intrinsically interesting (Deci, 1972). Thus, event staff should develop ways to make incentivized participants feel more connected to the event and interested in the issue of sexual violence against women. For instance, have them engage in activities that supplement their participation, such as reading an article or completing a project related to the cause. In this way, they will feel more connected to the issue and thus, attend for personal satisfaction rather than external rewards.

**Limitations**

I acknowledge some limitations in this study. First, asking participants their motivations for attending an event that is respected worldwide for raising awareness of a worthy cause could produce socially desirable responses, meaning participants may inflate their strengths and play down their shortages to promote their own positive image (Ray, 1984). In addition, having a woman explore an issue that is often perceived as a “women’s issue” may influence men’s responses. Further, since the sample was a predominantly white population, future studies should consider investigating a more
racially diverse population, and also explore how dimensions of identity, such as minoritized races and social classes, intersect with gender to create various masculinities and femininities. Lastly, since this is a case study of one campus event, it is difficult to generalize my results to other campuses, events, and populations. These limitations point to the need for further investigations of future Walk a Mile in Their Shoes events at Kent State University, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes events beyond Kent State, as well as other sexual violence prevention events and programs aimed at men.

**Implications**

According to Judith Butler, gender is created over time through a series of repeated social constructions. Although these social constructions have no real truth, through repetition, they come to be recognized as the truth of what is natural and essential. Consequently, individuals come to perceive gender as an innate identity tied to biological sex (Butler, 1988).

However, by emphasizing the disconnect between the individual performing the gender and the gender being performed, parodic gender performances, such as those at Walk a Mile in Their Shoes, attempt to mock culturally accepted performances and expressions of gender. In effect, parodic performances have the potential to disrupt social constructions governing how men and women are supposed to dress and act (Butler, 2011). However, while professional performances of drag are effective in disrupting gender and sexual boundaries, more informal performances usually do not produce the same result (Bridges, 2010; Lorber, 1994, 21). The findings from this study support this conclusion. While the nature of being a “drag queen,” involves identifying as
homosexual, at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*, men engaged in exaggerated performances of femininity to reinforce their heterosexual, male identities, distance themselves from homosexuality, and show that their sexual breaches in behavior were atypical. Thus, rather than mocking culturally accepted performances and expressions of gender, they instead mocked men’s performances of drag. Overall, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* may be employing a gender theatre that should have been disrupted long ago.

However, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* is not the sole performative event aimed at raising awareness of sexual violence and related issues. For instance, formed in response to a Toronto police officer telling women they can avoid rape if they stop dressing like sluts, SlutWalks are marches of protest aimed at raising awareness of and ending rape culture, victim blaming, slut shaming, sexual profiling, and other damaging ideas (SlutWalk D.C., n.d.). Similarly, Take Back the Night is a non-profit charity that hosts several events aimed at sexual violence awareness, including the popular “Walk the Walk” marches of protest (Take Back the Night, n.d.). Although *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*, SlutWalks, and Take Back the Night “Walk the Walk” events are all marches of protest, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* emphasizes male involvement and encourages men to wear high heels, while SlutWalks and Take Back the Night “Walk the Walk” events, encourage individuals of all sexes, genders, and ages to march with “no prescription on what someone involved…needs to look like, be like, say, do or identify as” (SlutWalk D.C., n.d.). Future research should investigate how effective SlutWalks and Take Back the Night “Walk the Walk” events are in raising awareness of sexual violence and rape
culture, as it could be beneficial to replace drag at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* with a form of protest similar to those employed at these events.

Further, much of my analysis was informed by survey and interview data. However, although nearly 300 individuals walked at *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*, only thirty individuals were surveyed or interviewed, with four coming from the event planning committee. At future *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* events, more individuals, especially men, should be surveyed and interviewed. By doing this, future studies could potentially find additional patterns and themes to support the findings and recommendations offered in the current study. As well, future studies would benefit from collecting more identifying information from participants, such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and race, to determine whether individual differences influence participants’ perceptions of the event.

**Conclusion**

Staff had objectives to increase sexual violence awareness among event participants and rally them to take action against its occurrence. However, the over-emphasis on incentives, having fun, and increasing participation left the event falling short on generating feminist activist behaviors. Further, high heels were used in a way that reinforced, rather than disrupted, gender and sexual inequalities. In light of my findings, some may argue that *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* marches should no longer be employed at Kent State University. However, this event does not have solely negative consequences. In other communities and universities, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* marches often draw a lot of attention for the sponsoring organizations and the cause of
sexual violence prevention, raise money for nonprofit agencies that assist victims, and may educate men with no prior connection to feminist concerns about sexual violence and gender inequality (Bridges, 2010). This study provides just one example of how efforts may be unsuccessful despite good intentions.

The findings from this study will be beneficial on both a local and national scale. On a local scale, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* planning committee members at Kent State University can use this study to restructure the event, making it a more powerful way of increasing awareness of and discussions surrounding gender relations and sexual violence against women, as well as mobilizing individuals to take action against its occurrence. On a national scale, leaders of sexual violence preventions trainings, programs, or events, specifically individuals and organizations planning a *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* march, can use the findings and recommendations from this study to guide their program designs.
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APPENDIX A

PRE-EVENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following web-based questionnaire seeks to learn your thoughts regarding the Walk a Mile in Their Shoes event. Before taking part in this study, please read the consent form below and click on the "I Agree" button at the bottom of the page if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate.

