

**Predators on Campus:
Examining the Alarming Rate of Sexual Assaults on U.S.
College and University Campuses and Why Prevention
Communication Messages are Failing**

by

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December 2006

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Liberal Arts
Saint Edward's University

December 2006

Mentoring Professor

Date

MLA Coordinator

Date

Abstract

An abundance of surveys and news reports have clearly indicated that sexual assaults and other violent crimes are prevalent on U.S. college and university campuses. What isn't as well known is how little is being done by most institutions to try and reduce this fact. Poor awareness of the reality of crime rates, combined with widespread policies that discourage the reporting of these crimes gives students and universities a false sense of security. A lack of adequate if any punishment for most offenders encourages escalation of these crimes resulting in a growth of sexual predatory behavior on campuses. This thesis examines why this behavior is occurring, what is and is not being done about it, and what needs to be done.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to the women mentioned in this project. Their names are anonymous, but their lives have all been permanently affected by the events described. Hopefully, their courage in telling me their stories will not be in vain.

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Introduction

There is an epidemic on campuses throughout the country that is largely being ignored. The American college campus today is infested with the idea that it is some how acceptable for men to be violent against women and even sexually assault those that aren't hyper vigilant of their environment or intoxicated. Many of these men grow violent over time because their actions are never punished. Some of these men come to campuses with a history of violence, looking for victims, and are not turned away. The one thing that is clear, is that most campuses are failing to properly warn students of the dangers that can await them at college and also don't provide for any real justice when these students become victims

This paper looks at a difficult but an important issue that is taking place on college and university campuses nationwide. The issue is the alarming rate of sexual assaults that are occurring on these campuses and the lack of adequate punishment for most offenders that often leads to an escalation and continuation of their crimes.

In addition to looking at this problem from sociological, criminological, and university administrative aspects, this paper will also examine the crime prevention communications methods that are being sent out to students and largely going unnoticed.

Some recent legal cases in central Texas have also indicated that colleges and universities could be doing far more to stop the problem of allowing repeat sexual offenders on campus. In a recent case where multiple students were drugged and raped, it was discovered that the rapist was a registered sex offender with a long, documented history of sexually assaulting college women before he was admitted to the campus where these latest crimes occurred.

One of the victims in this man's crime spree clearly indicated that, if she had known who she was sharing a class with, she never would have studied alone with him. It was also clear that,

as this man had been expelled from two prior campuses after being arrested for sex crimes and serving prison time for one, it would have been very easy for the university to have realized this person posed a threat to the student body. Despite this, however, most public colleges and universities, in large part, do not do the most basic screening of incoming students, have poor systems in place to handle these crimes when they are reported, and seem to go to great lengths to avoid the crimes from becoming known and harming the school's image. Some private schools do have programs in place that are more sensitive to the victims and do a better job of teaching students about the dangers, but there appears to only be one public university in Texas that does criminal background checks on incoming students and most victims interviewed said they felt as though they were being re-victimized by the universities when they tried to seek justice. There are many causes this paper will investigate, not the least of which is the fact that public universities are largely immune to prosecution, and the effect that persevering the image of the institution plays in the decision to change their policies.

Before examining the issue of university policies, however, it is important to look at why sexual assaults occur in such great numbers on campuses and how so many people are able to become sexual predators without fear of repercussions. Another topic examined will be why awareness messages that could warn female students of the dangers are largely not reaching their intended audiences and why so few of these crimes are actually being reported.

While an academic paper is traditionally void of personal experience for the sake of professionalism and neutrality, this subject deserves a brief exception. During the course of the research for this paper, the researcher interviewed a number of university administrators, police officers, psychologists, and students and was surprised at some of the responses received. While the majority of them were supportive of the research on this subject and eager to discuss it, there

were some who were quite hostile, and the researcher was even told while working his day job for the Texas Legislature that this subject matter was inappropriate and that he was not allowed to have this paper sitting on his desk simply because of the title. One administrator/ professor got so upset that he locked the door and tried to intimidate the researcher to not pursue the issue further. This is significant because it suggested just how terrifying it must be for the victims of sexual assault to come forward and talk about their assaults. If those responsible for helping these students would treat a researcher with such hostility, It must be terrifying for the victims who have to go through the process.

In fact, of the three women interviewed who were sexually assaulted, two of them said that they regretted the fact that they ever reported their crime. The process made them feel violated again by the university officials they spoke with. The third never did report the assault because of the experience of others she knew who had. When the victims of a crime are afraid to report it and other people are afraid to even talk about it, than it is going to be a great challenge to try and find a way to prevent the crime. To further illustrate how uncomfortable this issue is for people to discuss, one of the city police officers interviewed is in the process of suing a local university in order to hold awareness classes on campus about the issue of women watching their drinks and rape prevention. In this case, the campus is so afraid of an open discussion of the issue that legal action is going to be needed to try to educate students about the problem.

This leads us to the questions raised by this research: How do we prevent a crime that largely goes unreported and therefore largely unpunished? How do we prevent these violent crimes when no one wants to discuss them? What role and responsibility due universities and colleges have regarding prevention and punishment?

