

# "GIRL, YOU GOT THIS!" PROJECT:

## ADAPTING AN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM TO HELP TEEN GIRLS EFFECTIVELY RESIST SEXUAL DATING VIOLENCE

Report on Study 1:  
Teen Girls' Perspectives on Relationships with Young  
Men, Sexual Violence, and Resistance



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## Project Overview

The purpose of this project is to adapt and evaluate a version of the [Enhanced Assess Acknowledge Act \(EAAA\) sexual assault resistance program](#) for adolescents who identify as girls between 14 – 17 years old. EAAA is currently offered at universities across Canada and internationally and is known to university students as the *Flip the Script*™ program. EAAA is an evidence-based sexual violence resistance intervention developed by [Dr. Charlene Senn](#). EAAA places the responsibility for sexual assault on perpetrators, does not tell women what they should or should not do, and believes that women know what is best for themselves in any situation. Sexual violence continues to be a significant issue for girls and women, and resistance programs like EAAA can help to empower young women to fight back against sexual violence. A [rigorous evaluation of EAAA](#) found that university women (age 17-24) who took the program (compared to a control group) experienced a 50% reduction in attempted and completed rape. Women who took EAAA [were also able to better identify risk for sexual assault](#), had better knowledge of effective self-defense strategies, were more confident that they could defend themselves, and were less likely to believe rape myths or to blame women for sexual assault. The EAAA program offers a promising intervention for reducing sexual violence victimization among adolescent girls.

The goal of this project is to expand EAAA's reach to younger girls to reduce teen sexual violence victimization in Ontario and beyond. Conducted in partnership with community agencies, school boards, and youth from four regions in Ontario, this 5-year project involves two phases of research. Phase 1 (2018-2020) involves two research studies, as well as consultations with youth and service providers, to adapt EAAA to be relevant, engaging, and developmentally appropriate for adolescent girls. Phase 2 (2020-2023) involves evaluating the newly adapted EAAA program to test its ability to reduce sexual violence victimization among teen girls. At the end of the project, if the adapted version of EAAA works as expected, it will be made available to organizations, school boards, and communities across Canada.

For more information about this project and EAAA, please visit: [sarecentre.org](https://sarecentre.org) and <https://charlenesenn.ca/research/>.

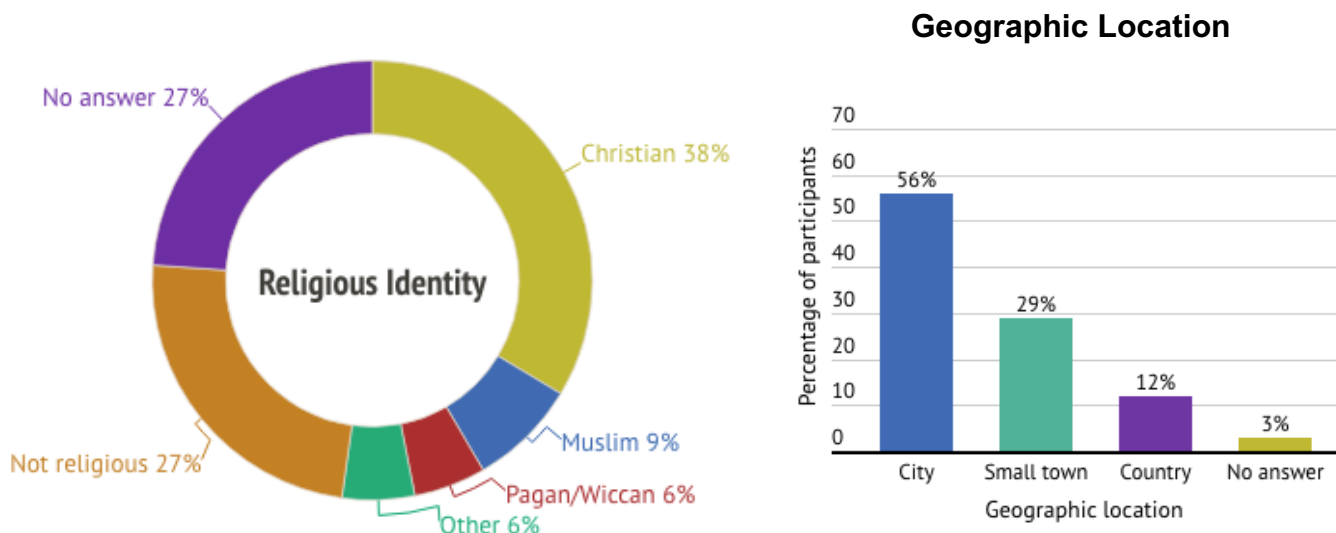
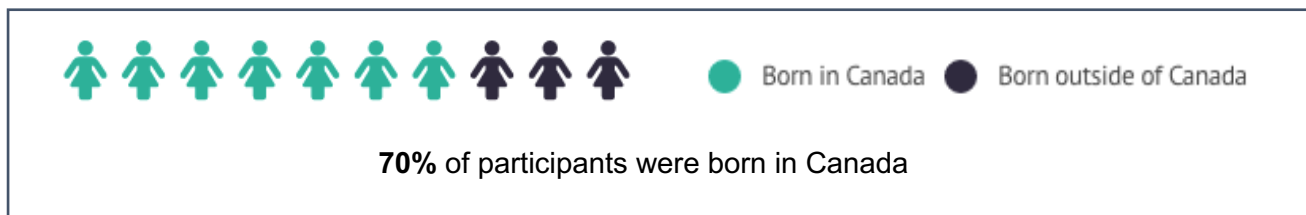
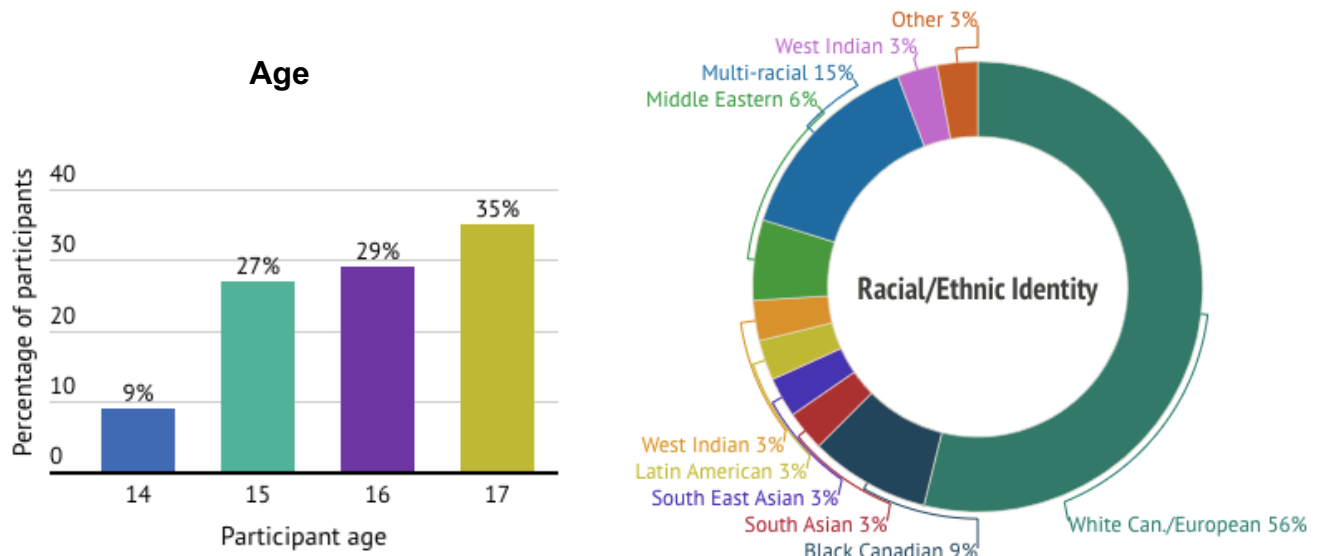
## Study 1 Overview

