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## “Make Sure You’re Not Getting Yourself in Trouble:” Building Sexual Relationships and Preventing Sexual Violence at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point

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*Sexual violence continues to present a problem on college campuses nationwide and among members of the U.S. military. This study attended to patterns of response in how students (cadets) at the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) discussed sexual and romantic relationships, both potential and actual, in order to examine how, if at all, they enact their sexuality-related values. Constructivist grounded theory was used to analyze semistructured interviews with three male and three female cadets from each of the 4 years of the undergraduate program, in which they are intended to become “leaders of character” who will serve as Army officers. Findings indicated limitations in cadets’ access to developing and implementing sexuality-related skills within this context. Cadets’ fear and distrust erected barriers to their pursuing their desires; the ways in which cadets avoided getting in trouble for sexual harassment or sexual assault shifted responsibility from a potential perpetrator onto a potential victim; and cadets were caught in dilemmas regarding romantic relationships as sources of both emotional support and social stigma. These findings have implications for promoting gender equity and for preventing sexual violence at this institution and at others like it, including both university campuses and other military settings.*

Effective sexual violence prevention strategies are urgently needed both among institutions of higher education and in the military (Cantor et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). Service academies function at the intersection of these two systems, as military institutions that provide a competitive undergraduate education to young people training to become military officers. Thus, research addressing sexual violence at service academies can inform sexual violence prevention efforts in higher education, throughout the military, and in other contexts in which young people transition to adulthood.

### Sexual Violence in the Military and at West Point

Rates of sexual violence in the U.S. military are higher than in civilian contexts, although findings range widely from study to study: 9% to 33% of women report attempted or completed rape; 22% to 84% of women report being sexually harassed; 1% to 3% of men in the military report sexual assault; and 36% to 74% of men report being sexually harassed (Turchik & Wilson, 2010). Data collected

by the U.S. Department of Defense (2012) indicate that 91% of victims of sexual assault are female and 99% of perpetrators are male. As for the military service academies, during academic year 2013–2014, when this study was conducted, there were 29 investigations of sexual assault: Individuals under investigation for perpetration included 24 men and three women; victims included four men and 26 women (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). In an anonymous survey of U.S. Military Academy (USMA) cadets in the spring of 2015, 8% of women and 1% of men reported unwanted sexual contact so far that year; 55% of women and 12% of men reported sexual harassment (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015).

### Current Approaches to Sexual Violence Prevention

There are many ways of understanding why sexual violence occurs and how best to prevent it. Feminist theories of power and control emphasize the ways in which sexual violence is an act of interpersonal aggression that can be used to demonstrate or gain power over someone else (Brownmiller, 1975). Another set of theories is organized around human sexuality and human relationships, understanding the social production of sexual activity on a spectrum from consent to coercion (Gavey, 2005). Several recent approaches to sexual violence

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prevention on college campuses center around the concept of sexual consent, such as affirmative consent policies, as well as policies that allow for nonverbal consent but note threats to consent capacity such as coercion and intoxication (Ali, 2011; American College Health Association, 2008; State of California, 2014).

The U.S. Department of Defense (2015) defined sexual violence or sexual assault as “intentional sexual contact characterized by use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent.” Thus, the concept of consent is key for identifying incidents of assault, even in the absence of clear force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority. Consent is defined as “words or overt acts indicating a freely given agreement to the sexual conduct at issue by a competent person” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). USMA efforts to educate cadets regarding the prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment include monthly newsletters, small group discussions, and expert speakers (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012).

Research examining prevention on college campuses has identified programs that impact individual knowledge of and attitudes toward sexual violence (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; DeGue et al., 2014). However, best practices for prevention include addressing behavioral skills, as well as implementing an ecological approach, which means responding to the culture, addressing institutional structures, and reshaping peer norms (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009; Nation et al., 2003). The present study draws on these prevention practices by examining individual-level behavioral skills in tandem with institutional-level norms and values.

### Conceptualizing Consent as a Behavioral Skill

Consent can be conceptualized as a dynamic behavioral skill, representing the capacity to act in an organized way in a particular set of situations, namely, situations that are potentially sexual (Arbeit, 2014; Fischer & Bidell, 2006). Consent can be understood as the active communication of an internal feeling of willingness to engage in a particular sexual activity with a particular person at a particular time (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999). Consent capacity is a product of individual behavioral ability, interpersonal interactions, and elements of the social context such as power and privilege (Arbeit, 2014). To enact consent freely, the people participating in the sexual encounter need to have both the ability and the access to saying yes and saying no as valid options (Powell, 2010). The skills involved in negotiating consent thus include asking about sexual activity in a way that makes yes and no both valid options for the other person, saying yes to communicate an internal feeling of willingness, saying no in the absence of an internal feeling of willingness, and accepting another person’s no easily and immediately (Arbeit, 2014).

To design ecologically based prevention approaches that develop skills for negotiating consent, it is important to understand how young people currently engage in and make meaning of sexual communication. College students have reported a reliance on nonverbal signals and passive responses (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014). Group differences between men and women indicate that men are more likely than women to interpret consent from nonverbal signals alone, and to start touching a female partner to see if they are pushed away, instead of working to proactively check for consent (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014; Jozkowski, Peterson, Sanders, Dennis, & Reece, 2014). In looking for nonconsent, men focus on nonverbal signals, in contrast with women’s reports that they indicate nonconsent verbally (Jozkowski, Peterson, et al., 2014).

Heterosexual sexual negotiations among college-age young adults continue to reflect traditional sexual scripts in which men are expected to be the initiators of sexual activity, sometimes in aggressive ways, and women are expected to act as gatekeepers and demonstrate resistance (Fantasia, 2011; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). The expectation of token resistance contributes to a dynamic in which men continue to prompt, pressure, or simply persist (Fantasia, 2011; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). A “yes” in response to pressure or repeated requests is a form of compliance that does not represent consent, illustrating the ways in which sexual communication and sexual activities fall on a spectrum between consent and coercion (Gavey, 2005; Impett & Peplau, 2003). Indeed, young women report continuing their active participation in unwanted sexual activity because they do not know how to interrupt, divert, or stop the process (Fantasia, 2011). These gendered patterns underscore the importance of attending to young people’s negotiation of sexual consent as constituted in and through particular cultural contexts and structures of power (Arbeit, 2014; Carmody, 2005; Tolman, 2006).

