Communication Surrounding College Campus Crime: Sexual Assault Influencing Factors, Policies, and Decision Making Outcomes

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By

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Abstract

This study includes research, data, and expert opinions regarding sexual assaults on college campuses, in particular California Polytechnic State University. The information presented in this study includes topics such as sexual assault rates, reports, cultural factors, policies, and prevention strategies.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses. It analyzes the cultural and societal factors surrounding sexual assault as well as reviews current university policies and statistics. Sexual assault remains the most underreported serious crime on campus (Potter). However, in recent years, sexual assault cases on college campus have become the forefront of media attention as activists and advocacy groups strive to bring awareness to this problem.

As attention to this problem continues to grow, universities face increasing pressure to provide effective prevention strategies and policies. Indeed, as our nations cultural perspective on this issue shifts, university policies will have to change with it.

Background of the Problem

Research shows that, “the prevalence of campus sexual assault has remained static since publication of the first study in 1987” (Potter, 2015). Some experts report “one in five” women being sexually assaulted by the time they leave college, while other sources say the statistic is closer to 6/1000 women who are sexually assaulted on campus (French, 2015). Because sexual assault that occurs on campus is handled differently than assault occurring off campus, this system of reporting is confusing. The Clery Act requires universities to report only crimes that occur on campus, which means that sexual assaults that occur off campus are not accounted for (Ridolfi-Starr, 2016).
Additionally, there are many social and cultural factors that impact the rates of sexual assault on campus. These include the idea of the “hook-up” culture, rape culture, humor, and alcohol consumption, all of which contribute to sexual assault. (Dockterman, 2016) As these cases continue to be the forefront of media attention, universities are forced to look at current policies and make a change.

**Purpose of the Study**

The overall purpose of this study is to determine why sexual assault occurs at such a high rate on college campuses and in surrounding areas. This study is aimed at examining the cultural and societal factors that encourage or promote sexual assault, as well as analyzing university policies encompassing the issue.

Ultimately, this study should bring attention to sexual assaults occurring on Cal Poly’s campus and in surrounding areas and pressure administrators to take immediate and appropriate action. Sexual assault is a problem that can no longer be ignored, and this research project should encourage those in power to take a closer look at the policies, preventative tips, and programs that are currently implemented. This study should spark conversation and drive us closer in preventing sexual assault.

**Setting for the Study**

This study will be done as part of the data collection for a Senior Project at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo California. Interviews will be conducted with five professionals including California Polytechnic State university’s Title IX Coordinator, Brian Gnandt and the Deputy Coordinator Tera Bisbee, the Director of Cal Poly’s “Safer,” Christina
Kaviani as well as the Coordinator, Kara Samaniego, and the Education Services Coordinator for RISE, Ashleigh Vereen. Each will be asked the same set of questions. These questions will be specifically designed to answer the research questions and fill in the gaps where the literature lacks.

**Research Questions**

This study used the following research questions; each one intended to bring up specific points regarding sexual assault. After researching existing information on key topics involved with this issue, each question was made to further investigate and acquire new and necessary data on sexual assault on college campuses.

1. Considering all campus crimes, how prevalent is sexual assault?
2. What cultural and societal factors influence and affect sexual assault?
3. How often is sexual assault on campus reported? Off campus?
4. What policies are implemented that prevent and manage sexual assault on campus and in college communities?
5. What is Cal Poly’s policy on sexual assault on campus/surrounding community and how does it compare to colleges across the United States?
6. What is being done to prevent sexual assault on and off campus?

**Definition of Terms**

**Sexual Assault:** Sexual assault is any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are
sexual activities as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.

**Title IX:** is a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity.

**Jeanne Clery Act:** a consumer protection law passed in 1990, requires all colleges and universities who receive federal funding to share information about crime on campus and their efforts to improve campus safety as well as inform the public of crime in or around campus. This information is made publicly accessible through the university's annual security report.