This report shares the main findings of Study 1 (the first of two studies in Phase 1 of the project).

The purpose of Study 1 was to learn from young women (14-17 years old) about relationships with young men (romantic, sexual, and friend/peers) and sexual violence. Specifically, participants in this study were asked to share their views on the different types of relationships that teen girls are involved in; the expectations, benefits, and challenges of those relationships; sexual coercion and assault in different relationship types; and how sexual coercion and assault can be resisted. Developing a better understanding of the experiences and viewpoints of adolescent girls is an important first step in adapting EAAA for this age group because the research and theory underlying the original EAAA program, and the specific EAAA curriculum, was developed with university women in mind. While many aspects of EAAA are important regardless of age, for example, the focus on acquaintance sexual assault, adolescent girls may be involved in different types of relationships or may experience social situations that are different from college/university-aged women. Adolescent girls may also have different beliefs about sexual assault and sexual assault resistance than older women. These differences will require EAAA to be adapted in particular ways to ensure the program is relevant, appropriate, and effective for teens.

## Study 1 Participants

Participants were 34 self-identified young women between the ages of 14 and 17 years old who were able to communicate in English and were available to attend the scheduled in-person study session in their community. See Appendix for information about the research methods, including recruitment, data collection, and analysis.

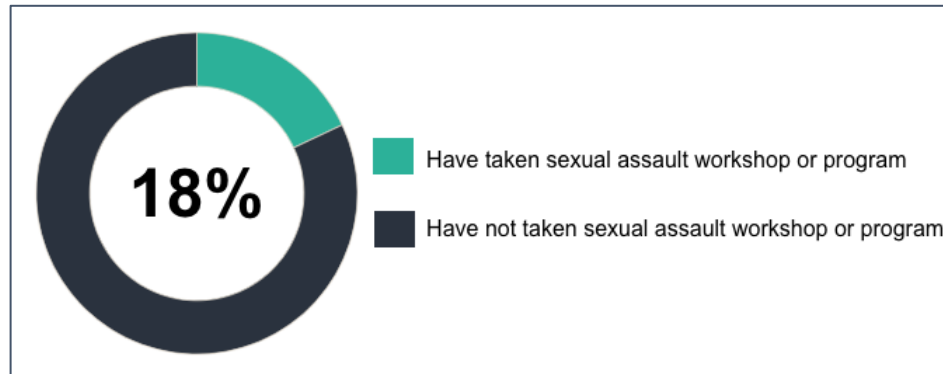


# Study 1 Findings

## Survey Findings

### *I. Sexual assault education/resistance training*

Overall, approximately 1 in 6 (18%) of the participants had taken a workshop or program on sexual assault either through school or in their community. Of those young women, all but one had participated in programs that contained self-defense training.

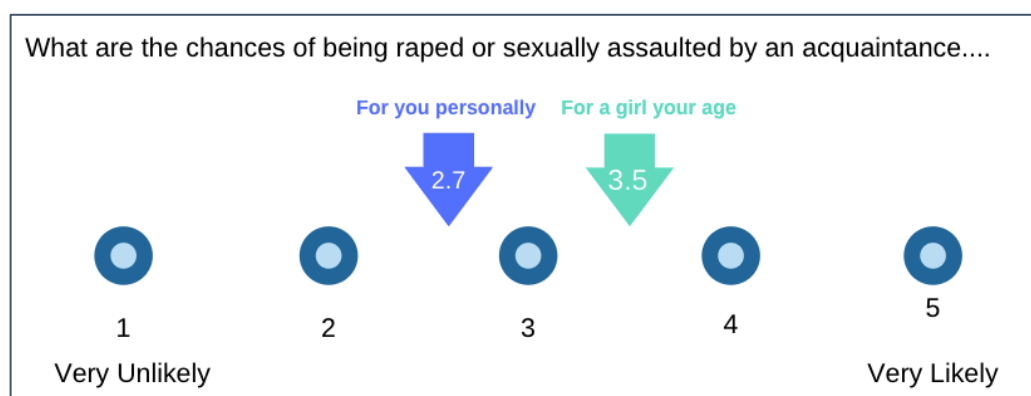


### *II. Young women's perceived risk of sexual assault*

Participants were asked to indicate how likely they thought it was that they would be sexually assaulted by someone they know, and how likely they thought it was that a girl their age would be sexually assaulted by someone she knows. Research with university women finds that young women tend to underestimate their personal risk for sexual assault, particularly when comparing themselves to other women their age. This is called the “optimism bias” effect, which finds that people tend to believe they are personally less likely to experience negative events. EAAA works to help young women detect their own risk for sexual assault more accurately to help them react more quickly when they are in the presence of someone who is coercive.