### Assessing the Ecology Through Sexuality-Related Values

The institutional ecology at USMA revolves around the three pillars of academics, athletics, and military training, with a focus on character and military ethics. This explicit focus on character and ethics fosters institutional norms and values that may impact the values cadets seek to enact with regard to sexual relationships and sexual violence prevention. At the same time, aspects of military culture associated with hypermasculinity, violence, and dominance may exacerbate sexual aggression (Hunter, 2007; Nelson, 2002; Turchik & Wilson, 2010). Refuting or endorsing common rape myths represents another relevant aspect of peer culture and institutional ecology. Rape myth acceptance involves false beliefs that excuse coercive behavior and blame the victims of sexual violence for what another person did to them; among college students rape myth acceptance has

been associated with a history of borderline pressure behaviors and higher proclivity to rape (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006; Jozkowski, Sanders, Peterson, Dennis, & Reece, 2014).

Dominant sexuality-related values on college campuses continue to reflect a traditional sexual script in which men are considered wanting and deserving of sex and thus expected to be the initiators of sex; women, cast as the gatekeepers of sex, are expected neither to want it nor to refuse it (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Jozkowski, Peterson, et al., 2014). Within this context, women and men report a double standard through which their sexual activity is judged, with men lauded for their sexual accomplishments and women denigrated for engaging in sexual activity deemed excessive or inappropriate (Tolman, 2006; Tolman, Davis, & Bowman, 2016). Indeed, some men report deceiving and intentionally misleading their partners as they pursue sex, for example, by inserting their penis into a partner's vagina and claiming that it was an accident (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). The values of the sexual double standard thus reflect a social ecology that poses challenges to building equitable sexual relationships and, potentially, to giving and getting consent.

### The Present Study

Conceptualizing consent as a dynamic skill allows for an integrated approach to preventing sexual violence and promoting positive sexual relationships (Arbeit, 2014). Such a skills-based approach can supplement the current use of consent in sexual assault policies (American College Health Association, 2008; U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). Institutions have the opportunity to be responsive to young people's ongoing sexuality development in the transition to adulthood, including and beyond setting and enforcing a high standard for consensual sexual behavior (Arbeit, 2014; Moshman, 2014). Therefore, to assess the potential for a skills-based ecological approach to sexual violence prevention in higher education and in the military, the present study examined cadets' skills for engaging in sexual relationships in relation to their ethical meaning making within the social ecology of USMA (Arbeit, 2014; Diamond, 2014).

This research addressed a three-part question: How, if at all, do cadets enact their sexuality-related values in regard to (1) the pursuit of sexual and romantic relationships, (2) engaging in sexual relationships, and (3) engaging in romantic relationships? The analyses drew upon the skills-based model for promoting sexuality development, particularly the skills involved in personal agency, sexual negotiation, and interpersonal intimacy (Arbeit, 2014). The present study expands on the model by integrating the prevention of sexual violence along with promotion (Moshman, 2014), and by integrating the study of meaning making along with skill development (Diamond, 2014). A grounded theory approach was used to assess cadets' meaning making with regard to the actions and

processes involved in sexual relationships within this particular social-sexual context (Charmaz, 2006).

### Method

To address the research questions regarding how cadets enact their sexuality-related values within sexual and romantic relationships, I conducted a grounded theory analysis of qualitative data collected as part of the West Point Character Development Project. In this section, I describe research context, data collection, and the process of data analysis.

### Research Context

The United States Military Academy at West Point is a postsecondary educational institution that prepares young people for service as commissioned officers in the U.S. Army. The mission of USMA is to "educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country." As an institution, USMA promotes the development of character attributes through a variety of academic and experiential channels across diverse programs and initiatives, representing academics, military training, athletics, and morality/ethics. The West Point Character Development Project was a one-year planning grant (2013–2014) in which the research team (led by Richard M. Lerner) sought to assess the existing components of character and leadership development at USMA in relation to the extant literature on professional preparation and character education.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the USMA superintendent identified their program in Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) as a top priority within the institution.

Cadets are citizens of the United States nominated by congressional representatives from each of the 50 states, as well as from military service sources. Cadets must not be legally married and must not have any legal obligation to support children. Cadets receive a salary and do not pay tuition. The 1,193 new cadets in the class of 2017 were in their first year at USMA at the time of the present study, and 16% were female (U.S. Army, 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), 99% of cadets are ages 17 to 24; 67% are White, 12% are Hispanic or Latino, and 9% are Black or African American. In addition, cadets are exceptional with respect to academic and athletic achievements: About 75% of cadets in the class of 2016 ranked in the top 5th of their high school class, and 90% were high school varsity athletes (U.S. Army, 2016).

<sup>1</sup> The planning grant was conducted in preparation for a five-year, longitudinal study of the development of character and leadership at USMA, which began in 2015 and is funded by The Templeton Religion Trust.

## Data Collection

I report here only the methods used with the subset of the study data focused on cadets' perspectives on sexuality. I conducted semistructured in-depth qualitative interviews with cadets to discuss their opinions and experiences with regard to gender, sexual relationships, and sexual violence. The protocol and procedures were developed in collaboration with USMA staff and faculty, and received approval from the USMA Office of Institutional Research and from the researcher's university institutional review board (IRB).

**Participants.** Participants were recruited with the goal of interviewing three male and three female cadets from each of the four class years, for a total of 24 interviews. This stratification was designed to provide an opportunity to examine and compare the experiences of men and women, given the relevance of gender to understanding sexual violence and sexual relationships (Jozkowski, Peterson, et al., 2014; Tolman, 2006). The sample was distributed across each of the class years to represent a range of perspectives, although without intending to conduct specific cross-cohort comparisons.