**Office for Civil Rights (OCR):** a sub-agency of the U.S. Department of Education that is primarily focused on protecting civil rights in federally assisted education programs and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, handicap, age, or membership in patriotic youth organizations.

**Rape:** is a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration perpetrated against a person without that person's consent.

**Consent:** Consent is when someone agrees, gives permission, or says "yes" to sexual activity with other persons. Consent is always freely given and all people in a sexual situation must feel that they are able to say "yes" or "no" or stop the sexual activity at any point.

**RISE:** RISE is a non-profit organization in San Luis Obispo that provides crisis intervention and treatment services to survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence and their loved ones.

**Safer:** Cal Poly’s confidential advocacy, education and support resource for addressing sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking.

**Survivor:** Someone who has survived a sexual assault/rape.
Organization of Study

Chapter 1 includes the background of the problem, purpose of the study, and a definition of terms. Chapter 2 will review the existing literature on sexual assaults on college campuses. Chapter 3 will present the methodology of the study. In Chapter 4, the data will be presented based on the original research questions, and then analyzed and compared to the existing literature. Finally, Chapter 5 will summarize the study and include recommendations for ending sexual assault on college campuses.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of literature focuses on the existing literature regarding sexual assaults on college campuses and in their surrounding communities. It includes everything from measuring sexual assault statistics, to policies implemented on campuses, to cultural factors and prevention.

Prevalence of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

It is difficult to measure sexual violence on college campuses. In one study, it is estimated that approximately one in four or one in five college women have been victims of sexual assault (Dockterman, 2016). In another study, done by the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, it shows that the true incidence of campus rape is not one in five but rather 6.1 per 1,000 (French, 2015). This statistical discrepancy is confusing, therefore it is important to note that one study reports sexual assault of all college women regardless of location, while the other reports only assaults that occur on campus. Research shows that the prevalence of campus rape has actually remained stagnant throughout the years. According to Potter (2016) ”Intensified public awareness of campus sexual assault cannot be attributed to an increase in prevalence: the prevalence of campus sexual assault (according to data collected from students regardless of whether they reported the crime to authorities) has remained static since publication of the first study in 1987.” Indeed, sexual assault has been grossly underreported in the past and in fact remains the most underreported serious crime: “between 64% and 96% of victims do not disclose the crime to authorities.” (Potter, 2016, p. 1)

When it comes to crimes committed on campus, the investigation process is different than for crimes committed off campus. “Campus investigations are far less thorough and rigorous
than criminal investigations” (Potter, 2016). However, due to increased activism as well as a multitude of complaints by assault-survivors, attention to this issue has significantly increased in recent years. Because of this sudden attention, it may appear that rape is more prevalent on campus than ever before, when in fact it has simply been magnified. This attention has led to Title IX investigations by the Department of Education and allocated pressure on the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016)

Culture

The definition of hookup culture is one that accepts and encourages casual sexual encounters, including one-night stands and other related activity, which focus on physical pleasure without necessarily including emotional bonding or long-term commitment (Guarino, 2013). The hookup culture directly affects sexual assault in that it encourages the casualness of rape. Psychologists agree that this kind of culture has desensitized today’s youth to sex and sexual imagery so much so that rape has become an accepted part of the "hook-up culture." (Guarino, 2013, p. 1)

When it comes to sexual assault, “The view that responsibility for prevention lies with potential victims is reinforced by products marketed to women, including whistles, flashlights, and alarms, contraptions that put the onus on the victim, not the perpetrator, to head off an assault.” (Potter, 2016) Potential victims (typically women) are urged to monitor their alcohol consumption and to remain in control of social situations, as alcohol consumption and sexual assault are positively correlated. (Flack, W. J., Hansen, B. E., Hopper, A. B., Bryant, L. A., Lang, K. W., Massa, A. A., & Whalen, J. E., 2016) This creates a culture in which women are responsible for preventing their own rapes. “If only she hadn’t gotten so drunk or she hadn’t
worn that outfit, the thinking goes, things might have turned out differently. As opposed to: why didn’t he respect boundaries?” (Dockterman, 2016) Potential perpetrators are not similarly warned to monitor their own alcohol intake or to refrain from encouraging others to drink to excess. (Potter, 2016)