Consent Form

This is a web-based survey designed to assess whether Walk a Mile in Their Shoes can positively impact individual attitudes toward rape and sexualized violence against women. The survey is being administered by Kristina Kamis, honors student, and Susan Iverson of Kent State University, and it has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to adult participants (i.e., no more than the level of risk encountered in daily life).

Participation in the survey takes approximately 10 minutes and is strictly anonymous. Participants are asked to respond to (less than 10) open-ended questions about the event. All responses are anonymous, and in no case will responses from individual participants be identified. Rather, all data will be pooled and published in aggregate form only. Participants should be aware, however, that the study is not being run from a "secure" https server of the kind typically used to handle credit card transactions, so there is a small possibility that responses could be viewed by unauthorized third parties (e.g., computer hackers).

Participation is voluntary; you can skip any items, and stop completing the survey at any time. Refusal to take part in the survey involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which participants are otherwise entitled. If you do not complete the survey it does not affect your participation in the "Walk a Mile" event.

If participants have further questions about this survey or their rights, or if they wish to lodge a complaint or concern, they may contact the principal investigator, Susan V. Iverson, at siverson@kent.edu, or the Kent State University Institutional Review Board, at (330) 672-2704.

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the survey, click "I agree" to begin the experiment.

I agree
What motivated you to register for the *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* event?

What do you believe is the purpose of this event, *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*?

Why do you think high heels are part of the *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* event?

What do you think it means to be a Feminist?
Do you consider yourself a Feminist?

Yes
No

What do you know about Bystander Training?


Have you received Bystander Training?

Yes
No
APPENDIX B

POST-EVENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following web-based questionnaire seeks to learn your thoughts regarding the Walk a Mile in Their Shoes event. Before taking part in this study, please read the consent form below and click on the “I Agree” button at the bottom of the page if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate.

Consent Form

This is a web-based survey designed to assess whether Walk a Mile in Their Shoes can positively impact individual attitudes toward rape and sexualized violence against women. The survey is being administered by Kristina Karnis, honors student, and Susan Iverson of Kent State University, and it has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to adult participants (i.e., no more than the level of risk encountered in daily life).

Participation in the survey takes approximately 10 minutes and is strictly anonymous. Participants are asked to respond to (less than 10) open-ended questions about the event. All responses are anonymous, and in no case will responses from individual participants be identified. Rather, all data will be pooled and published in aggregate form only. Participants should be aware, however, that the study is not being run from a "secure" https server of the kind typically used to handle credit card transactions, so there is a small possibility that responses could be viewed by unauthorized third parties (e.g., computer hackers).

Participation is voluntary; you can skip any items, and stop completing the survey at any time. Refusal to take part in the survey involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which participants are otherwise entitled. If you do not complete the survey it does not affect your participation in the "Walk a Mile" event.

If participants have further questions about this survey or their rights, or if they wish to lodge a complaint or concern, they may contact the principal investigator, Susan V. Iverson, at swerson@kent.edu; or the Kent State University Institutional Review Board, at (330) 672-2704.

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the survey, click “I Agree” to begin the experiment.

I agree
At what time did you register for the *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* event?

- I pre-registered online.
- I registered at the event.

Overall, what are your reflections on your participation in the *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* event?

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

How did you feel walking in high heels?

What impact did *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* have on you?
How will you apply what you learned at *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* in everyday situations?

What do you think can be done to improve *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* next year?
Appendix C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

a. **Pre-Event** interview questions with staff planning *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*.

1. What are your goals for the event this year?
2. What strategies have you employed this year to increase attendance?
3. I know men are your target population for this event. How do you determine which men to recruit; what groups do you target for this event?
4. Why are high heels a part of the march?
5. What else have I not asked you about that you’d like to add?

b. **Post-Event** interview questions with staff planning *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*.

1. What are your reflections on the event?
2. In what ways did the event achieve (or did not achieve) your goals for the event?
3. What do you believe the men (your target population) took away from the event?
4. What do you think can be done to improve the event next year?
5. What else have I not asked you about that you’d like to add?

c. **Post-Event** interview questions with walkers in *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*.

1. What are your reflections on your participation in the *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* event?
2. How did you feel walking in high heels? (For men only)
3. Have you ever participated in other events like this one? (i.e. bystander training, Take Back the Night)? If yes, how did this experience compare? If no, what motivated you to participate in this event?
4. What impact did your participation have on you?
5. How will you apply what you learned through your participation?
6. What else have I not asked you about that you’d like to add?
IRB APPROVAL

RE: IRB #15-178 entitled "Powerful or Playful?: An Investigation of the Effectiveness of "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" Events

Hello,

I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as a Level II/Expedited, category 6,7 project. Approval is effective for a twelve-month period:

March 30, 2015 through March 29, 2016

*A copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email. This “stamped” copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB tries to send you annual review reminder notice by email as a courtesy. However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials. Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00000853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at Researchcompliance@kent.edu or 330-672-2704, or 330-672-8658.

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