The research team determined that interviews would be best scheduled ahead of time to take place during one specific week, considering cadets' regimented schedules and the multitude of events throughout the semester. The USMA Office of Institutional Research shared a randomly generated list of 20 male and 20 female cadets in each of the four years of the program. To preserve confidentiality, this list was not shared with anyone else at USMA. I contacted cadets by e-mail, saying they had been "randomly selected to participate" in an interview "about your opinions on gender and sexual relationships at West Point." Not knowing what response rate to expect, I used a random number generator to select the first few cadets from this list to invite, and continued sending e-mails to fill in the gender by class stratification design. In total, 168 cadets were contacted: Junior women and sophomore men were the most responsive, but an additional random list of 10 first-year men and 10 senior women was needed. Six cadets responded positively but did not follow up to schedule an interview; three responded to say they were willing to be interviewed but not during that specific week; and 11 declined participation. By the end of the week of interviews, one cadet still wanted to schedule an interview but was turned down because the sample had been obtained.

Participants were not prompted to identify their race or ethnicity. Most of the participants appeared White, with the exception of two who each presented as Black and self-identified as such during the interview. No participant self-identified as a sexual or gender minority during the interview. Results are reported with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality and with an indication of whether the participant was a plebe (first-year student), soph (sophomore), junior, or senior at the time. The term "plebe" is used to avoid the gendered term "freshman" and to emphasize the

separate (subordinate) status held by first-year students in this institutional context. At USMA, cadets are formally known as fourth-class, third-class, second-class, and first-class cadets, with first-class indicating the seniors, who are the highest-ranking cadets. The seniors (first-class cadets) are informally called firsties, the juniors called cows, the sophomores called yearlings ("yuks"), and the fourth-class cadets are plebes.

**Procedures.** All cadets who scheduled an interview arrived for the interview, and all of them consented to the procedures. Interviews were scheduled in April 2014, lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and took place in a private study room at USMA. Throughout the recruitment and interview process, I emphasized that participation was voluntary and there would be no consequence if they decided not to participate in the research. Cadets were able to skip any question they did not want to answer or any topic they did not want to discuss. I followed the principles outlined by Charmaz (2006) with regard to supporting the comfort of interview participants while discussing sensitive topics such as human sexuality. For example, I paid close attention to when to probe or when to just listen, and, in closing the interview, I returned to a conversational rhythm to help them transition back into their day (Charmaz, 2006). Cadets were offered snacks and refreshments to thank them for their participation. After each interview, I wrote field notes with my observations and reflections. Interviews were recorded, sent for professional transcription, and then checked for detailed accuracy.

**The Interview Protocol.** The protocol was designed to provide cadets the opportunity to reflect on their experience of sexuality within the context of USMA. The protocol was piloted during six interviews with volunteer participants from the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program in my local area. After piloting, the potential perpetration scenario was simplified and the order of questions adjusted.

The protocol asked participants to "tell me about the sexual culture at USMA," with prompting for reflections on both positive and challenging aspects of the sexual culture. If not yet mentioned, I asked specifically about gender: "How, if at all, does being male/female influence your role in the sexual culture at USMA?" Participants were asked to share stories, opinions, and reflections. They were also asked to respond to a scenario designed to represent a possible precursor to sexual harassment or assault in the context of sexual or romantic relationships. Half of the male and female participants heard a scenario with a male (Tony) in the role of potential perpetrator with a female target person, and the other half of the male and female participants heard a scenario with a female (Tina) in the role of potential perpetrator with a male target person. The name of the bystander corresponded to the gender of the participant (Jane or John). Thus the iteration designed for a male participant with a male as potential perpetrator was as follows: "John's best friend, Tony, has been talking about

another cadet for a while. Tony asked her out, and she said no. At a party, John sees Tony dancing with her and is not sure if she is uncomfortable. What should John do?" The scenario was developed to create moral ambiguity. Throughout the course of discussing the scenario, participants were also asked what they would do if the genders were reversed, and what they would do if it were two men or two women. Participants were also asked questions regarding their own understanding of key concepts such as sexual assault and consent.

### Data Analysis: Constructivist Grounded Theory

I analyzed the 24 semistructured interviews using the method of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory is a qualitative analysis method used to identify processes that operate within specific situations or institutions. Constructivist grounded theory entails approaching data collection and data analysis as a dynamic process involving individual participants, the research context, and the implicit and explicit assumptions of the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory also involves explicitly stating the theory shaping the analysis, which in this case was a skills-based model for promoting adolescent sexuality development (Arbeit, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory is an iterative process in which findings at each stage contribute to adjusting and reframing the research approach as needed to best attend to the data and to the experiences of the participants in the context of relevant theory (Charmaz, 2006).

**Coding the Data.** Grounded theory codes are intended to describe actions, meanings, and situations to foster the overall study of processes (Charmaz, 2006). In developing codes, I attended to how participants described their experiences and expressed their opinions. Open coding involves giving different labels to each segment of the data. I conducted open coding on six interviews, selected to sample both gender and year, to develop the initial draft of the codebook. I prioritized coding data as actions, using primarily gerund-based phrases, such as "flirting" and "dating a cadet" (Charmaz, 2006).

After I conducted open coding on the six selected interviews, the codebook was revised and interrater reliability was established. A graduate research assistant served as the second coder, reading and coding each of the first six interviews and discussing them with me. We used the method of constant comparison, comparing segments of data with other similar segments of data, and comparing those sets of data with different segments of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We eliminated many codes that were not consistently meaningful, merged codes we were using in similar ways, and added codes that were particularly pertinent. After repeating this process for each of the six interviews, we met with the rest of the research team to ensure the codebook was aligned with the project goals. I selected another four interviews for us to code separately, and I compared our coding on those four interviews to confirm we were

using the codebook in the same way. We then each coded the remaining 14 interviews. We reached above 85% agreement for all relevant codes, with a Cohen's kappa of 0.68, indicating moderate interrater reliability.

The next step was axial coding, in which the codes are organized by gathering information about each category of action and the relationships among categories, such as when, where, why, who (the conditions for action), how do the actions and interactions occur, and with what consequences (Charmaz, 2006). I developed categories of interest based on key codes and combinations of key codes. I then outlined relevant information regarding each category based on reading within each code (across interviews). During this step, I mapped each category onto the research questions, beginning to develop the grounded theory.

The last step was theoretical coding, as in, integrating the coding into a theory (Glaser, 1978). I explicitly drew on a skills-based model for promoting adolescent sexuality development (Arbeit, 2014) at this step. I identified how the categories fit together within the iteratively forming theory and then created codes that highlighted different findings in response to the research questions.