This report will examine a variety of issues leading to the foundations of the problem and possible solutions. Institutions of higher education have the opportunity to control admission and the ability to punish those who attend. People assume that they will be safe on their campuses, and a greater effort should be made to ensure that safety. A variety of communication methods are examined from a prevention standpoint and to encourage victims to come forward. Some of the solutions will likely be in the form of new methods of dealing with students to make them feel more comfortable with the crime victim reporting process, and other solutions will deal with different ways of communicating with students. The traditional communication methods appear to be failing to change the ways of students as evidenced by a number of studies illustrating that the amount of sexual violence on campuses has gone not been significantly reduced in decades despite many articles on the subject. Finally, the paper will examine the possibility of peer-to-peer communication methods as a possible means of better reaching the target audiences in future public awareness communications campaigns.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine the issue of sexual predatory behavior on American college and university campuses, determine what is causing the problem to be so pervasive, and look at various strategies to combat the problem. To reach conclusions to this problem, this paper will examine some of the following issues:

- **Are attempts by universities to protect their images causing an environment for predatory behavior to grow?**
- **Why is this issue not discussed more and is this failure to discuss the issue one of the keys to its continuance? By all accounts sexual violence on campus is a much greater**

problem then most seem to know. What roles do the spiral of silence and the taboo of not discussing sexual issues play in keeping the issue from being openly discussed?

- **What effects do peer groups of victims and aggressors have on their behaviors?**
- **Why are current communications methods failing to have desired effects on changing these behaviors?**
- **What communications strategies need to be implemented to try to reduce the problem?**
- **What legal or administrative changes need to be implemented to try and reduce the problem?**
- **Are there any other potential solutions to the problem that should be examined further?**

Methodology

There have been approximately 1,000 research articles over the last decade regarding violence against women (Schwartz, 2000). Most of the results were similar indicating no need to conduct a new survey.

In addition to academic and commercial articles and court case summaries, a number of students and subject matter experts were interviewed. (Specifically, four students, three of whom were victims of sexual assault by fellow students; the fourth was a friend and witness of one of the students were interviewed). All three students interviewed for this project were attacked by fellow students who had documented convictions for sexual assaults on female students before they were admitted to the campus where they met the victims.

In addition to the victims, additional interviews included three university and two city police officers who are all tasked with investigating sexual assaults. Also, six university administrators with jobs relevant to this project were interviewed along with two university psychologists and one university psychiatrist. Finally, four university professors, including one who was involved in one of the case studies mentioned, were interviewed.

Most of the people interviewed requested that they remain anonymous. The victims were concerned that nothing be revealed which could lead to their identity. To that extent, no direct quotes or identifying information are revealed in this paper. All human sources will be referred to by the title: Student, Administrator, Psychologist or Psychiatrist, University or City Police Officer, or Professor. The titles will be followed by a number based on their order of appearance in the paper (e.g. Professor 1, Professor 2 etc...). Legal cases and news reports will be referred to generically whenever possible.

Literature Review

Female Perceptions: Self-Blame and the Rape “Myths”

The three fundamental problems that arise from past studies are that very few sexual assaults are reported, many victims tend to partially or fully blame themselves for what happened, and, because of the self-blame there is a fear of embarrassment if they do report the crime. One of the students interviewed for this paper stated that, even though she was drugged by her attacker and that she said no repeatedly, the fact that she voluntarily studied (in a group study session) at his apartment caused her to put some of the blame on herself. She was terrified of the case going to court because, if her family found out, she felt that they would look down on her for being stupid (Student 1, 2006). This was clearly a case where the aggressor had been to jail

for a violent sexual assault on another campus and is now facing over a dozen counts of sexual assault committed at various Texas campuses since his release from prison. Despite the fact that the man is clearly a sexual predator, the victim blames herself for having participated in a group study session with fellow students at one of their apartments. (The student was drugged and assaulted after the other students went home).

One argument often used to claim that there is not a high level of sexual violence on college campuses or that many of the reported rapes are not actually sexual assaults is the assertion that very few women actually report the crimes. In a survey of women who were the victims of sexual assaults involving alcohol or drugs:

- Only 27 percent of these women use the word rape to describe what happened to them.
- 79.3 percent of women who were raped while intoxicated put all or part of the blame on themselves. (50 percent of rape by force victims also took on some degree of self-blame.)
- 25 percent of those raped while intoxicated felt that they were entirely to blame for what happened.
- 51 percent of the survey respondents stated that they had been raped since coming to campus (all of them had been).
- Of women raped due to physical force, there were 16.7 percent who claimed to be unaffected [emotionally] versus only 5.7 percent of women victimized because of alcohol or drugs.
- Only five percent of campus rapes are ever reported to police [including both forcible and stranger rapes] (Scwartz & Leggett, 1999).

