

## Qualitative Analysis of Definitions of Rape Among Social Media Users

Formatted: Font: Bold

Sexual assault is a serious social problem in the U.S., and this problem is exacerbated by widespread misconceptions about what constitutes rape. There is an apparent disconnect between legal/academic and lay definitions of rape (i.e. perpetrators and victims of rape may not consider their experience to be rape even if it meets the legal definition). This disagreement has serious implications for victims, whose assault may be labeled “illegitimate” because it does not meet the lay definition. For this reason, it is important to understand how people conceptualize rape, what are the characteristics of this lay definition, and why different groups may subscribe to one definition over another. We will explore these questions using anonymous data collected from the social news website Reddit.com, an enormous and active online community with over a billion page views per month. Data collection took place in two parts: 1) users of two sub-groups of Reddit.com (feminist and Men’s rights) were asked explicitly to answer the question of “what is rape”, and 2) Reddit users responded to descriptions of scenarios describing sexual assault and debated amongst themselves whether the posted scenarios constituted rape or not. The rape definition prompt and the scenario descriptions were posted by anonymous Reddit.com users. These topic threads were discovered for the current project after the researchers performed a general topic search using the phrase “rape definition” on Reddit.com. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, and we hypothesize that two distinct definitions will arise: 1) rape is any non-consensual sexual act and 2) rape is penetrative sex that involves the use of physical force/restraint. This finding has implications for practice, as it will show how prevalent this alternative view of sexual assault may be in our culture.