**Memo Writing and Reflexivity.** Memos are notes, reflections, or preliminary analyses written and organized throughout the research process to record thinking and decision making, continue constant comparisons and connections, and identify different directions to pursue (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I began writing memos during the data collection process and continued during data analysis. Memo writing also facilitates reflexivity, which contributes to the validity of the research and increases transparency concerning theory development.

I used a process of reflexivity that involved examining my various "selves" (Reinharz, 1997). While conducting and writing about this research, my brought selves included being female, feminist, White, middle class, college educated, a U.S. citizen, and a civilian (i.e., nonmilitary). I also brought with me years of volunteer and professional work in sexual violence prevention and sexual health education, with adolescents and with young adults. I was aware of many assumptions I carried with me from these experiences, particularly with regard to social pressures and gendered power inequities, and I intentionally checked my assumptions regarding whether and how these aspects of sexual culture may manifest within a military training context.

My position within the context of the broader study facilitated my ability to separate my personal beliefs and assumptions from the work that I was doing. While conducting this research, I was a doctoral student and a research assistant, and I was accountable to my research institute and our funding agency. My collaborators at the research institute shared similar social positions to my own and had academic backgrounds in character development, which was the impetus for the overall research project. Together we built relationships with our USMA-based collaborators, which helped us deepen our understanding of what it might

be like to live and work at West Point. When I conducted the interviews, I crafted a situationally created self as listener, and I also “listened” to my participants throughout the analytic process (Reinharz, 1997). I continuously engaged in reflexivity to better understand how these different aspects of who I am influenced the work I produced and to separate my work from my own assumptions to increase the validity of my findings.

**Validity.** The validity of the resulting grounded theory can be assessed using multiple strategies. First, I used a process of establishing interrater reliability for the codebook. Second, the cadet interviews included a dilemma-based scenario (the potential perpetration scenario) intended to draw out cadet perspectives in a manner distinct from the experiences and plans they described in their own lives. Third, I kept a transparent audit trail that allows other qualitative researchers to assess the rigor of my analytic process. Fourth, I immersed myself in the experiences of cadets at USMA to understand the processes from their point of view, and I examined their language and assumptions as well as my own. Speaking with other members of the research team about my findings contributed to this process of examination. A formal process of member checking was not used in the present study; however, informal feedback from USMA collaborators was received. Finally, the findings of this research process can be judged through the value of the resulting theory in contributing to research and practice in the prevention of sexual violence.

## Results

To examine how, if at all, cadets enact their sexuality-related values within sexual and romantic relationships at USMA, I used constructivist grounded theory methodology, guided by a skills-based model of sexuality development (Arbeit, 2014). Findings are presented according to three core components of the resulting grounded theory: (1) gendered dynamics of fear and distrust that constrain cadets’ agency in pursuing their sexual and romantic desires; (2) the ways in which male cadets’ focus on avoiding trouble and punishment distorts their own responsibility and capacity for sexual violence prevention and instead burdens female cadets with the work of sexual negotiation; and (3) the potential for cadets to build positive romantic relationships with other cadets if equipped to address gendered patterns of shame, stigma, and distrust.

### Agency: Fear and Distrust in Pursuing Desires

The findings for this section were identified through an examination of how, if at all, cadets enact their values while in pursuit of sexual and romantic relationships. The analyses drew on the skills involved in sexual agency, such as taking into account personal desires and values and making active decisions about what to pursue and what to avoid (Arbeit, 2014).

**Flirting as a Skill for Relationship Pursuit.** Flirting skills identified in participant reflections involved cadets managing their own behavior to pursue or attract desirable relationships and to avoid what were considered undesirable outcomes. Female cadets were focused on avoiding harm to their reputation; specifically, to avoid being “considered really flirtatious and loose,” they aimed to “wait for them to come to you” instead of proactively expressing interest in a male cadet (Quinn, plebe). Ugo (junior) provided an example of these negative reputations when he said that “a lot of the girls here are really stuck up ... they think everybody wants them.” These comments are consistent with dominant sexual scripts in which women are expected to be passive recipients of men’s sexual attention (Tolman et al., 2016). Male cadets, on the other hand, reported feeling “more open in pursuing ... a relationship” (Abe, soph). Kim (soph) named two undesirable outcomes that male cadets wanted to avoid in their flirtations: First, “if I blow it, it’s going to be awkward,” but also, “you don’t want to be SHARPed or anything.” However, the descriptions of “awkward” moments in cadets’ stories suggested that experiences of awkwardness may be closely related to the potential for sexual harassment or assault.

*The problem of awkwardness.* Cadets frequently used the word *awkward* while describing or referencing something that did not seem safe or right. For example, Cara (junior) noted that “because of the awkwardness ... some guys don’t get the message” which, for her, resulted in “experiences of stalking” when her “no” wasn’t heard as a “no.” Leo (soph) said that the potential perpetration scenario “sounds like an awkward situation to me and like nothing really needs to be done.” Rita (plebe) said she felt “super awkward” on a camping trip when a male cadet was “in my area, just by himself.” By calling each of these situations “awkward,” the participants places them along a spectrum of normative social challenges, perhaps reflecting a spectrum from consent to coercion within cadets’ experiences (Gavey, 2005).

*The challenge of interpretation.* Calling something “awkward” could also be a misinterpretation of signals of distress. For example, Sally (soph) said she would often “drop nonverbal hints” but that “some guys really don’t pick up on hints” and “girls ... just get stuck.” Several male participants considered it “obvious” and “pretty easy to notice” if another person “doesn’t want you touching them” (Owen, plebe). However, positive signals could be imbued with more than the intended meaning, and if two people were “having a good time with each other at a bar ... and then you don’t have sex,” it could be labeled as “teasing,” as in, flirting could be interpreted as interest in sex even if such interest were neither stated nor intended (Zack, junior). Sally’s experience and observations provides evidence of the limits of the possibility that someone will pick up on signals and generate an accurate interpretation of what the other person might want or not want. These comments

also illustrate that misinterpretations occur in ways that reflect the dominant dynamics of rape culture, as in women getting “stuck” with men in situations they do not want to be in, and men criticizing women (e.g., as a “tease”) when they try to end an unwanted interaction (Gavey, 2005).