These statistics illustrate that one of the toughest battles in trying to reduce sexual violence on campus is to first reinforce the notion that women are not at fault in a case where they are too inebriated or drugged to know what is going on. Schwartz & Leggett note that “Many women believe that if they are too intoxicated or drugged to say no, then they are to blame for the sexual assault” (1999). A city police officer interviewed for this paper stated that prevention and awareness programs are not being adequately delivered to college and university students. The police force that she works for is actually involved in a class-action suit to force the university to allow them to conduct alcohol and sexual assault awareness classes on campus (City Police Officer 1, 2006).

Unfortunately, self-blame tends to lead to under reporting and lesser punishment for the aggressors. Personal denial also shows that it more difficult for a victim to recover from the crime (compared to a stranger-rape victim) because fewer people are likely to believe her and she is less likely to feel that she is a true victim of the crime. Schwartz & Leggett also note that

“A great many educated college students freely blame the woman for an act of male aggression in a variety of circumstances . . . Like a stranger-rape victim, her [the acquaintance rape victim] confidence in the world has been upended; unlike a stranger-rape victim, few people will offer her sympathy due to social myths about acquaintance rape, the tendency to blame the victim” (1999).

A lack of understanding about her role in what happened will cause, not only her self-blame, but the blame of her friends, family, and others feeling that she did something wrong. Fear of this potential blame and confusion as to who was to blame will often contribute to many victims never reporting the crimes. In the same paper, Schwartz & Leggett noted that “It is not uncommon for women who have been attacked to be unable to fully understand that the incident that is

bothering them is actually an event defined by criminal law as felony rape” (1999). Part of the problem evident in this study is that the message is clearly not being communicated to the majority of these women that they are not to blame for what happened to them, regardless of their level of intoxication or drug use. The psychologists and university police officers interviewed for this project all agree that this self-blame is a common problem they fight even with those that do end up reporting the crime. In their report, Schwartz & Leggett note that “Hidden rape victims who do not define what happened to them as rape do not seek out the services of rape counselors, do not attend to various mental health services, and often do not understand why they are suffering from various symptoms of emotional pain” (1999).

This study also shows an interesting contradiction in the punishment of these crimes. This particular study contradicted a number of studies done in the 1980s which suggested that a large number of acquaintance sexual assaults were either being over-reported or were not as emotionally traumatic as stranger-rapes. What the surveys of victims actually ended up demonstrating was that, due to the level of self-blame, the number of assaults is actually under-reported, and, due to the widely believed myth that women are to blame for these types of assaults, when are less likely to receive sympathy and support for what happened to them and it actually makes the event more traumatizing for the women, even though the punishments for the men are often significantly lower in these cases due to the greater difficulty in proof (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999).

Victims’ self-blame and the fear that others will blame them for what happened are clearly becoming common themes in these readings that will need to be addressed. As will be illustrated in the following sections, men who are not held accountable for their actions will continue to escalate their attacks well into their adult lives. One of the key steps in prevention is

finding a way to keep women from blaming themselves for sexual assaults and making sure that the general public does not jump to the conclusion that these victims are responsible for what happened to them. Schwartz & Leggett conclude by noting that “Feminist theorists often argue that our society is one that accepts sexual assault as normative. If that is the case, it is no wonder that so many women blame themselves and do not report it to the police . . . self-blame leads to silence” (1999).

Not only does society seem to believe that violence against women is acceptable in society, but there also seems to be a belief that these events only happen to ‘other’ women. This encourages the perpetuation of the rape ‘myths’. According to Carmody & Washington, Belief in a ‘just world’ may encourage some to hold on to their beliefs about rape myths (2001). One common theme found in these articles is that students and parents want to believe that they live in a safe world. Many of today’s students come from very sanitized backgrounds; they are suburban kids who have never been exposed to violent crime and are shielded from it by their parents who also believe that such events only happen to ‘others’. When students go off to college they don’t have the awareness they need to be prepared for the realities of college life. They are more likely to hold on to rape ‘myths’ such as: “Women who consent to going to a man’s apartment also consent to sex, women ask for it, and only promiscuous women get raped” (Carmody & Washington, 2001).

Of the three women interviewed for this project who were victims of sexual assault, two of them openly blamed themselves for having gone to the man’s apartment, even though, in both cases, they went there with the intent of studying only and made that perfectly clear to their attackers. These myths, however, seem to perpetuate, especially amongst incoming students who may not yet have any friends who have been raped. It is easy for students to distance themselves

from victims and feel it could never happen to them, until it does. When surveyed, men were more likely to support these myths, but women also supported them in great numbers, even women who reported being sexual violence victims themselves. (Carmody & Washington, 2001).

Male Perceptions: Peer and Social Influences

There are a number of studies that examine reasons men become prone to violence against women in general and specifically why the problem is so pervasive on college and university campuses. One of the common theories is that peer groups play a large role in perpetuating such behavior. A significant number of studies indicate that fraternity men are in significantly greater agreement with supportive statements about rape and adversarial gender beliefs. With athletes it is even greater (Boeringer, 1995).