Furthermore, the definition of consent differs significantly between men and women. Multiple studies have shown that men typically perceive consent as an event: a woman’s consent to go to a man’s room, for instance, is taken to imply acceptance of any sexual activities that ensue there; women tend to view consent as a process that continues throughout the interaction. (Young, 2014)

When it comes to the prevalence of sexual assault, humor is another factor to be considered. According to Strain, “writers and comedians seem to be more concerned about shock value than about their potential perpetuation of rape culture—a society in which sexual violence is prevalent, excused, and encouraged by popular attitudes, norms, and media message.” There are two major ways in which humor has the potential to influence rape culture: by reinforcing it, or by challenging it. (Strain, 2016) Humor that targets individuals who have been raped, or that trivializes rape itself, may reinforce rape culture by perpetuating inaccurate ideas, overpowering or silencing individuals against whom rape may have been perpetrated, and desensitizing individuals to the severity of rape. However, humor that targets rapists or rape culture in its subtext may challenge individuals’ acceptance of rape, and thus actually work as a tool in increasing society’s awareness of rape as a social problem. (Strain, 2016, p. 3)
On and Off Campus Sexual Assault Reports

According to Field (2015) “nine out of 10 colleges reported no rapes on their campuses in 2014.” This statistic, released in November by the American Association of University Women, “seemed to contradict recent surveys of female undergraduates, as well as the often cited -- and controversial -- statistic that one in five women are sexually assaulted during college.” Field believes there could be three possibilities for this: students still aren’t comfortable reporting rape, students aren’t reporting rape for some other reason, rapes aren’t being counted- or they’re not being reported to the feds. (Field, 2015, p. 1)

In addition, because of the Clery Act colleges must count only crimes that occur on or near campus property. Therefore, “if a student is victimized on a city street or at a house party, the incident won’t be included in the numbers. This means that nonresidential campuses, including a majority of community colleges, are likely to have reported no rapes. (According to the AAUW, 76 percent of the nearly 4,000 "main or primary campuses" -- including community colleges' main campuses -- made zero rape reports in 2014.)” (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016)

Over the last decade, the number of college sexual assaults being reported has risen from 2,300 to 3,300 (Gray, 2014). However, to many counselors and advisors, this increase is a sign that colleges have gotten better at handling sexual assault. According to Gray, “This is likely the result of a number of factors: schools becoming better educated about defining sexual assault and more transparent about disclosing when it happens, and victims feeling increasingly empowered to come forward because of these changes.”
Policies

Title IX, a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity, is the cornerstone piece of legislation in the fight to end sexual violence within institutions of higher education. (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016) Despite Title IX’s prohibition against discrimination based on sex, many survivors of gender-based violence receive little to no support from their college or university after experiencing violence. In response, an increasing number of survivors are filing Title IX complaints with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR). After they file these complaints, most survivors must wait years—sometimes even until after they graduate or withdraw from the institution—to get redress. (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016)

For each investigation, OCR examines the school’s culture, reviews previous institutional responses, interviews complainants and school officials, and analyzes existing policies and procedures. If OCR identifies noncompliance, Title IX requires that OCR seek voluntary compliance from a school before it initiates other enforcement actions. (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016, p. 2) These complexities, combined with a lack of resources, delay justice for complainants, as OCR has decided to address discrimination faced by individuals (such as a denial of interim measures) only after conducting systemic investigations. (Campus Sexual Assault: Suggested Policies and Procedures, 2013) Therefore, OCR’s current enforcement strategy has the effect of penalizing survivors of gender-based violence, as they experience longer delays than victims of other forms of discrimination. (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016)

Additionally, the Jeanne Clery Act, passed in 1990, requires all colleges and universities to release annual security reports tallying the number of crimes reported on or near campus. Under the Act, institutions must provide survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating
violence, and stalking with options such as changes to academic, transportation, or living, or working situations, and assistance in notifying local law enforcement, if the student or employee chooses to do so. It also provides both parties in a campus disciplinary process certain rights. (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016, p. 3) However, schools are not required to release any information about how these reports are ultimately addressed or any aggregate information regarding the identity of the parties involved, such as whether the majority of perpetrators are students. (Ridolfi-Starr, 2016).