**Fear and Confusion as Barriers to Relationship Pursuit.** Feelings of fear and frustration contributed to the disconnect between male and female cadets through confusion regarding behavioral boundaries and men not trusting women.

*Lacking behavioral boundaries.* Participants reported repeated questioning of whether certain behaviors constituted friendship, flirting, or sexual harassment. Regarding friendship and flirting, Quinn (plebe) explained that female cadets “are not purposefully looking to find a date; they’re just happy to be friends with you. And the guys take that as flirting.” Regarding flirting and sexual harassment, she mentioned that some female cadets would say male cadets were “sexually harassing me” when Quinn, as an observer, would think, “No, he was trying to flirt with you.” The male cadets struggled to distinguish “between being really friendly ... without it turning into being flirty, and then making it seem like, oh, he’s coming on to me” (Ike, senior). Indeed, some male cadets “are just pretty confused” (Mike, plebe) and “won’t talk to girls here because they don’t want to come off as it being sexual harassment” (Owen, plebe). Tori (junior) observed that “a lot, like 99%, of the sexual harassment cases here are just guys not understanding what’s going on.” Female cadets were interpreted as flirtatious when they were seeking friendship, and male cadets were potentially perpetrating sexual harassment when they were trying to flirt or be friendly. Relatedly, one participant spoke of a female peer targeted by sexually harassing behaviors who was “questioning her judgment because she wasn’t sure if ... you can call this person out on this” (Pam, senior). Thus, both the cause and the covering over of sexual harassment among cadets was attributed in some way to cadets’ lack of clear behavioral boundaries.

*Men not trusting women.* The lack of behavioral boundaries was connected to a dynamic that “demolishes trust from men to women,” with men warning one another that if “you’ve got a lot of friends that are girls ... any day they could really turn that around on you” (Ike, senior). The implication was that women could use the “leverage” of a sexual harassment claim if “they really wanted to get you” (Ugo, junior). In response to the potential perpetration scenario, several participants said they would be “afraid that she would say something ... and try to get him in trouble for it” (Tori, junior), reflecting the idea that “the corps feels ... that the victims are out to get us” (Walter, plebe). Male participants commented that female cadets “have free reign to do a little bit—a lot more than we ever could,” while male cadets “have to walk on more eggshells” (Harry, senior) and “think before you act because you can be accused of rape” (Zack, junior). Female cadets expressed that it was “annoying” to be “trying to create a relationship”

with male peers who thought they “can’t hang out too much with you ... because something might happen” (Kim, soph) or whose “fear” led them to believe “I can’t talk to a girl or she’s going to cry rape” (Eve, senior). The idea of crying rape or trying to get someone in trouble reflects rape myths that women intentionally make false accusations and was functioning to discourage men from any social interaction with women as well as to delegitimize women who do speak up (Bohner et al., 2006). These socially and culturally produced vulnerabilities also manifest in what might happen if flirting did lead to a sexual interaction between cadets.

### **Negotiation: Avoiding Trouble by Shifting Responsibility**

The findings for this section were identified through an examination of how, if at all, cadets enact their values while engaging in sexual relationships. The analyses were guided by the sexuality skills involved in sexual negotiation, in particular the negotiation of sexual consent (Arbeit, 2014).

#### **Enacting Values Through Sexual Consent Skills.**

Most participants independently mentioned the idea of consent, and then I asked follow-up questions about what the term means and how a person can know whether consent is present in a given sexual interaction. Cadets varied in their application of the concept of sexual consent and in their ideas about what negotiating consent might involve.

*Giving and getting verbal consent.* Some participants asserted that consent skills involve “a lot of communication” (Fay, junior). Tori (junior) remembered when her boyfriend said to her, “I want to have sex with you, but I won’t if you don’t want to.” This approach used a negative framing, as in, checking to see if she did *not* want to have sex rather than if sex was something she *did* want. Victor (senior) used a positive framing: “It’d be like, do you wanna go all the way?” Dan (junior) said he would engage in “constant communication” and ask, “Is it okay if we do this?”; although he admitted that “asking the person” felt “unsexy.” Indeed, several participants observed “people just don’t want to accept” that “I should ask” because “they don’t want to make it awkward” (Harry, senior). But they were aware that *not* asking for consent could have consequences more severe than awkwardness, such as “ten months later, sitting in a JAG courtroom, saying I thought she wanted me to kiss her” (Tori, junior). In this comment, Tori revealed that asking for consent may be motivated by trying to not get in trouble (e.g., not ending up in a JAG courtroom).

*Relying on nonverbal signals.* Some participants felt that “consent to have sex” was “not something people usually say” out loud but “you can usually tell if you’re a decent human being” (Mike, plebe). Mike’s framework of “decent human being” implied that he did not consider negotiating sexual consent to involve a set of learned skills.

Rather, he reflected that “body language, actual language, physical actions” and “a lot of touching” would indicate consent in a way that, as Zack (junior) said, “one could, with a high degree of probability, infer that they are consenting.” Indeed, several participants described sexual interactions in which “one person initiates and the other person, what’s the word, reciprocates,” which they thought “would count ... as consensual” (Rita, plebe). They imagined that “you’ll start fooling around, clothes start coming off ... she gets naked, takes off your clothes, climbs on top of you” (Victor, senior). Harry (senior) commented that “if she’s initiating you doing whatever you’re about to do, then I feel like you’re in more of a safe zone.” These participants imagined nonverbal consent as a series of behaviors that constitute active participation and thus demonstrate willingness (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014).

Participants debated the use of verbal or nonverbal signals in ongoing relationships. For example, Gabby (soph) guessed that “most people in a relationship would consent” but acknowledged “sometimes assault can happen within a relationship,” so “asking is probably the easiest.” But Cara (junior) reflected that when she was “in a relationship” she “had a social contract” and “found myself not having to say yes or no, I just kept kissing him, we kept doing whatever, and then we did it.” Sally (soph) said she “would personally wanna know the person, even just a little bit, to read whether or not they’re saying yes.” In this way, Sally was accounting for the possibility of individual variation beyond the traditional sexual script but still relying on her ability to “read” another person. Walter (plebe) reflected “The one thing about this place is you learn how to read people really well, and then also, on the other hand, you learn how to hide your emotions very well.” If cadets at USMA learn to hide their discomfort, avoid awkwardness, and appear unemotional, then their nonverbal signals may not accurately reflect whether they are willing or unwilling to engage in sexual activity.