Consistent with research on college/university women, the findings of Study 1 suggest adolescent girls experience a similar “optimism bias” in their beliefs about sexual assault risk. The average response for personal risk was 2.7 on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely) compared to an average response of 3.5 when asked about the risk of a girl her age (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Perceived risk of sexual assault for herself and for a girl her age



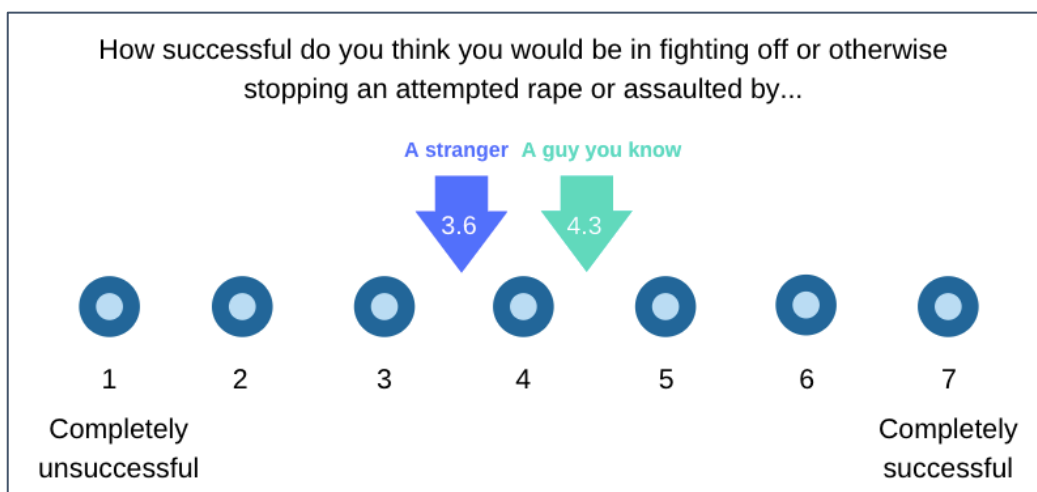
Just over half of the participants (53%) believed it was “very unlikely” or “unlikely” that they personally would be raped or sexually assaulted by someone they knew. In contrast, only 12% of participants believed the same was true for a girl their age. This finding suggests that EAAA’s focus on increasing young women’s ability to accurately and quickly detect personal risk will continue to be important in an adapted version for teen girls.

### ***III. Young women’s perceived ability to resist sexual assault***

Participants were asked to indicate how successful they believed they would be at resisting sexual assault perpetrated by 1) a stranger, and 2) a guy they knew, like a classmate or friend. Research consistently shows that the majority of sexual assault perpetrators are known to the victim. Research also shows that women believe that they have greater control over situations involving acquaintances compared to strangers, and that women experience emotional barriers to recognizing risk and resisting acquaintances in situations of sexual coercion and assault. EAAA focuses on helping young women develop skills to resist sexual coercion and assault from acquaintances. Specifically, EAAA addresses the emotional and psychological barriers to forcefully defending yourself against someone you know and may even like, such as a boyfriend.

On average, the participants believed they would be more successful at defending themselves against an acquaintance than a stranger. The average response for “a guy you know” was 4.3 on a scale of 1 (completely unsuccessful) to 7 (completely successful), compared to 3.6 for “a stranger” (see Figure 2). However, the average response for both acquaintances and strangers is around the mid-point, suggesting that participants do not feel they would be particularly successful in either situation. This finding suggests that adolescent girls may have difficulty identifying barriers to resisting acquaintances in particular. EAAA’s focus on helping young women identify and overcome emotional and psychological barriers to resisting acquaintances will continue to be an important in an adapted version of teen girls.

Figure 2. Perceived successfulness in resisting sexual assault

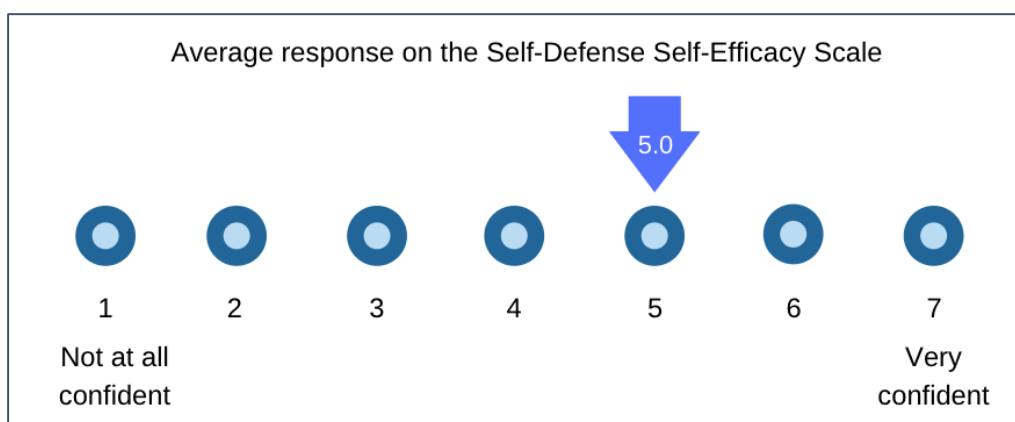


Participants were also asked to indicate how confident they believed they would be in successfully resisting different coercive situations, ranging from situations that were more and less explicitly related to sexual assault (e.g., resisting pressure from a guy to consume alcohol, resisting a guy’s persistence to pay for your meal, resisting a guy’s attempt to have a sex with you). Research shows that self-efficacy, or a sense of confidence that you can successfully engage in a behaviour such as self-defense, is essential for changing that behaviour. EAAA includes a 3-hour unit on

feminist/empowerment self-defense; this unit helps young women to develop confidence in their ability to defend themselves and provides young women with a toolbox of effective forceful physical (e.g., hitting, kicking) and verbal (e.g., yelling) self-defense strategies they can use.

Overall, participants were moderately confident that they could successfully resist coercive situations. The average response on the *Self-Defense Self-Efficacy Scale* (Ozer & Bandura, 1990) was 5.0 on a scale of 1 (not at all confident) to 7 (very confident) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Perceived confidence to resist/avoid coercive situations



Most participants (85%) were “moderately confident” to “very confident” that they could successfully resist a guy who was trying to sexually assault them, and a similar number of participants (80%) were “moderately confident” to “very confident” that they could successfully avoid a situation in which they could be sexually assaulted. 82% of participants were “moderately confident” to “very confident” that they could successfully identify the signs of sexual assault danger, and the same number of participants (82%) were “moderately confident” to “very confident” that they could avoid/prevent an assault once they had recognized the danger signs. Participants were, on average, more confident in their abilities to resist coercive situations that were not explicitly sexual, such as resisting pressure to consume alcohol, compared to sexual assault situations. Importantly, findings from other parts of the survey and the focus groups (discussed below) do not necessarily lend themselves to the high levels of confidence that the young women reported. While high levels of confidence are important, the data suggests that there is room to increase young women’s knowledge about successful resistance strategies and to help them overcome psychological barriers to using those strategies in a range of situations. Providing young women with effective, evidence-based verbal and physical self-defense strategies (as is currently done in EAAA) may further increase adolescent girls’ confidence to avoid a range of coercive situations while simultaneously increasing their use of effective self-defense strategies.