**Cal Poly’s Sexual Assault Policy**

The president of Cal Poly, along with all other CSU presidents, signed a revised version of Executive Order 1095 on June 23rd, 2015. This order related to the implementation of Title IX, the Campus SaVE Act, and related legislation on sex discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual violence (Dean of Students). The executive order requires CSU Campuses to: “(1) publish and widely disseminate a Notice of Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Gender or Sex; (2) designate one Employee to coordinate Title IX compliance (including compliance with VAWA/Campus SaVE Act, and all other relevant Sexual Discrimination/Harassment/Misconduct legislation); (3) adopt appropriate complaint and investigation procedures; (4) implement education and prevention programs for Students and Employees, as well as victim resource programs for victims of Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Dating and Domestic Violence, and Stalking; (5) provide written rights and options information to victims of Sexual Misconduct; (6) provide training to the Campus community on how to prevent, identify and report Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Dating and Domestic Violence, and Stalking; (7) provide
training on how to conduct investigations to those Employees who investigate such allegations of Sexual Misconduct; and (8) provide training to student conduct Hearing Officers.” (Dean of Students).

At Cal Poly, the program Safer is the primary resource for addressing sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking (Dean of Students). Safer provides support for students, faculty, and staff who have been affected by sexual violence. This support includes: confidential crisis counseling, survivor support, on campus accompaniments, and support and guidance on making a report to university official and/or law enforcement. “If a faculty or staff member is made aware of a student who has been sexually victimized, they are required to report the incident to the Dean of Students who will then call the student who has been assaulted and give them the choice to involve the school or do nothing” (Dean of Students).

Prevention

There are several ways sexual assault can be prevented. The first is bystander intervention. Prevention initiatives that focus on the role of bystanders, including in-person programs and social-marketing campaigns, have the potential to engage the entire campus community. Teaching bystanders to intervene will help stop sexual assaults before they occur. (Potter, 2016)

Additionally, the Journal of Sex Research suggests that an “increased understanding of sexual consent communication is an important first step to improving communication and decreasing sexual assault.” (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013)

Research also shows that most sexual assaults involving women at college occur after women voluntarily consumed alcohol (which will change sexual consent communication.)
(Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2009). Sexual assault and alcohol consumption are positively correlated. Because the two are linked, many prevention tips suggest drinking less alcohol. However, most tips are intended for women (the potential victim.) (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2015)

In addition to prevention tips, Abby Rosenstein of Advocated for Youth, suggests that “Much of [rape prevention] comes down to what's taught in schools or not. If we focus only on preventing unintended pregnancies or reducing HIV, we're not necessarily getting to a place where we can talk about healthy relationships.” This advocacy group in Washington is calling for national sex-education standards that include the discussion of rape prevention (Wilson, 2016).

Finally, in order to prevent sexual assault and rape from occurring, a broad cultural shift needs to take place (Potter, 2016). Activist college students and administrators should be at the forefront of this cultural change, where they can change the conversation, turning sexual assault from a common practice to a crime.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the methods used to collect data for the study including the data sources, collection and presentation of the data, and limitations/delimitations.

Data Sources

Five professionals were interviewed for this study, two of which are in charge of Cal Poly’s program Safer, and two of which are in charge of handling Cal Poly’s Title IX policies. The last expert is involved with the San Luis Obispo community program RISE which provides crisis intervention and treatment services for survivors. The interview was based on a single questionnaire specifically designed to answer the original research questions and fill in the gaps where the literature lacks.