*Denying or withdrawing consent.* Refusal of consent means denying or saying no to a sexual activity when it is not desired, and the person asking for consent also needs skills with which to accept a negative response (Arbeit, 2014). Cara (junior) shared a personal story that illustrated the importance of each of these skillsets. She was “kissing” someone whom she had “the biggest crush” on, but she felt “not ready” for sex. For her, “having the social skills of being confident” was an important aspect of “being able to verbally tell somebody, okay, I know I just totally led you on a bit, but I don’t think I’m ready for this.” In addition, she needed the other person to have the skills to “respect me” and maybe “wait a little bit longer” instead of being “mad at you for saying no.” Her story captured several aspects of the difficulty of saying no. She liked him a lot, and she still wanted to have sex with him at a later time. But compounding those positive feelings toward him were her feeling “shame” about being “not ready” right then and having “led [him] on.” This experience of shame almost

blocked her ability to implement her sexual negotiation skills and express her unwillingness to consent.

**Gender Inequity Blocking Values.** The participants’ comments provided evidence of ways in which the sexual double standard and rape myth acceptance, as part of the ecological context at USMA, hinder or block the enactment of values such as consent, respect, and gender equity within sexual interactions.

*Shaming female cadets.* Many female participants reported experiences of sexual shame or ways in which they feared being shamed for their sexual behavior. They worked hard to “avoid being considered easy, you know, easy-to-get girls” (Quinn, plebe). Niki (senior) explained: “If a girl will have sex with one guy, maybe two, it’s ‘Oh my God, she sleeps around, she’s a slut.’” Rita (plebe) said she would advise other female cadets “to be more careful” than male cadets would need to be “because there’s still the stigma for it, and you don’t wanna be labeled as someone who sleeps around.” Rita reported that such a label not only “affects how people see you” but also “affects your advancements” while at USMA. Many individual participants noted the hypocrisy of the sexual double standard. Owen (plebe) believed: “If you’re gonna hold ... a girl to the standard where if she sleeps around, then she’s a whore, then you should hold a guy to it ... it shouldn’t be like a guy’s a player.” Gabby (soph) did not want shaming extended to men but rather wanted a context in which “every person is in charge of their own body and can do what they want with it.” Gabby’s position, in contrast with Owen’s, would allow for both men and women to be affirmed (not shamed) if they do not want sex and affirmed (not shamed) if they do want sex.

*Congratulating male cadets.* Male cadets were celebrated for engaging in sexual activity and displaying an active sexuality. However, this aspect of the culture was founded upon the objectification of women. For having sex with a female cadet, male cadets were congratulated for earning their “gray wings,” which used to be “this little pin that you can wear on the inside of your jacket” (Niki, senior). In addition, “one of the social rules here” was that male cadets were “expected to ... pick up random girls and sleep with them and then tell all your friends about it later on” (Dan, junior). This expectation that male cadets would engage in casual sex, tell their peers, and be congratulated for it perpetuated the sexual double standard and served as the context for attitudes toward rape and sexual assault.

*Myths about preventing perpetration.* Cadet attitudes toward the prevention of sexual assault reflected common myths and misconceptions about how sexual assault is perpetrated and thus how it can be prevented (Bohner et al., 2006). For example, when participants were asked how they would know if a sexual partner is consenting, they referred to a “culture” at USMA in which “no means no” (Gabby,

soph), so “when the person says no or stop” then “you have to stop no matter what” (Kim, soph). Therefore, to know if a person is consenting “we more look for a definite no than we look for a definite yes, meaning it’s like they’re consenting the whole time until they say no” (Zack, junior). These participants were defining consent based on the absence of a clear refusal instead of the presence of clear agreement.

Owen (plebe) claimed: “Once you get to assault, you’re gonna know that the girl doesn’t want that type of sexual advance. So if you’re committing sexual assault, you know you’re doing something wrong.” However, Owen’s claim does not account for the fact that even if a woman “doesn’t want that type of sexual advance,” she may not be in a position to actively communicate her refusal. For example, someone could have “hesitations” but feel “pressured to do something anyway” (Eve, senior). Owen was endorsing rape myths that sexual assault would always involve clear refusal, while Eve shared reasons why refusal might not always be so clear (Bohner et al., 2006). Some participants endorsed a related rape myth assumption that perpetrating sexual violence would be obvious because it would always involve the use of force. Mike (plebe) asserted that “rape has to involve physical force” or “the threat of physical force,” and even when he tried to image a potential perpetrator “emotionally dominating” another person, he concluded, “I’m still not sure that classifies as rape.”

In contrast with the claim that perpetration would be obvious, several male participants described a concerted effort to avoid getting in trouble related to sexual assault. Ugo (junior) referred to a feeling of “terror” that “you need to always keep in back of your mind” to remember “that you really can’t do this” no matter “how good it feels in the moment.” Harry (senior) said, “It’s almost like a step-by-step list” in his head “to make sure you’re not getting yourself into trouble.” These cadets struggled to find ways to engage in sexual relationships without the risk of getting in trouble related to sexual assault. Other participants did not believe there even were specific steps they could take to avoid perpetration. Zack (junior) explained, “I don’t think you can train someone out of raping or assaulting someone” and that telling someone to “make sure you get consent from people before you do anything” would suggest that “you automatically think they’re predisposed to doing the wrong thing.” Tori (junior) echoed this belief by saying, “If we treat guys like the kind of guys who are gonna date-rape drug a girl ... they’ll become the kind of people who don’t respect other people.” Taken together, these comments demonstrate several misunderstandings of what sexual assault perpetration is and whether and how it can be prevented. Ultimately, these misunderstandings shifted attention away from potential perpetrators and onto the people being targeted.