#### ***IV. Young women’s attitudes towards sexual violence***

Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed with statements reflecting rape myths and men’s use of sexual violence against women. Rape myths are false and stereotypical beliefs about sexual assault, perpetrators, and victims. Research shows that while focusing on attitudes alone is not enough to create long lasting changes to the perpetration of sexual violence, attitudes about sexual violence play an important role in sexual assault resistance. For example, women who are more accepting of men’s aggression may be at greater risk of sexual violence because they are slower to acknowledge their personal risk and take action in the situation. Attitudes also

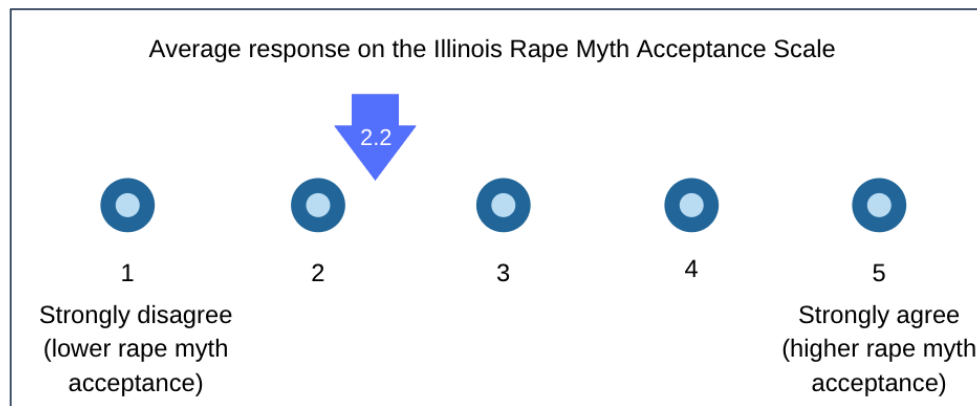


play an important role in shifting cultural beliefs about sexual violence. EAAA helps young women to reject false and stereotypical ideas about sexual violence.

### *Rape myth acceptance*

On average, participants tended to reject rape myths, suggesting that participants typically did not agree with stereotypical ideas about sexual violence such as the idea that it is only “counts” as sexual assault if there are physical injuries. The average overall response on the *Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999; McMahon & Farmer, 2011) was 2.2 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Young women’s acceptance of rape myths

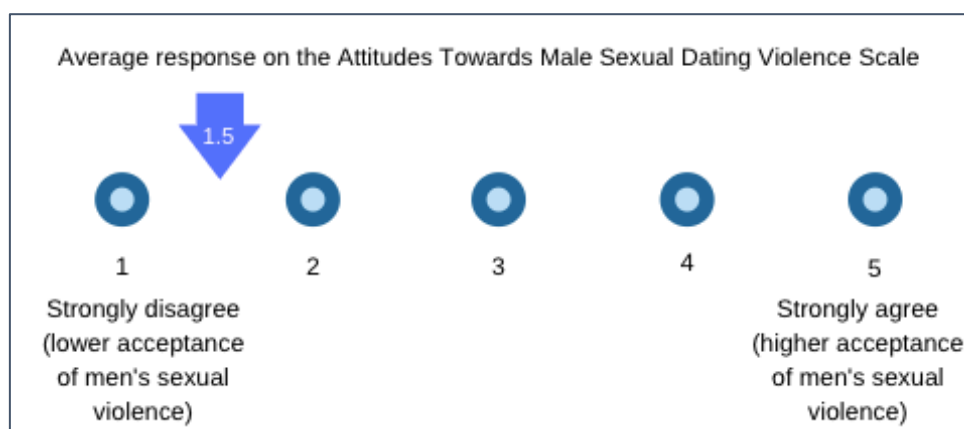


While most participants strongly rejected rape myths that suggested young women were responsible for rape because of their drinking or clothing, 50% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that young men commit sexual assault because of their strong sex drives. Participants strongly rejected rape myths that suggested that victims must physically resist and that it was only “really” rape if there was a weapon used or the victim has bruises. However, over 40% of participants agreed or strongly agreed (and 30% neither agreed nor disagreed) that girls who get caught cheating often claim it was sexual assault. While overall these findings indicate that rape myth acceptance was relatively low, there are several specific rape myths that should be given greater attention in the adapted EAAA program. More focus on challenging all rape myths in an adapted version of EAAA will likely be necessary because these participants chose to volunteer in this study and likely have lower than average rape myth acceptance than the general population of adolescent girls.

### *Attitudes towards men’s use of sexual violence*

On average, participants tended to strongly reject men’s use of sexual violence. The average overall response on the *Attitudes Towards Male Sexual Dating Violence Scale* (Price, Byers, and the Dating Violence Research Team, 1999) was 1.5 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Young women's acceptance of men's sexual violence



While most participants (80%) strongly agreed that guys do not own their girlfriend's bodies, 1 in 4 participants (27%) "neither agreed nor disagreed" or "agreed" that when guys are sexually excited, they cannot stop themselves from having sex. Relatedly, about 30% of participants "neither agreed nor disagreed" or "agreed" that guys often have to be rough with their girlfriends to turn them on. Encouragingly, 100% of participants "strongly disagreed" or "disagreed" that it is okay to pressure a girl for sex if she has had sex in the past. Similar to the rape myth findings, these findings suggest that while the participants did not endorse young men's use of sexual violence, certain ideas, such as the idea that men are biologically driven to have sex, are unable to stop themselves once they have started, and are naturally sexually aggressive, continue to be held by young women and attention to these ideas will need to be enhanced in the EAAA program. Similar to the rape myth data, it is also important to remember that these participants likely have lower than average acceptance of men's use of sexual violence compared to the general population of adolescent girls.

## Focus Group (Group Discussion) Findings

The findings presented below are both descriptive (i.e., what participants said) and interpretative (i.e., the meaning of what participants said within the broader social context). Some of these findings come directly from the questions asked during the focus group. Other findings are recurring themes in the data rather than responses to a direct question. Please note that the findings reported here represent the main themes in the data and do not include all themes or responses from participants. The quotes provided below come from the study participants.

### I. "Relationships" Defined

Participants were asked on both the survey and as part of the focus group to identify different relationship labels (and their meanings) commonly used by their peers. The most frequently reported relationship types and common definitions are listed in the table below. There was some variability in the definitions provided and participants acknowledged that these terms can mean different things to different people.

Label	Most common definitions
Dating/Boyfriend-Girlfriend	Committed, exclusive, "serious" or long-term romantic relationship. Provide emotional support, physical connection, and are usually sexual. Some reference made to the relationship being public and doing activities together.

Wheeling	Getting to know someone by talking to them (often on social media), usually to “figure out” if you want to date someone. May involve flirting and sexual activity. Mutual interest but not “in a relationship.” Some expectation for loyalty/exclusivity. Terms sometimes used interchangeably. Notably, “wheeling” was not a familiar term to all participants and seemed to only be used in certain geographic regions.
Having “a thing”	
Talking	
Fling	Semi-serious, short-term relationship.
Friends with Benefits / Friends with Bennies / Fuck Buddies	Ongoing, contractual casual sexual relationship with friend or acquaintance. No emotions or romance involved. “No strings attached.”
Hooking up	Casual, less frequent sexual encounters. Often take place at parties. No commitment, “no strings attached.” Sometimes spontaneous. May not know the person very well. Could hook up with more than one person during the same time period.