Participants

California Polytechnic State University’s Title IX Coordinator, Brian Gnandt, as well as the deputy coordinator Tera Bisbee, were chosen for this study based on their knowledge and understanding of the policies implemented at Cal Poly. The director of Cal Poly’s program Safer, Christina Kaviani, and the coordinator for the program, Kera Santiago were both interviewed. Ashleigh Vereen, the Education Services coordinator for the San Luis Obispo program, RISE was also interviewed.
**Interview Design**

The following questions and probes were asked each of the professionals and served as data sources for the study:

1. In your opinion, why does sexual assault occur so frequently? What factors contribute to its frequency?
2. How often are sexual assaults reported to you? What steps do you take after one is reported? What happens when/if the perpetrator is a student? What happens if the perpetrator is found guilty?
3. Do you know if the rates of sexual assaults have gone up or down in the last ten years? In the last year?
4. In your opinion, are the policies implemented on campus sufficient in preventing sexual assault? Are they fair? What would you change? What would you keep the same?
5. What is being done now to prevent sexual assault? Why are most preventative tips directed at women? What can we do in the future to prevent assaults from occurring?

**Data Collection**

The method of data collection for this study was four separate interviews with each individual expert (the only exception being that the two professionals from Safer were interviewed at the same time.) The interviews were conducted during July 2016 and lasted about 30 minutes to an hour each. During the interviews, each professional was asked questions from a single questionnaire that was designed to provide answers to the original research questions. Based on the person being interviewed and their area of expertise, some topics were covered more intensively than others.
Data Presentation

For this study, the interviews with Brian Gnandt and Tera Bisbee were not recorded with a digital voice recorder as both respondents declined to be recorded. Instead, intensive handwritten notes were taken as each question was answered. The rest of the interviews were documented using a digital voice recorder as well as hand written notes.

Limitations

One limitation for this project is the 8-week time constraint placed upon it. For the interview part of the study, both Brian and Tera declined to be recorded. This is a limitation simply because all of their answers could not be recorded. The experts from Safer were also interviewed at the same time, instead of individually. Additionally, each person interviewed, with the exception of Brian, was female which is a factor that may influence the data collected.

Delimitations

For this study, five people were interviewed. Because of time and money, all of the interviews were conducted in San Luis Obispo. For this study, each person interviewed was selected based on their position either on campus or in the community. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in office settings.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter will provide descriptions of those interviewed in the study as well as summarize the respondents' answers to the questionnaire. Because the data was collected through interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour, it will be presented in the form of direct quotations or paraphrased responses. The answers will then be analyzed and compared to the original research questions and the existing literature on sexual assaults on college campuses and in campus communities as reviewed in Chapter 2.

Description of Professionals Interviewed

Brian Gnandt: California Polytechnic State University’s Title IX Coordinator. Brian has delegated authority from the President of Cal Poly to receive sexual harassment/violence complaints. As the Title IX Coordinator, it is Brian’s job to ensure that every person at the university (including faculty, staff, and students) are aware of their legal rights under Title IX. He is charge of training for faculty, staff, and students, as well as investigations, remedies, including interim measures, and monitoring and advising. He is also responsible for ensuring that Cal Poly complies with its legal obligations under Title IX.

Tera Bisbee: California Polytechnic State University’s Title IX Deputy Coordinator. She is directly under Brian and in charge of assisting with his duties as coordinator. She is a designated administrative Title IX investigator responsible for investigating complaints of sex discrimination and sexual misconduct.

Christina Kaviani: Director of Safer, Cal Poly’s confidential advocacy, education and support resource for addressing sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic
violence, and stalking. Safer provides confidential crisis counseling offered Monday-Friday. It serves as an informational resource for all Cal Poly students, faculty, and staff. It provides information on reporting on sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment to the university and/or law enforcement. Safer also provides education and outreach.

Kara Samaniego: Safer Coordinator. Directly assists Christina in organizing events, educational services, etc… for Safer.