*Myths about victim blaming.* Many cadets endorsed rape myths that burdened victims and potential victims with most or all of the responsibility for incidents of sexual violence (Bohner et al., 2006). For example, they

warned, “Don’t let yourself be ... drawn into something you don’t want” (Bob, soph), or “Don’t ever put yourself in a situation where ... you’re at risk” (Leo, soph), and “If they put you in an uncomfortable situation, you shouldn’t let that happen” (Kim, soph). These attitudes were also reflected in other statements declaring that victims, even after a sexual assault occurs, should share the blame for their own victimization. The myth of shared blame implies that “you could have been victimized; but it would have been of your own doing” (Ike, senior). Alcohol contributes to the myth of shared blame, as in, if “they were both drinking” then “the fault would be more evenly distributed” (Sally, soph). Or, more explicitly, incidents in which “this guy got drunk, this girl got drunk, they had sex, they woke up in the morning or something and it turned into a sexual assault” were dismissed as “stupid” (Harry, senior). In this conception of shared blame, it “turned into” an act of violence in the morning, ostensibly when the victim named it as such, not at the moment in which the perpetrator initiated the assault.

Cara (junior) provided an analysis of how the culture of victim blaming contributed to incidents of sexual assault at USMA. She described a hypothetical scenario in which “a guy and girl meet for studying ... it’s a misunderstanding ... they’ll start kissing ... but then she stops kissing him, like I don’t want to do this.” Cara imagined this female cadet thinking to herself, “I put myself in this situation and I am responsible for my actions,” and as a result “she didn’t want to have sex, but she just goes with the flow.” In this example, the female cadet has internalized rape myths and other victim-blaming attitudes in ways that block her from interrupting the interaction to deny or withdraw consent. These internalized messages that impact cadets in their sexual interactions were also evidenced in their discussions of ongoing romantic relationships.

### **Intimacy: Seeking Support But Risking Stigma**

The findings for this section were identified through an examination of how, if at all, cadets enact their values while engaging in romantic relationships, specifically with other cadets. The analyses drew on the skills involved in sexual intimacy, which include navigating among possible relationship formats, building a relationship together, and managing the feelings and potential conflicts that can be part of a relationship (Arbeit, 2014).

**Shared Values and Mutual Support Facilitating Intimacy.** Cadets identified shared personal values as an aspect of the USMA experience that could contribute to meaningful romantic relationships. Tori (junior) observed, “We’ve all been looking for the same thing for our whole life, especially in terms of structure and service and things like that, so in a lot of ways I feel like cadets are more compatible” and, as a result, the “relationship gets serious faster.” Participants emphasized that cadets who date other cadets could support each other during their time at USMA.

Because “life gets stressful here” it is “definitely a good thing emotionally to have someone there to go to” (Jill, plebe), as “another leg of your support system” (Niki, senior), which “makes it a lot easier” (Harry, senior). However, along with these noted benefits of dating other cadets, such relationships were also highly stigmatized.

**Stigma as a Barrier to Intimacy.** The term “cadating” was used to refer to cadets dating other cadets, a term which generally implied “Oh, I’d never do that” (Sally, soph) because of the “challenge” of “defeating the stigma” (Harry, senior). Walter (plebe) remembered that “the first thing you should know” from “all these upperclassmen” was to “never date another cadet.” The stigma of cadating carried different meanings for men and for women.

*Men disgusted by cadating.* When Quinn (plebe) arrived at USMA, she “had no idea” that “girls would be considered undatable.” She said that her male peers “have told me straight to my face that they would never date me purely because I’m a cadet.” Some participants attributed this stigma to “the male-to-female ratio” (Leo, soph) that left male cadets “jealous that they can’t cadate and they don’t have someone here, so they’re like, ‘Oh I would never cadate,’ and then a month later they’re cadating” (Kim, soph). Expressions of disgust also took the form of “jokes about not having a bunch of females to choose from” (Abe, soph). Several female participants reported jokes about men not wanting to cadate because female cadets are “disgusting” (Eve, senior) and “are not really girls” (Cara, junior). In addition to coping with these disrespectful messages, female cadets had their own concerns about cadating.

*Women concerned about cadating.* Female cadets feared if they expressed interest in romantic relationships it could harm their reputations. Participants described assumptions at USMA that “a lot of girls here aren’t really wanting an Army officer career” (Kim, soph) but rather “came here to find their dream guy, their Prince Charming” (Ugo, junior). Many female participants attempted to distance themselves from these assumptions through declarations that “I didn’t come here to find a husband; I came here to serve in the United States Army” (Tori, junior). They wanted to “be thought of as professional and as an officer” and were worried that “personal relationships” could affect “how people view me within my company and my chain of command” (Sally, soph). Both men’s disgust and women’s concerns were thus centered on the reputations of female cadets and whether they could be seen as romantically desirable and/or professionally serious, while the professional and social status of male cadets remained intact regardless.

**Managing Drama as an Intimacy Skill.** Given the social stigma of cadating, cadets who did date other cadets needed skills for managing the related social interactions, particularly with regard to ending a romantic relationship. The stress of USMA “can be difficult if you’re in an early relationship that just isn’t going to make it” (Eve, senior)

because “as soon as you break off and go your separate ways, that’s when things start to crumble” (Harry, senior), especially when people “live next door to each other” but “hate” each other (Walter, plebe). Ugo (junior) warned that male cadets who choose to date female cadets would need to “learn to control your temper, learn to control your manners” in order to “not try to retaliate.” These comments emphasize the importance of skills such as self-control and emotion regulation not only for coping with loss but also for remaining respectful through the drama of a breakup.

## Discussion

This study builds on existing sexual violence prevention approaches (DeGue, 2014) to assess the potential for an ecological and skills-based approach (Arbeit, 2014; Casey & Lindhorst, 2009). Toward this end, I examined how, if at all, cadets act and enact their values in relation to sexuality within the sexual context at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The results of this grounded theory analysis can be used to understand both the particular dynamics involved in sexual relationships within this unique institutional context and the experiences of young adults in related developmental contexts, such as other military settings and other institutions of higher education.

### Implications for Cadets’ Relationship Building at USMA

The resulting grounded theory of cadets’ relationship building identified: (a) fear and distrust as barriers to cadets’ individual agency in pursuing their desires; (b) men’s motivation to avoid trouble and women’s motivation to avoid shame and blame as barriers to cadets’ mutual negotiation of consent for sexual activity; and (c) the threat of stigma and drama as barriers to cadets’ building intimacy and seeking support within romantic relationships.