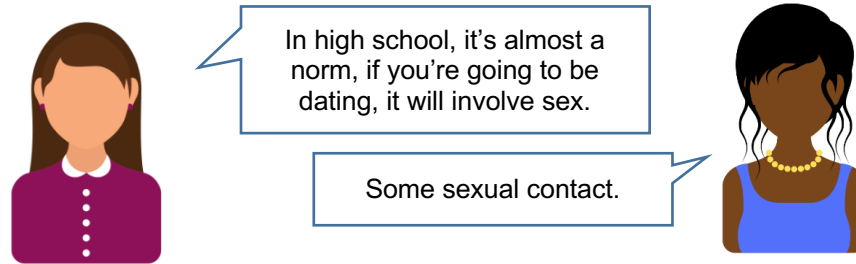
## ***II. Dating Relationships: Expectations, Benefits, Communication***

### *Expectations in Dating Relationships*

The participants spoke about a number of expectations they believed were common in heterosexual/straight dating relationships. These expectations (listed below) are consistent with mainstream cultural ideas about heterosexual relationships, such as traditional gender norms (e.g., men are the financial providers), romantic love, and heterosexual sexual scripts (e.g., men’s needs/desires take priority in relationships).

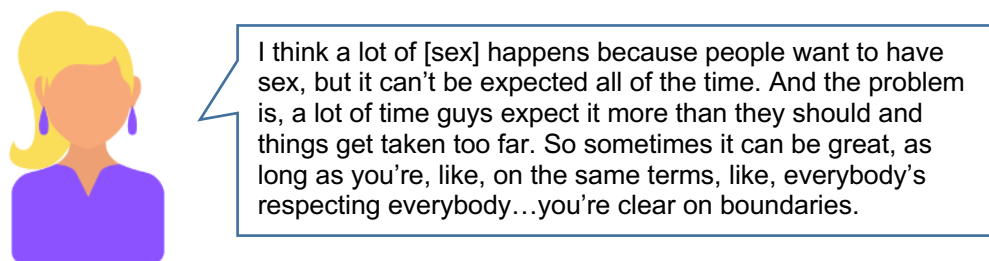
The expectations provided by the participants include expectations for how a dating relationship will go and how boyfriends should behave towards their girlfriends. Common expectations included:

- Exclusivity/loyalty (no cheating, no flirting with other girls, not asking for or sending “nudes” to other girls)
- Being respected. When asked to explain what this means, participants said:
  - Boyfriends not controlling what girls do on their own time/with friends or who they hang out with
  - Showing their girlfriend attention
  - Not getting mad at girls for wanting to “do their own thing”; giving their girlfriend the space she needs
- Being introduced to his friends (i.e., not keeping the relationship a secret)
- Being spoiled (bought gifts, taken on dates, given his clothes to wear [e.g., a sweatshirt], and other “gestures”)
- Being emotionally and financially supported
- That boyfriends will be polite, nice, and not force girlfriends to do something she does not want to do
- Love; “I love you” will be exchanged
- Sexual activity or that you will “have sex”



**Participants generally believed that young men and women had different expectations related to sexual activity.** Participants agreed that young men would expect to be sexually active with a girlfriend and this was believed to be particularly true for relationships where the boyfriend was older. Participants also agreed that young women would expect their boyfriends to want to engage in sexual activity with them because “that’s how [society] usually molded them to be” and as a girl, “you kind of try to be okay with that.” Beyond this general expectation for sex, participants believed that young men would expect their girlfriends to “comply with everything,” suggesting that young men expected to have the sex they want on their terms.

The idea that sex is an expectation was problematized by some young women who made connections between the expectation for sex and sexual violence:



There was some discussion about expectations of “time” before engaging in sexual activity in a dating relationship. However, there was disagreement among participants about “how long was too long” to wait before having sex. Participants also acknowledged that the length of time would depend on the individual people involved in the relationship.

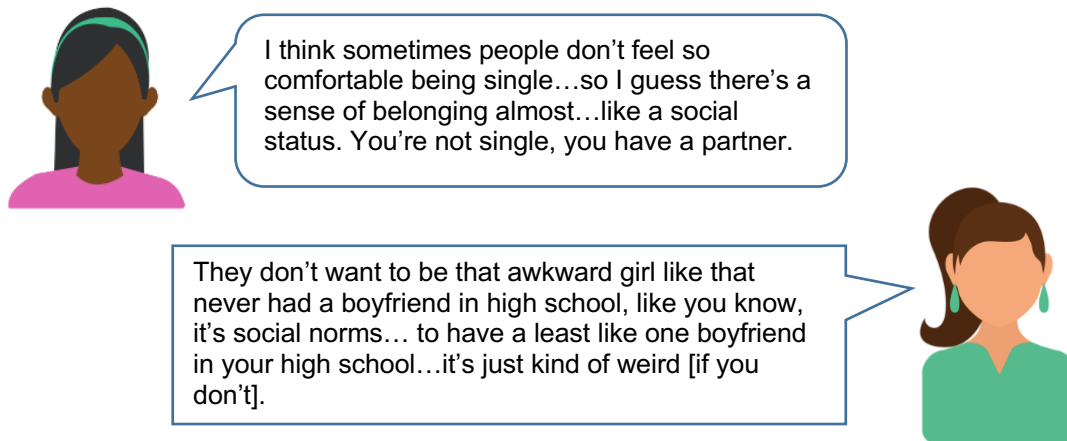
Finally, participants also believed that many young women are interested in having a physically affectionate or sexual relationship and there was **some discussion about the lack of attention given to women’s pleasure and sexual desire in teen relationships.**

### *Heterosexual Dating Relationships, Benefits, and Social Status*

Young women identified the following benefits of being in a dating relationship:

- Learning about yourself (what you want and do not want)
- Emotional connection and comfort
- Sex (“if it’s consensual and everybody’s having fun”)
- Affection
- Attention
- Sense of security

Importantly, **having a boyfriend was a way for girls to gain social status** and offered them a sense of social belonging:

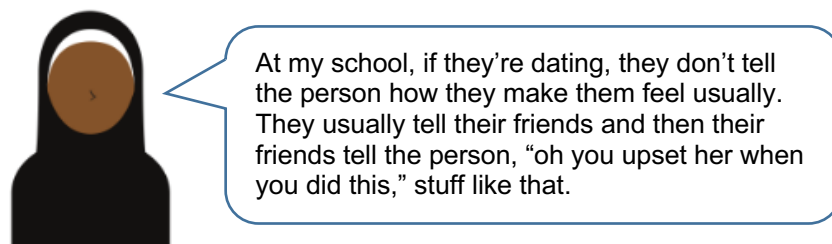


Dating relationships were described as being highly public and visible on social media. For example, participants said that couples often add their anniversary date to their Instagram profiles to make it known that they were a couple. Participants also spoke about girls posting pictures or comments about the gifts they received from their boyfriends as a way to “brag” about their relationships.