Ashleigh Vereen: Education Services Coordinator for RISE. RISE is a non-profit organization that provides crisis intervention and treatment services to survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence and their loved ones. All staff members are mandated reporters and have an obligation to report under the following circumstances: reports of abuse or neglect to minors, dependent adults, elders, as well as if a client is in danger of hurting themself or others. As the Education Services coordinator, Ashleigh is in charge of providing education at local schools and for other groups. She is in charge of presenting information and providing necessary information for her clients.

**Sexual Assault Questionnaire**

Each expert was asked to respond to the following questions and probes regarding sexual assault on Cal Poly’s campus and college campuses in general.

1. In your opinion, why does sexual assault occur so frequently? What factors contribute to its frequency?
Question #1 was asked in order to gain expert insight as to the reasoning behind sexual assaults that occur in the college setting. The question was designed so that each expert would give their opinion and was open to interpretation.

- Brian Gnandt: “Cultural” (Appendix A).
- Tera Bisbee: “There are a lot of factors. One is our current hook-up culture. Another is the lack of communication between the parties involved. They are not comfortable talking about intimacy/sex. On college campuses, alcohol plays a role. People have a lot to drink, and behaviors change because of that…The inequality of the genders also plays a huge role” (Appendix B).
- Christina Kaviani: “I mean I guess starting from like how people are born and how people parent, and how certain behaviors are expected from girls versus boys… Media and influencing factors” (Appendix C).
- Kara Samaniego: “As we know alcohol is involved in those first thirty days. People are experimenting for the first time and learning what their limits are. So that’s why we see an increased rate in those first thirty days, it’s a vulnerable time. But then there is the whole societal and gender socialization aspect of it and how are we raising our children to interact with one another” (Appendix C).
- Ashleigh Vereen: “Our culture” (Appendix D).

2. How often are sexual assaults reported to you? What steps do you take after one is reported? What happens when/if the perpetrator is a student? What happens if the perpetrator is found guilty?
Question #2 was designed to determine how often sexual assaults were reported to
different places on campus/in the community. It was also used to further investigate the steps that
are taken after each report is made, and find out what happens on campus when the compliant is
found guilty.

- Brian Gnandt: “Often times, reports come in waves. They are generally consistent, but we
tend to get an influx at certain times of the year. Last spring, for example… When a case
is reported, we evaluate it and then decided where to go from there. Each case is
different, so the case itself depends on the investigation going forward… Sanctions can
range from suspension to expulsion if they are our students” (Appendix A).

- Tera Bisbee: “In the 2015-2016 year, we had 65 reported cases (however, not all were
sexual assaults, but they still fall under Title IX.)… ultimately the investigation
determines whether or not there was a violation. If either party is unhappy, they can
appeal. Based on the severity of the case, we will work out the appropriate sanction”
(Appendix B).

- Christina Kaviani: “[Safer] and counseling are the only places that are confidential…
When someone reports to us and wants to do an investigation, that’s when we would send
them to the university” (Appendix C).

- Kera Samaniego: “This past year we had 208 survivors come into our office to seek
service. But that’s a number of things that could be a recent trauma or it could be from
fall quarter and they’re only coming in for spring, or it could be from childhood, but we
do see, this year was pretty high compared to previous years in terms of seeking
services…from there we connect them with counseling services…we also do advocacy”
(Appendix C).
• Ashleigh Vereen: “People come in very frequently and report to us… The next steps are basically all up to the client. We lay out every step available to them…We want people to fully understand what they are doing.” As far as what happens to the perpetrator, “It just varies, and it depends on the case” (Appendix D).

3. Do you know if the rates of sexual assaults have gone up or down in the last ten years? In the last year?

Question #3 was used to determine whether or not sexual assault rates have gone up or down in previous year and what that entails.