One common thread in these findings is a disconnect between men and women that prevents cadets from working together to build the kinds of interactions and relationships they mutually desire and, accordingly, to avoid the ones they do not. Women’s fear of a negative reputation holds them back from flirting and dating, and it also may hold them back from clearly and actively negotiating their desires and boundaries in sexual situations. Men’s fear of getting in trouble holds them back from pursuing friendships and other close relationships with women, and also from admitting their own susceptibility to violating women’s boundaries. One consequence is that they resist building skills to help them prevent such an occurrence. Both fears, about personal reputation and about charges of sexual harassment or sexual assault, are heightened by cadets’ dual role as students and as professionals, as they pursue training to become Army officers.

The fears, anxieties, and lack of understanding between men and women at USMA may be contributing to (a) an ecological contradiction between stated institutional commitments to

gender equity and cadets' experiences of a social system that involves burdening women, blaming victims, and perpetuating sexual stigma; (b) specific incidents of unwanted and nonconsensual sex that are understood and experienced in distinctly different ways by each person involved; and (c) cadets' struggles with whether and how to form intimate relationships that can reinforce shared values and provide mutual support without risking harm to the individual wellbeing or professional status of either person involved. These findings, therefore, could inform future work to develop a skills-based ecological approach to sexual violence prevention at USMA, based on the following three suggestions:

1. Acknowledge the gulf between the institutional commitment to gender equity and the lived experiences of cadets. Address this gap by building empathy between men and women about each other's fears; the significance of those fears within this particular professional context; and the ways in which boundary confusion regarding sexual behavior exacerbates the risks. This confusion can then be directly addressed through skill building.
2. Provide opportunities for cadets to practice skills for negotiating sexual consent. These skills must be ecologically supported for cadets to implement them effectively. Ecological support would engage cadets in shifting cultural norms to address the social, emotional, and interpersonal challenges involved in communicating with sexual and romantic partners.
3. Make explicit the ways in which the stigma attached to romantic relationships among cadets is part of a broader history of disrespect for women and women's sexuality. Amplify existing attitudes among cadets that emphasize the benefits of interpersonal connection and relationships of different forms. Build individual skills and ecological support for engaging in intimate relationships, managing drama, and demonstrating respect for other people, whatever their personal choices and boundaries (including both dating and breaking up).

A skills-based ecological sexual violence prevention program based on these three suggestions would directly respond to the findings of the present study. However, alternative interpretations are possible, particularly with regard to the utility of focusing on explicit communication of sexual consent as opposed to the broader context of gender inequity. Although comments from many female participants reflected evidence of the difficulty of stopping a sexual interaction from proceeding toward unwanted activities (Fantasia, 2011), other participants spoke with confidence about the ways in which they use nonverbal signals to express themselves and to assess their partners' consent (Jozkowski, Sanders, et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the present findings illustrate how the normalized sexual

experiences of cadets fall on a spectrum from consent to coercion influenced by expectations that women will be responsive to men's desire and initiative (Gavey, 2005; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998; Impett & Peplau, 2003). Therefore, the broader power inequities that privilege masculinity over femininity and attach stigma and shame to female sexuality also need to be addressed (Diamond, 2014; Tolman, 2006; Tolman et al., 2016). Indeed, it is likely that the hypermasculine norms of military culture and the emphasis on stoicism and control over others are so influential that no prevention will be effective without addressing these directly (Hunter, 2007; Seigler & Gunderson, 2005; Turchik & Wilson, 2010).

### **Application to Sexual Violence Prevention in Related Contexts**

While these recommendations are specific to the military academy context, certain aspects of the present study can apply to other undergraduate contexts. For example, the ways in which women are impossibly burdened with managing their own reputations and preventing their own victimization have been broadly identified as contributing to and excusing sexual violence (Gavey, 2005; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Tolman et al., 2016). Suggestions to address sexual violence through building skills and shifting cultural norms are aligned with best practices in prevention (DeGue et al., 2014; Nation et al., 2003) but may be effective only when existing social and structural inequities are also addressed (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009; Tolman, 2006). Empathy, shared understanding, and mutual support may provide resources to leverage in promoting positive relationships among young people that involve respect, trust, and clear communication and can stand in stark contrast to incidents of violence and violation.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The present study was limited in several ways. As a cross-sectional study, the present analyses did not directly assess cadets' development during their time at USMA. The data set is also limited by not having had participants indicate self-identified race/ethnicity and self-identified sexual orientation. None of the participants reported pursuing or being involved in same-sex sexual relationships, an understudied aspect of cadet experience. Furthermore, the present analyses are also limited by the lack of mixed method triangulation, as no quantitative data were available. The data collection process involved certain adjustments to standard grounded theory practices, including the use of a stratified random sample instead of continuing data collection until saturation, and the lack of formal member-checking procedures. Nevertheless, the present study contributes significantly in providing directions for future research and application.

The findings identified gender inequity as a barrier to building positive relationships among cadets. Further work could implement a gendered analysis, for example, studying

attitudes toward masculinity, femininity, gender nonconformity, and homosexuality, in regard to what is explicitly or implicitly accepted and in terms of what is valued by the institution and by the cadets themselves (e.g., Tolman et al., 2016). Theoretical sampling could also strengthen future work in constructing grounded theory, for example, to address research questions relevant to specific subgroups at USMA, such as students who engage in same-sex sexual activity or students of color.

As the military opens combat positions to women and more women gain admission and enroll, this research provides a baseline for future work assessing shifts in gender dynamics at USMA related to changing military policy (Taylor, Williams, & Cheatham, 2014). Furthermore, men's fear of being accused of sexual assault and motivation to avoid getting in trouble indicate the need to assess the ways in which prevention programs themselves may unintentionally reinforce problematic messages such as victim blaming and rape myths (Bohner et al., 2006). Directly addressing these and other barriers to cadets' enactment of agency, negotiation, and intimacy could facilitate sexual safety and gender equity at USMA and could model ecologically situated skills-based sexual violence prevention throughout the military and in other institutions of higher education.

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