The other relationship types (e.g., wheeling, friends with benefits) did not appear to offer girls the same access to social status as dating relationships did. This is possibly because these relationships were “more private and personal” and therefore not shared publicly.

### *Communication in Relationships*

Participants were asked to discuss expectations around communication in relationships. Overwhelmingly, **participants agreed that young men's needs drove dating relationships** and that girls were not expected to voice their own needs, values, boundaries, or expectations, sexual or otherwise, to their boyfriends. In fact, communication in general was perceived to be quite limited between dating partners and was often facilitated through friends:



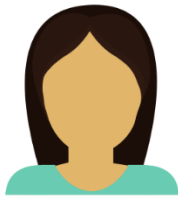
While participants agreed that there should be more communication in relationships and that communication was a sign of a “healthy relationship,” there was general consensus that **girls experienced barriers to communicating their own needs, desires, boundaries, and preferences in relationships**. Participants reported barriers such as “being made fun of” for “expecting too much” from their boyfriends. They also said that they would be called “crazy,” “high maintenance,” “needy,” “boring,” “controlling,” “slutty,” “moving too fast,” or “pushy”, and that the relationship would be seen as “too much work.” This would ultimately jeopardize future relationships because girls would have these stigmatizing labels follow them through high school

and other guys would not want to be involved with them. Participants also reported that their boyfriends would simply break up with them because they were perceived as being “too difficult.”

People don't want to always say something that might put the relationship at risk in any way. If you're going up to the bedroom, and you're like, “we're not going to do *this* specifically, you don't want that person to be like, “oh never mind” and walk away.



Participants reported that there was **an expectation that conversations about needs, boundaries, values, and interests would have occurred before “dating”** – in those “pre-dating” relationships (wheeling, having a thing) where the purpose is to get to know someone. Waiting until you were dating was seen as a violation of dating norms.



If you're in a relationship where you are boyfriend and girlfriend...you don't have to take that step where, like, oh, are you ready? You want this, right? It's like, you know you both want it because you already checked with each other. You're in that relationship, you've taken that step where, like, by saying that you are boyfriend and girlfriend, you want the same things.

While the participants recognized the silencing that girls experienced in heterosexual dating relationships to be inequitable, they also believed that discussions about needs and boundaries were expected to take place “before” dating. Sexual communication was largely seen as a one-time event, rather than an ongoing process throughout the relationship.

### ***III. Technology, Sexuality, and Sexual Coercion***

**Participants reported that the exchanging of “nudes” was a very common practice.** “Nudes” was used as a broad term to describe any photo taken of oneself with the intended purpose of “turning on” a guy. “Nudes” do not necessarily include nudity and could include young women in lingerie, swimsuits, or underwear.

Participants reported that guys typically “request” nudes by sending an unsolicited “dick pic” over Snapchat. Girls understood that guys expect a response from girls in the form of their own nudes. Alternatively, young men would first engage young women in conversation over Snapchat or text and try to convince her to send nudes.

**Storing and sharing nudes (particularly among boys) without the consent of the sender (typically girls) was also believed to be very common.** While photos shared over Snapchat disappear after a short period of time and the sender is alerted if the receiver takes a screen shot of the image, girls reported a number of common work-arounds that they know young men use including using another phone to take a picture of the nude. Once the nudes are saved (typically without the girl's knowledge that it was saved), they are often stored in password protected secret folders on Snapchat called My Eyes Only.

Participants consistently commented on the relationship between sexual coercion/pressure and nudes:



I think something very common now, in this day and age, is just peer pressure with nudes. Physical, like in-person sexual assault isn't as common as when you're being peer pressured to send nudes to somebody and then that type of stuff gets spread around and you're embarrassed. That's very common.

**The practice of requesting and sending/receiving nudes was sometimes explicitly coercive** including the use of threats and blackmail to coerce girls into sending further nudes and threatening to sharing photos as revenge following a break up.

There was some debate among participants about the consequences associated with “having your nudes leaked”. However, in general, having your nudes shared without your permission was connected to negative social consequences.

#### ***IV. Sexual Consent and Consent Education***

All of the participants agreed that consent was important, that it could be revoked at any time, and that the lack of consent was sexual assault, regardless of the type of relationship. However, **there was a range of perspectives on how consent is typically negotiated and communicated** between partners in real life, how it ideally *should* be negotiated and communicated, and what is required for something to “count” as consent (e.g., verbal “yes” or body language only).

There were **competing opinions about whether or not guys pay attention to or can tell when girls are not interested in the sexual activity**. Some participants believed that guys were aware when there was a lack of consent, for example, by someone looking uncomfortable in a situation; whereas other participants believed that guys could not always tell when someone was uncomfortable.

Sometimes, it looks like the girl's just shy. But I feel like, some guys, like use that as an excuse to go further, because they're like, “oh she's just shy”. But they know. I feel like they know. It changes from being shy to actually not wanting to do something.



When asked how they know that guys know when they are crossing a line, participants spoke about the types of refusals we make in non-sexual situations and how this is understood to mean no, for example, that “moving away” means no in any situation, that we are all familiar with basic social cues, and this is “common sense.”

**The process of getting consent was suggested to differ across relationship types.** Friends with benefits relationships, which are entirely sexual without an emotional or romantic component, were described as having “implied” consent. These relationships were considered to have “implied” consent because, as described above, conversations around boundaries were suggested to have already taken place at the beginning of the relationship. Participants also said that consent was implied because if you did not want to engage in sexual activity, you would not meet up with your friends with benefits partner (because the purpose of the meet up is for sex).



Therefore, if you met up with this person, the assumption was that sexual activity would take place. This idea that friends with benefits had implied consent was in contrast to dating relationships where consent was not considered “implied.” Participants suggested that this is because there were multiple facets to these relationships, including sexual, emotional, and financial. While this may seem to initially suggest that consent conversations are more common in dating relationships than friends with benefits relationships, the previously discussed findings that girls in dating relationships were not expected to communicate their boundaries to their boyfriends instead suggests that conversations about consent are not happening at any stage in dating relationships. Dating relationships were also described as having “permanent” consent whereby boyfriends come to think they are entitled to girls’ bodies; an idea that was considered problematic by participants and that further suggests that communication related to sexual consent is often missing from teen relationships.