Another study examined men who participated in aggressive high school sports and found a correlation between these athletes and their likeliness to commit violent acts against women in high school and later in college. The study demonstrated that “men who participate in aggressive high school sports find violence more acceptable and are more likely to use violence against women, correlates to higher levels of sexual coercion and date rape...high school girls are substantially more likely to experience sexual assault than are college women... aggressive sports are the training ground (at any age)” (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka & White, 2006). University police officers interviewed for this paper also complain that athletic departments are far more likely to cover up acts of violence because the image of the university is more likely to be effected by crimes committed by high-profile student athletes than with anonymous students. One of the frustrations many officers have run into is the lack of cooperation from coaches who

are aware of sexual violence by their athletes (University Police Officer 1, 2006). This behavior increases the likelihood that such behaviors are tolerated by their peers and coaches, and the perpetrators will be able to escape punishment.

While having a peer group that supports violence against women (such as fraternal and athletic groups) certainly contributes to the problem, an offender's history of violence is also a large contributing factor. According to Mahlstedt & Welsh, "to be sexually aggressive towards women... one would need to be accepting of violence in relationships, believe that women deserve violence (hostility towards women), and think that it is men's place to be dominant (dominance/ power ideology)" (2005). This also leads into the idea that many men who have been raised to be the 'dominant' gender tend to lash out at women who do not live up to that ideal. In a study by Schwartz & DeKeserdy, it was found that "when their female partners reject or fail to live up to the ideals of familial or courtship patriarchy...(justifying abusing these women)...male peers may tell men to sexually, physically, and psychologically mistreat dating partners who challenge men's patriarchal authority, refuse to provide them with sexual gratification, or both" (2000). Klein found that "boys assaulted girls who rejected them or otherwise caused the boys gender distress" (2006). The study also suggests that men are genetically aggressive and that the idea of gender roles need to change. Additional studies have shown that male victims of family violence tend to become violent offenders in large numbers (Carr & VanDeusen, 2002).

Regardless of the root cause, the problem is pretty pronounced. "Self-Report research...as many as 15 percent of incoming male freshmen have been sexually aggressive or assaultive in the past." Versus five percent for all men nationally (Mustaine & Texksbury, 2002). This study only looks at incoming freshmen. As escalation patterns of violence tend to

increase with time, the numbers certainly grow as these men are allowed to go unpunished for their acts throughout their university experience.

Another interesting point to consider here is how little the situation seems to be changing over the years. A comparison of studies between 1957 and 2004 showed little change in the prevalence of sexual coercion and assault on campus. The 1957 study reported that 56 percent of women reported coerced sexual experience, 21 percent experienced forced. The numbers from all subsequent surveys showed similar numbers suggesting almost nothing has changed in the past 50 years (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004). An interesting side note to this is that it is not just women that are reporting being victims of acquaintance/ date violence. In a survey done in 2002, it was found that:

- “82 percent of women and 87 percent of men reported psychological aggression from dating partners.
- 39 percent of women and 30 percent of men reported experiencing some type of sexual victimization from dating partners.
- 22 percent of women and 21 percent of men reported experiencing physical aggression from partners (Harned, 2002)”.

This information segways into the next subsection in that it illustrates why university policies are the key towards keeping the problem of sexual violence from escalating. “Prior research has shown that adolescents involved in deviant behavior typically continue that behavior into adulthood... prior deviance serves as a more robust predictor of sexual deviance (Jackson, Veneziano & Rikken, 2004)”. This fact is repeated by most police officers interviewed for this paper. One senior city police officer interviewed said that he could look at person’s criminal history and easily predict what their next crime would be in

that criminals tend to follow very predictable patterns of escalation if they remain uncaught and unpunished for their crimes (City Police Officer 2, 2006).

University Policies

“Thus, if too many men act like they can force sexual intercourse on a woman any time they wish on college campuses and get away with it, it is because it is too often true. In fact, they can often act with impunity (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999).” A number of news articles and personal interviews make it abundantly clear that the majority of university campuses do not adequately punish sex offenders on the rare occasion that these crimes are actually reported. That is why this is the predominant issue addressed in this paper. Assuming that solutions can be found as to how to increase awareness of and reporting of these crimes, it won't help if the universities involved take serious steps to discipline these students. “Worse yet, too few campuses act with concern for the crimes that are reported. Some campuses are more concerned with covering up and hiding victimization than they are with helping victims. Others are committed to a non-adversarial justice system that requires the victim to act as prosecutor if she wishes any action to be taken. This burden may be more than the raped woman wishes to handle....the New York Times reported on one elite campus that did not take significant action against an admitted rapist, but did expel the friend of a rape victim, who sat with her during the proceedings, for being caught with an open container of beer. (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999).”

Many of the university administrators, psychologists, and police officers interviewed for this paper indicated that they felt that competitive pressure between universities kept university administrators from being motivated to change the system and increase punishments. Doing so would mean that these crimes would have to receive more public attention. One group of

students at a private university in Texas expressed outrage when a campus police chief suggested that he would not install additional safety call boxes on campus because when visiting students and parents see too many of them they feel that the campus is not safe. Other officers interviewed in the department have stated that the comments were taken out of context and misinterpreted, but they did agree that they all felt considerable pressure from the administration to make the campus seem safe and keep the crime statistics low. To that extent, many university administrators have policies that violent crimes are often referred to the Dean of Students office in order to receive academic punishment.