• Brian Gnandt: “This office is neutral. We have a job to do, so we need to get all the information, the accounts, and analyze the information through the eyes of the policy in place. This is not a criminal investigation, and often times the cases are a lot of he said, she said…Statistics show that there is a huge number of freshman victims and freshman accused. They need to know that drinking, being incapacitated, does not equal consent…This is something that just can’t be shoved under the rug anymore. The issue now is, how are we handling it. People need to know that there are consequences for their actions” (Appendix A)

• Tera Bisbee: “If the assault occurs off campus, students have to option of reporting here or to SLO PD. If the person accused has no affiliation with Cal Poly then we have no jurisdiction over them. A fair amount of sexual assaults occur in residence halls, and there always seems to be a spike in the fall. At Cal Poly, reports have definitely gone up, but it is because people are more aware of their rights. Nationally, there has been more awareness and attention brought to this issue” (Appendix B)
• Christina Kaviani: “The higher the numbers are the more people know like hey, there’s a problem” (Appendix C).

• Kara Samaniego: “I think it was maybe about a 15% or 20% increase than in the previous year, but I don’t see it as a bad thing. We are at a point where it shows that our resources are getting to where they need to be, that people are comfortable now, more so, to come forward and to just get some resources” (Appendix C).

• Ashleigh Vereen: “As far as I know from our own agency, we have been receiving more calls related to sexual assault. But I wouldn’t necessarily classify that as more reports, if that makes sense. I think what that means is that more people know that we exist. And that more people are reaching out for help. And, if you think about it, sexual assault has been in the news more. We’ve been talking about it more, as a society, as a community. And, our name and logo has been in the news more too. So, I think that people are more aware of the services, and are starting to be more willing to reach out for help. So, I wouldn’t necessarily say the reports of it have gone up, it’s people that are feeling more comfortable and want to reach out for help. Which, it feels weird to say this, but it feels like it’s a good thing, because I don’t really feel like sexual assault rates ever really go up or down, at least in this point in time” (Appendix D).

4. In your opinion, are the policies implemented on campus sufficient in preventing sexual assault? Are they fair? What would you change? What would you keep the same?

   Question #4 was asked so that each professional interviewed could give their opinion on the current policies. This question was asked to inspire ideas that can help improve Cal Poly’s current policies.
• Brian Gnandt: “Cal Poly is very comprehensive. Its policies and procedures are accurate, complete, and thorough. Cal Poly also has Safer, which is huge.” In regards to changing anything, Brian said he would hire “more staff” to carry out the necessary procedures. (Appendix A)

• Tera Bisbee: “I would say that the executive orders are good, but they are not perfect. For example, they added an appeal process, which was good. Honestly, I think one thing that would be most helpful in prevention would be doing more bystander training. That way, we can stop assaults before they happen” (Appendix B).

• Christina Kaviani: “I mean all 23 campuses have the same policy, but we are instigating them… there are flawed pieces within the system. Like it is hard to find a lack of consent… I think a better system for us would be, any student who has been accused should have some sort of minimal sanction. Whether the investigation has an outcome, I do think that just the fact that someone has come forward, and especially if we are verifying like this is not a made up story and we are professionals doing this on a regular basis, that the person who did this, that the minimal thing that they should have is an educational class or something” (Appendix C).

• Kara Samaniego: “I agree [with Christina] especially because we know that like 98% of the people who come forward are telling the truth so to have the university not find an outcome is frustrating” (Appendix C).

• Ashleigh Vereen: “I would do more education” (Appendix D).

5. What is being done now to prevent sexual assault? Why are most preventative tips directed at women? What can we do in the future to prevent assaults from occurring?
Question #5 was designed to determine the best way to prevent sexual assault.

This study will use this question in order to make recommendations for prevention, and ideally encourage change in education, policies, etc..

- Brian Gnandt: “Education. People need to be educated. They need to be aware and know that what they are doing is wrong. We have mandatory online training, which is a good baseline, but not enough” (Appendix A).

- Tera Bisbee: “Right now, there are mandatory online programs for each student, and each ‘special group’ on campus has training. I think sexual assault is a culture thing, because most victims are female. If we are going to stop it, it has to be by males stopping other males. They have to think “I wouldn’t want this to happen to my sister” and they need to speak up. I believe that this is a society/gender inequity issue and that if women were treated with the same amount of respect as men then this would not be happening so frequently” (Appendix B).