Importantly, participants believed that there were differences between the way that consent is taught and the way it actually happens in the moment. **They agreed that explicit “asks” for consent were uncommon.**



...Consent, usually people don't verbally say, “yes, we're doing this and I am okay with that.” It's like, you're doing it and you look like you're okay with it. So, that's what ends up happening most of the time.”

According to participants, teens are getting information about how to negotiate consent and sexual communication from TV, movies, and pornography where there is typically a complete absence of these discussions.

Participants also spoke about consent education in their schools. In general, **consent education was described as not being taken seriously by students:**



It's really a joke sometimes at our school because you'll see guys making fun of it and they'll be talking to each other and they'll be like, “oh will you let me do this, can I do this”?

Especially at our school, someone will go to tap someone on the shoulder and be like “uh nuh, didn't consent to that, that's rape...It's become this big joke.



As one specific example, two participants (who were in the same focus group) reported not liking the “[consent and tea](#)” video that was shown in some of their classes because it was seen as a “humor” video. The participants explained that they are aware that you should not “pour tea” on someone who is passed out and the issue is not “not understanding no.” They wanted a more serious and realistic video.



## V. Sexual Coercion and Assault

Overall, **participants recognized sexual assault to be a common experience for young women, and that perpetrators were often acquaintances or intimate partners.** This is in contrast to their perceived level of risk for sexual assault for both themselves and other girls their age reported above, which were, on average, around the midpoint (sexual assault was neither likely nor unlikely). Reflecting the survey data on rape myth acceptance, while the participants did not often explicitly believe rape myths, their beliefs in rape myths were sometimes more subtle:

I feel like every woman I know has faced some type of sexual assault, so I don't think it's always about what you're wearing. So, like there's girls who wear literally like they cover everything, and they still get sexually assaulted.



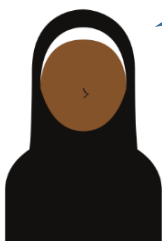
Some participants endorsed the idea that men who commit assault are not “bad” guys, they are just uneducated. This is counter to the idea that some participants held that the issue is not about a lack of understanding.

### *Resisting Sexual Coercion and Assault*

The participants were asked to list as many strategies to resist sexual coercion/assault as possible. **Their strategies included things young women could do “in the moment” to resist coercion as well as more general precautionary strategies for avoiding situations where sexual coercion could occur:**

- Say no
- Physically move him off of you
- Make up an excuse to leave situation (e.g., “I have to pick up a friend”)
- Make up an excuse to avoid sexual activity (e.g., “I have my period”)
- Delay (“not today” or “not right now”)
- Do something to “turn him off”
- Hang out in groups / meet at a familiar location on your terms
- Clearly outline your boundaries

When participants were given a specific and common coercive situation to consider (a boyfriend trying to physically force his girlfriend to give him oral sex by pushing her head down), some young women had a considerably more difficult time identifying strategies they could employ in that situation:

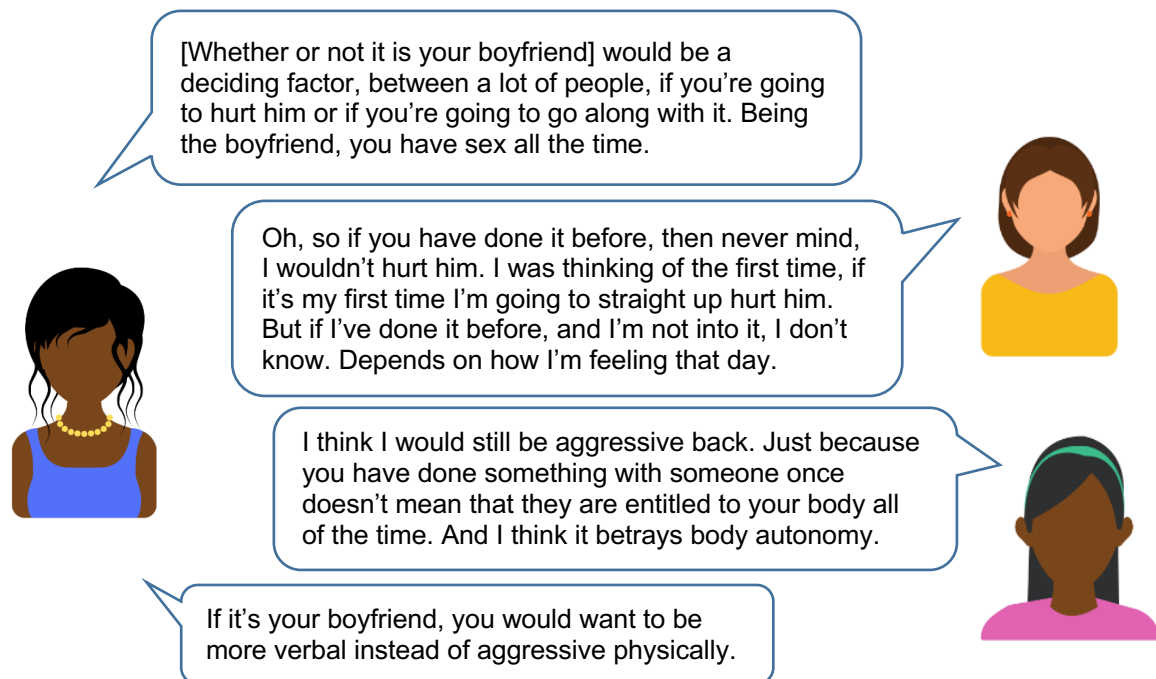


I don't really know what you do in that situation. I feel like you have to think fast because you don't really...you don't want to do something. If you're being forced, your brain goes into ...

...panic mode, and you don't know what to do. Now you're scared and you just can't think clearly so you just stay calm and, I don't want to say hope for the best, but you're kind of just going to have to and hope that his person is just a good person, has good morals enough to let your head go and let you walk out.



However, **other young women immediately identified a range of forceful physical strategies to employ in this situation**, including biting, kicking, and punching. When prompted by the facilitator to consider if it might be difficult to use physical force against your boyfriend, participants had mixed responses. Some young women said it did not matter who the person was; they would apply equal force regardless. In contrast, other participants believed that the most likely outcome of such a scenario would be that the young woman would give in and “just do it.” They commented that this is a very common situation in their schools. This is in contrast to the survey data that suggests that participants believed they would be more successful at defending themselves against someone known to them compared to a stranger.



Taken together, the findings related to sexual resistance suggest that 1) participants' current “tool box” of resistance strategies are mostly non-forceful strategies (e.g., make up excuse to leave), and therefore unlikely to be effective, and 2) similar to research on sexual assault and resistance with university women, resisting coercive acquaintances is a complex process that involves a number of social and cognitive factors for adolescent girls (e.g., deciding whether or not to use physical force against a boyfriend). Further research and programs to help young women develop effective resistance skills and overcome barriers to resistance are needed.