One of the victims interviewed for this paper later discovered from detectives that the student she had studied with off campus had previously been convicted in another state for sexual assault and a non-sexual assault. She had no idea of his history or that he had just been arrested and kicked out of another area university for failing to register as a sex offender. After this second arrest, he was admitted to the university student 1 was attacked even though he was registered and had a violent criminal history. University police officer 1, who works at a local private university, stated that this is the reason why his university asks all incoming students if they have ever been convicted of a felony or are registered as a sex-offender. The officer stated that it is easy and cheap to do these background checks and if something is found, that a licensed police officer will review the case to determine whether or not the student appears to be a danger to other students. (University Police Officer 1, 2006). My own informal survey of university admissions offices shows that only one public university or college in Texas does background checks on incoming students (University of North Texas). Many private universities didn't answer my question on the subject so it is difficult to compare the two. Another university police officer at a private university stated that private universities are more inclined to do background

checks on incoming students because unlike state-sponsored universities, private universities can be sued for negligence (University Police Officer 2, 2006). A detailed search on Lexis-Nexis showed a number of cases where state-sponsored universities and colleges have been sued for negligence in sexual assaults involving fellow students or university property, but only one case that actually succeeded. In this particular case a Texas community college student was able to prove that state law giving government institutions immunity from lawsuits did not apply in cases where state employees acted negligently. In this case the victim was able to prove that the college police officer acted so inappropriately while interviewing her that she was able to sue the university for the officer's actions.

Of the three students interviewed for this paper who had all been the victims of sexual assault by fellow students at their public universities, one of the students stated that she felt so victimized by the system that they regretted ever having reported the crimes. The other two students never did report the crimes and after hearing stories from others, stated that they were glad they didn't (Students 1, 2, & 3, 2006).

Over the course of looking at cases for this paper, it appeared rather alarming by how little most university administrators and professors seemed to be concerned about the extent of the problem and how reluctant many of them were to become involved in the solution. Most professors interviewed stated that they didn't want to have to get involved in disciplinary measures in that it was a distraction to their ability to teach (Professor 1, 2005). Students 2 and 3 interviewed were both assaulted by a male student that they were attending class with. When a third party approached the professor to ask that the male student be removed from the class and gave the professor details of what the two female students had reported to him, the professor was reportedly annoyed by the request and was hostile to the student making the request. This

experience scared the two female students and they both failed to report their attacker for fear that they would also be treated with hostility (Students 2 & 3, 2006). This clearly indicates one of the fundamental flaws with university policies towards handling violent crime on campus. As opposed to high school teachers and administrators which have an obligation to protect the minor children on their campuses, most professors interviewed for this paper do not feel that they have any such obligation. This contributes to the spiral of silence which keeps so many victims from reporting their crimes and allows their attackers to grow more confident as they their crimes go unpunished.

The most extreme example found regarding this complacency was at the University of New Brunswick in Canada only ten years ago (1996). The University of New Brunswick newspaper published a letter by math professor Matin Yaqzan. He stated that when boys are 17 or 18 that regular sexual intercourse must become a necessity. For those entering a university, co-ed residences may be helpful, but don't always provide enough sexual opportunities and therefore date rape is necessary. He further argues that a "female who has sex outside of marriage is not entitled to label unwanted sexual activity as rape and that 'it would be more reasonable for her to demand some monetary compensation for her inconvenience or discomfort, rather than express moral outrage' (DeKeseredy, Schwartz & Alvi, 2000). It seems rather horrifying that not only would a university professor have such an opinion, but that he would put it in a newspaper, and the newspaper would actually run it.

The other primary problem found in most university policies is that there doesn't seem to be very effective means in place to encourage women to report the crimes to the campus police. Some studies have indicated that although many women don't report these crimes to police, they are reporting it to their friends, indicating that they do wish to talk about it or do something about

it, but don't feel that the university police are the best people to approach. Another survey revealed that "although few incidents-including rapes-are reported to the police and/ or campus authorities, a high proportion are disclosed to some else (mainly to friends). Incidents were more likely to be reported to the police when they had characteristics which made them more 'believable' (e.g., presence of a weapon or an assailant who was a stranger). The use of alcohol and/ or drugs by offenders and/ or victims had a unique effect, causing students to be more likely to expose their victimization to friends but not to campus authorities... 40 percent of women said they didn't report the crime to police because they didn't feel that they had enough evidence (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003)". This study really highlights the greatest problem being confronted here; while many women are willing to talk to friends about what happened to them, they don't often bring it to the authorities because they don't believe that the police can do anything about it unless they have some sort of 'proof'. This would suggest that awareness messages focused on interpersonal/ peer-to-peer communication would likely be most effective at reaching these students.

Public and Peer Awareness and Prevention

The reasons justifying action by the public and other students are pretty straightforward. These crimes have a terrible impact on the lives of the victims and if the aggressors are allowed to go unpunished, these crimes will only continue to escalate when they leave the campus environment. An interesting side note here though is that the majority of these crimes do seem to be occurring on campus, suggesting that the general communities are doing a better job of stopping this type of behavior than the campus communities are. The majority of rape victims are between the ages of 16 and 24 (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003). "Exposure to sexual

violence is associated with a multiplicity of ...increased substance abuse, depressive symptoms, health risk behaviors, and symptoms of PTSD (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004). This study and similar reports from university psychologists interviewed for this paper indicated that women exposed to sexual or other violence on campuses leads to severe emotional problems and the perpetuation of bad habits, especially if they don't seek psychological help. Victims are often liable to be repeatedly abused if they are allowed to continue to believe that they are at fault for what happened. According to a consensus of psychologists interviewed, women who blame themselves and don't receive peer or family support as victims are likely to be re-victimized.

The problem of community action requires first and foremost an awareness of the problem in the community. "Edward's community-readiness model would indicate that change cannot take place until communities move beyond the historical perspective that sexual violence does not exist or is a problem only in other places." A surprising number of university administrators and faculty members interviewed for this paper were actually surprised to learn the magnitude of this problem. While informally interviewing a number of female college students a surprising number indicated that they had either experienced something similar or had many friends in college who have. In one survey, "approximately 50 percent of college women had experienced some form of unwanted sexual activity (Blanyard, Plante & Moynihan, 2004). Based upon conversations with dozens of university age females interviewed for this project it can be reasonably concluded that the real number is actually substantially higher and in fact the interviews have found very few women who don't feel that they have had some form of unwanted sex during their time in college. Most of the experiences either involved inebriation, fear, or feeling pressured or obligated. In almost none of these cases were the men reported or punished for what they did.

One of the problems with relying too much on the statistics presented here and elsewhere is that it is very easy to assume that what is occurring is happening elsewhere or to someone else. The other is that the statistics are rarely looked at by those affected by them the most. The Clery Act of 1990 was an act of Congress, initiated by the parents of a woman who was killed in her dormitory. It requires college campuses nationwide to report campus crime statistics and release a daily crime log on their websites. One problem that has arisen with this law is that according to many of the university police officers and students interviewed, almost no one actually looks at it when making their decisions as to which college to attend. In addition, according to one university police officer, the law is written in such a vague way that it is extremely easy for a university to get away with not reporting almost all of the violent crimes that occur on their campuses (University Police Officers 1 & 2).

There are a variety of researchers focusing on different ways to combat the problems addressed here. “Some researchers criticize sexual violence prevention efforts for focusing too much on individuals or small groups, such as athletes or fraternity members, at the neglect of attending to wider social change. Prevention approaches must go beyond changing individuals to changing the system that creates and maintains sexual abuse ...to maximize the likelihood that bystanders will engage in pro-social behavior, they need to have an awareness of the problem and its negative impact on the victim (Banyard, Plante & Moynihan, 2004).” “ Male silence about violence against women is complicity (DeKeseredy, Schwartz & Alvi, 2000). Most solutions that have been proposed for the changing public perceptions involve finding alternative groups. In other words, if fraternal and athletic groups encourage sexual aggression, then one possible way to fight it is to create groups that discourage such behavior. One comparison given is that if an alcoholic spends time in a peer group that regularly drinks, then he is going to have

difficulty quitting the behavior himself. If on the other hand he joins Alcoholics Anonymous, then he will be in an anti-drinking peer group, rather than a pro-drinking peer group.

(DeKeseredy, Schwartz & Alvi, 2000).

One of the scariest and most frustrating results from the readings were from a 2003 study that examined sexual violence prevention programs in place at universities throughout the United States. What the study found was that there were “prevention programs that have shown promise for altering attitudes and belief systems among young adults; however, no direct evidence indicates that these programs reduce the incidence of sexual violence (Clinton-Sherrod, Gibbs, Vincus, Squire, Cignetti, Pettibone & Igoe, 2003)”. In other words, of all the different types of awareness programs out there on campuses, there have been a few programs that have been shown to change attitudes, but even in areas where these attitudes have been significantly changed; there is still no reduction in the level of sexual assaults. It would appear from this study that even when colleges and universities are successful at making women aware of the dangers and making men feel that these behaviors are wrong, it still doesn’t change their actual behavior. This is frustrating and discouraging, but it also suggests that the best means of dealing with the problem is not necessarily through public awareness programs. Incidentally, the study did find that the most effective means of reaching college students were through small peer led groups that were interactive and involved multiple sessions. The least effective were health center type presentations and lectures.

Conclusions

As stated earlier, the primary purpose of this paper is to examine the issue of sexual predatory behavior on American college and university campuses, determine what is causing the problem to be so pervasive, and to look at various strategies to combat the problem.