### *Disclosure and Help Seeking*

**Participants described the decision to disclose an assault as one that means you have to “deal with the judgement that comes with that.”** Participants recognized that disclosing sexual assault is often accompanied by questions about your own actions and responses, such as “why didn't you fight back?” Participants spoke about self-blame and self-doubt as particularly strong barriers to disclosure and help seeking (“it's always your fault”), especially if you were in a relationship with the person who assaulted you because you “don't want to be in the wrong.”

## ***VII. Young Women's Advice for Younger Girls and Their Ongoing Information Needs***

The young women were asked to share the advice they wish they had been given at the start of high school or advice they wish they could give younger girls. They offered the following advice:



- You have a right to say no
- If someone continues to make you uncomfortable, they are not a person you want to be with
- You are allowed to advocate for your own sexual pleasure
- You do not need a relationship in high school
- Look after your own happiness first
- Do not be so trusting of guys – recognize that they may be trying to manipulate you
- Be wary of older guys in their 20s who are trying to date you

In addition to sharing advice with younger girls, young women also identified current information needs and recommendations for improving access to information for youth:



Participants reported that police-facilitated presentations on nudes were common in their schools but that the police focused primarily on stories about the consequences of sharing nudes, which was not perceived as helpful. The young women wanted the police to give more education about nudes such as how to report the sharing of nudes and what happens after you report.



Relatedly, the police were described as intimidating and students felt like they would be in trouble for asking certain questions. The participants recommended someone with more knowledge on the issue of sexual assault and consent do this education so that students feel more comfortable and supported.



Participants identified a number of barriers to seeking help from school-based counsellors and social workers, particularly when students felt that they would be in legal trouble. This was suggested by participants to be a key reason why teens do not seek out support or help from adults and instead disclose to their friends. Guidance counsellors/teachers were often perceived to be unsupportive of students because they did not listen or show students that they cared, including blaming students for their assaults, for example by asking what they were wearing or why they were hanging out alone with boys. The young women also reported that teachers often gossiped about students and students felt that their information was not being kept confidential.



It was recommended that schools provide students with sexual assault-specific resources and support, separate from information on bullying. It was also recommended that school staff should not assume which students will or will not need these resources/supports and that these resources are visible and accessible to all students.



Participants also reported that they needed more visible/accessible/better advertised information related to sexual health, for example, that they could go to the public health units for free condoms and emergency contraception. Participants indicated that it was not always clear to them where they could go for resources and support, especially in Catholic high schools.



Finally, schools should offer free self-defense training for girls that focuses on acquaintance assault scenarios and non-violent sexual assault scenarios such as someone touching you inappropriately.



We need the tools to prevent [sexual assault] in the first place

## Conclusion

The majority of young women in this study had never received training or education on sexual assault and believed that resources, support, and education on sexual assault were badly needed. This finding speaks to the need for effective sexual assault resistance programs to be made widely available to youth and suggests that adolescent girls would see an adapted version of EAAA to be valuable to them.

The findings of Study 1 were largely consistent with sexual assault research with college/university-aged women and on sexual assault resistance broadly. This study confirmed the importance of key components of the original EAAA program (e.g., focusing on acquaintance sexual assault, overcoming emotional obstacles to resisting acquaintances, forceful physical and verbal self-defense training). This study also highlighted some of the ways that teen girls are thinking about relationships, sexual violence, and sexual assault resistance that have implications for how EAAA is adapted. For example, while the participants largely rejected the rape myth that men who commit sexual assault are mentally ill, they were more likely to believe the myth that coercive men are simply uneducated and unaware that they are being coercive. The adapted EAAA may need a greater focus on addressing rape myths and counteracting the idea that sexual assault is the result of miscommunication. A key take away from this study is the diversity in viewpoints and beliefs that teen girls have about sexual violence, consent, and resistance. It will be important for the adapted EAAA program to ensure the program addresses this range. Finally, this study provided important information about the social and relationship experiences of teen girls that will inform changes to EAAA, such as including a greater focus on casual sexual and romantic relations (i.e., friends with benefits, wheeling), incorporating information and skill-building exercises specific to nudes and social media as they relate to dating/acquaintance sexual violence, and including additional information (above and beyond the original program) about seeking help for sexual assault.

## Next Steps for the Project

The findings from Study 1 are being used to inform some initial adaptations to the EAAA program, such as language and scenarios used in the program. The University of Windsor researchers will be seeking input and feedback from the project's partner organizations and stakeholders on this report and on adaptations to the EAAA program in the coming months.

Recruitment for Study 2, which involves delivering a lightly adapted version of EAAA (with updated language and scenarios) to young women between 14 and 17 years old to receive feedback on the program, will begin in September 2019. Data collection for Study 2 will be complete in March 2020 and a report detailing the key findings from the study will be available in June 2020.

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“

People, for so long, didn't talk about [sex]...People didn't really like talking about their sexual preferences or experiences...It's something that you need to talk about if it's consistent in your life. You need to know about how to be safe and all the things with your partners and stuff. It's really important to do that, to make sure you have a healthy relationship.

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- Study 1 Participant

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# Appendix

## Study 1 Methods

### *Recruitment*

Participants were recruited through social media (paid advertisements on Facebook and Instagram and posts made to the project's social media accounts), advertising through the project's partner agencies and other community organizations via recruitment posters displayed in meeting areas/offices, distributed to clients, and/or posted on the organization's social media. Recruitment posters were also posted to newspaper and other (e.g., Kijiji) classified sites.

### *Data Collection & Analysis*

Eight mixed-method focus groups were conducted in four communities across southwestern and eastern Ontario between February and March 2019. Parental consent was obtained for participants under 16 years old. Upon arriving at the session, participants gave informed consent and were given a \$20 gift card and reimbursed for transportation costs required to participate in the study. Participants completed an anonymous survey to prime them to the topic of relationships and sexual violence and to capture individual perspectives and attitudes about sexual violence. Following the survey, the young women participated in an audio-recorded group discussion about relationships and sexual violence. At the end of the session, participants were provided with additional information about the project and a list of local and online resources that they were encouraged to contact if needed.

The quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group) data were analyzed by the University of Windsor researchers. The focus group analysis was supported by two undergraduate research assistants and members from the project's Girls' Research & Advisory Committee (a youth advisory committee made up of 10 young women in Ontario). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns in the data.

For more information on Study 1 recruitment, data collection, and analysis, please contact Dr. Sara Crann, Department of Psychology, University of Windsor by email ([scrann@uwindsor.ca](mailto:scrann@uwindsor.ca)).