- **Are attempts by universities to protect their image causing a ripe environment for this predatory behavior to grow?** The case studies evaluated for this project would seem to indicate that universities are being put in a difficult position. While it can be assumed that most university administrators place a high priority on trying to keep their campuses safe, they are also faced with competitive pressure to not appear less safe than other universities they are competing with for students, funds, professors, and grants etc... This has led numerous campus police officers interviewed frustrated and at odds with administrators who don't want the officers to crack down on violent offenders for fear of the negative image it would bring to the campus. These officers are also reporting some problems with university psychologists. One thing that has been repeatedly emphasized to me here is the importance of giving rape victims choices. These people have had a choice taken away from them, and telling them that they must respond in a certain way to these crimes would only result in the victims feeling re-victimized by the system, something that is currently a widespread problem and a likely reason why so few women come forward to report these crimes. As the crimes fail to get reported, the criminals are able to get away with what they've done without punishment and they have no good reason not to re-offend. Due to these factors, it seems safe to conclude that attempts to protect a campus' image are a very large contributor that allows these crimes to continue and even escalate. Unfortunately, due to competitive reasons, it is likely that none of these universities are going to be highly motivated to change, especially public

universities which have legal protection from prosecution for their roles in most of these cases. It would appear that the only thing that would force a change in policy would be new legislation, successful legal action against them, or a large public outcry for change.

- Why is this issue not being discussed more and is this failure to discuss the issue one of the keys to its continuance? By all accounts this is a much greater problem than most seem to know. What roles are the spiral of silence and the taboo of not discussing sexual issues play in keeping the issue from being openly discussed?** One issue that constantly arose in the process of researching this paper was just how uncomfortable the topic made most people. It was gathered from most of these conversations that this was not an issue discussed between students and parents or between university policy makers. The only place it seems to be discussed at all is between female friends. This does emphasize the possibility that if we could some way put together an outreach program that educated the student body of most campuses about the previously discussed rape myths and encouraged peer-to-peer communication and encouragement to try and convince all students to be aware of the dangers and convince victims to come forward and report their crimes that this would be the most effective communication strategy for reaching the audience. If the topic is so uncomfortable that most are not willing to discuss it publicly then there tends to be a spiral of silence problem that establishes itself. In other words, if a victim feels that she is the only one, and continues to not hear any information that there are others, she is more likely to fall into the self-blame trap and fail to discuss or report the crime herself, thereby tightening the spiral. One alarming trend that began to emerge when discussing this issue with a variety of students is that a small proportion of female students and a large proportion of

male students and parents interviewed were alarmed by the stories relayed to them. By contrast, a large proportion of the female students interviewed about the subject have expressed a deep empathy and understanding of the problem. For those female students interviewed for more than a couple of hours, most of them came forward and at least expressed pretty clear hints that they had experienced something similar. The more female students interviewed, the more common it seems to be that these students had been sexually abused or assaulted at some point during their college careers. Based on these conversations, it can be safely deduced that the actual number of victims is substantially higher than even the statistics reported in this paper. Frankly, as this paper progresses it became difficult to find female students who haven't had a first hand experience in this area and are relieved to have someone that they feel they can discuss the issue with. Those that did discuss their complete stories indicated that the interviewer was often the only person they had spoken to about it outside their immediate circle of friends for the self-blame and embarrassment reasons mentioned earlier. Because of this fact, it would seem that any possible solution to the problem needs to begin with getting past the taboo of speaking about sexual abuse on campus and make sure that the topic is brought up with all incoming students and parents. Until people feel free to discuss what is going on, this problem will remain a horrible hidden secret.

- **What effects do peer groups of victims and aggressors have on their behaviors?** The various studies cited in the literature review section of this paper indicated that peer groups do have a heavy influence (both positively and negatively) on student's decision making processes as well as in helping to reinforce in them what is considered to be acceptable and unacceptable behavior among the group members. With this in mind, if

we can get these secondary opinion leaders to communicate messages to men that this behavior is inappropriate and to women that they need to be more aware of the threats out there and the importance of reporting and accepting their friends who become victims, then these peer groups can be used for positive gain on the problem. As it stands right now, it is pretty clear that the male fraternal and athletics groups are encouraging male sexual predatory behavior and female peer groups have largely been absent in sending out messages that increase awareness of threats and prevention methods and combat the rape myths to help out the victims.

- **Why are current communications methods failing to have their desired effects on changing these behaviors?** As indicated by the studies and through common sense by anyone who has taught university students, most students aren't terribly receptive to morality lessons from people outside of their peer groups. Lectures and generic public service announcement message attempts have largely been ignored. While well intentioned, it seems the lack of change in the number of sexual offenses over the years combined with the failure of many of the documented awareness campaigns reinforces the earlier suggestions that the keys are interpersonal and peer communication techniques and creating a supportive environment where victims feel safe coming forward and are confident in knowing that their privacy will be respected and their choices for how to deal with the criminals are not being taken away from them.
- **What communications strategies need to be implemented to try and reduce the problem?** This question was largely addressed in the previous questions, but to reiterate, a strategy needs to be implemented that emphasizes peer-to-peer interpersonal and small

peer group communications and awareness messages. Given the prevalence of instant and text messaging on campuses, students are more connected now in real time than they ever have been before. There is a great communications network in place if a way can be found to tap into it.

- **What legal or administrative changes need to be implemented to try and reduce the problem?** As stated previously, in order to be fair to competing colleges and universities, the only solutions that are likely to be accepted are those that are universally applied. The Clery Act of 1990 mandated that all college campuses publish daily crime logs online and report a list of all crimes committed on campus each year for public inspection. The problem, according to most university police officers interviewed is that: 1) there is a too much vagueness in the law which makes it easy for campuses to not report all crimes, 2) too many crimes, including violent crimes are referred to the Dean of Students for academic rather than legal punishment, therefore avoiding reporting requirements, and 3) almost no one actually seems to look at these reports, thereby making them rather ineffective.
- **Are there any other potential solutions to the problem that should be examined further?** As with any problem, there needs to be more brainstorming sessions on the issue to try and find solutions not previously looked at. A good idea would be to gather together groups of students and have them work on brainstorming solutions to try and come with some original ideas. If nothing else, these solutions would help in increasing awareness of the problem on their campuses.

In summary, the problem here is pretty vast and overwhelming. First of all, the way that most campuses handle these crimes are acting as a discouragement for victims to come forward.

Before anything else can change, universities and colleges must adopt new procedures for making sure that whatever they do is in the best interest of the victims and doesn't make them feel that they are being re-victimized. The administrators, police officers, and psychologists need to get together to try and find ways of accomplishing this. From the information gathered from personal interviews, these three groups were add odds with each other and were not working together very well to try and find common solutions that would actually help the students that have and will fall victim to these predators.

If it becomes necessary, which is safe to presume it will, these policies will be have to be forced upon the campuses either by the existing lawsuits pending or more likely through new legislation that would need to be proposed to try and force these changes.

Before any of this can happen though, there must be open communication about the issue. Campus organizations need to put aside the taboos on the subject matter and realize that this problem cannot be solved until everyone comes to the table and talks about it. This needs to occur as much as possible from the student side in order to encourage the peer-to-peer interpersonal communication methods that will be necessary to combat these problems. It seems though that it will be up to the university administration to ensure that these sections take place however, as many students remain unaware of the problem and the need to do anything about it. As students quickly come and go from campuses, it is the administration that is there and in the best place to make sure that these conversations take place.

Once public awareness is raised and new ideas are discussed, the activist nature of most campus communities should take over and the solutions should spread throughout various peer groups.

The critical thing that needs to happen here is that colleges and universities need to public and internally recognize that there is a significant problem going on here that shouldn't be continuously swept under the rug just because it has been for so long. They have been relying on the taboos, myths, and embarrassment of all parties to keep the issue quiet for too long. While this could probably continue indefinitely, the emotional scars that this problem is leaving on generations of women is enough that it is time for all of us in a position to stand up and do something about it. Those that have the authority and ability to stand up and speak out for those that are unable to do so for themselves have the moral obligation to do nothing less.

Evaluation

Whenever I discuss this issue with others I always get one of two responses. The first response is that of total surprise from those unfamiliar with that this is a problem on campus today. The other response is a look of understanding that only seems to come from those that have been affected first hand by this tragedy. Upon further interviewing it becomes clear that the only people who seem to be aware of the magnitude of this problem are those that are either victims themselves, close friends of a victim, or the police and psychologist who work with them. There doesn't seem to be any in between reaction, meaning to me that the word is simply not reaching the general public. We can study all the numbers and statistics in the world, but these will never tell us whether or not any new attempts at conquering this problem are successful. The true measure of success will come when I can discuss this issue and I get a third response; a response of awareness without the tragedy in their face. In other words the response that people have heard the message who haven't been personally affected by it and are aware of

the issues. When trying to educate others on a taboo subject, in some cases, simply finding ways to talk about it will lead to success.

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Vitae

Michael Hollis, 32 years old, is a native of San Antonio, Texas but was raised in Austin and the Central Texas Hill Country. He has also lived and studied independently in Dallas, Texas; Seattle, Washington; Vancouver, British Columbia; and numerous other cities and towns along the way.

Michael received his Bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Saint Edward's University in 2003. He additionally received his Master's degree in Mass Communication from Texas State University where he served for two years as a Graduate Teaching Assistant where he taught and assisted a variety of News Reporting, Public Relations, and Advertising courses. He also delivered a number of guest lectures in these areas as well as in the fields of Gender and Anthropology, Archaeology, Mass Media and Society, and Media Ethics. He anticipates getting his Master of Liberal Arts in Global Issues from Saint Edward's University in August, 2007.

In addition to his teaching experience, Michael served six years as an enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army and Texas and Washington National Guard as a Public Affairs Specialist, Broadcast Journalist, and Print Photojournalist. He also has an extensive work experience in a wide variety of fields over his 15 years of work experience.

Michael has received a number of awards and honors including the Saint Edward's Presidential Scholar Award, The Goodnough Fellowship, and numerous Texas Legislative and institutional grants. He was a member of Alpha Sigma Lambda national honor society and presented a paper on "Human Trafficking in the Western World" at the 2003 SOURCE Symposium. He has also received the military award of Texas Adjutant General's Individual Award for Distinguished Meritorious Achievement and Outstanding Service.