- Christina Kaviani: “Having a class that connects all that right from the start. I am a huge proponent of that. So I think if you want culture change on a campus there has to be something like that. The confidence level of our students at Cal Poly are so low…So it’s just like this mess of how do we build students self confidence and assurance and how do you engage in really awesome sexual experiences. I think we need to break down those kind of conversations, and in a dialogue sense like what could change it and the education. That needs to happen. People need to be saying this turns me on, and this is what I like. That kind of dialogue between men and women needs to happen instead of assumption based. I think we have a lot more to go if we want to change a culture like as
a nation. We need to incorporate the discussion of consent with our children” (Appendix C).

- Kara Samaniego: “I think primarily those tips are focused on women because in the media we hear a lot about victim blaming. And there must be something she could have done to have this not happen. So I think having the tips go in that direction very much fits in with that train of thought. But, that’s the problem. We need to be having those conversations with boys. How to not perpetrate, how to respect boundaries and how to ask for consent. I think at Cal Poly we have started to change that” (Appendix C).

- Ashleigh Vereen: “Education… basically you have to have a program that they can replicate. Something that they can say this is working, and we can repeat it over and over and over again” (Appendix D). When asked about preventative tips, Ashleigh said, “It’s our culture it’s that double standard. Women, watch your alcohol consumption because you’ll get preyed upon, but we don’t tell men to watch your alcohol consumption because you might become a rapist” (Appendix D).

**Sexual Assault on College Campuses Research Questions**

For this project, the following six research questions were created in order to determine how often sexual assaults occurred on college campuses and in surrounding areas and what factors contribute to its occurrence. These questions were made to further investigate the policies implemented on campuses surrounding sexual assault and determine whether or not those policies are sufficient. With these research questions, this study hopes to answer what can be done to prevent sexual assaults from occurring in the future.

**Research Question 1: Considering all campus crimes, how prevalent is sexual assault?**
• “Intensified public awareness of campus sexual assault cannot be attributed to an increase in prevalence: the prevalence of campus sexual assault (according to data collected from students regardless of whether they reported the crime to authorities) has remained static since publication of the first study in 1987.” Indeed, sexual assault has been grossly underreported in the past and in fact remains the most underreported serious crime: “between 64% and 96% of victims do not disclose the crime to authorities” (Potter, 2016).

Research Question 2: What cultural and societal factors influence and affect sexual assault?

• Potential victims (typically women) are urged to monitor their alcohol consumption and to remain in control of social situations, as alcohol consumption and sexual assault are positively correlated (Flack, W. J., Hansen, B. E., Hopper, A. B., Bryant, L. A., Lang, K. W., Massa, A. A., & Whalen, J. E., 2016). This creates a culture in which women are responsible for preventing their own rapes. “If only she hadn’t gotten so drunk or she hadn’t worn that outfit, the thinking goes, things might have turned out differently. As opposed to: why didn’t he respect boundaries?” (Dockterman, 2016)

• Multiple studies have shown that men typically perceive consent as an event: a woman’s consent to go to a man’s room, for instance, is taken to imply acceptance of any sexual activities that ensue there; women tend to view consent as a process that continues throughout the interaction (Young, 2014).

• The hookup culture directly affects sexual assault in that it encourages the casualness of rape. Psychologists agree that this kind of culture has desensitized today’s youth to sex
and sexual imagery so much so that rape has become an accepted part of the "hook-up culture." (Guarino, 2013, p. 1)

Research Question 3: How often is sexual assault on campus reported? Off campus?

- Over the last decade, the number of college sexual assaults being reported has risen from 2,300 to 3,300 (Gray, 2014).
- Therefore, “if a student is victimized on a city street or at a house party, the incident won't be included in the numbers. This means that nonresidential campuses, including a majority of community colleges, are likely to have reported no rapes. (According to the AAUW, 76 percent of the nearly 4,000 "main or primary campuses" -- including community colleges' main campuses -- made zero rape reports in 2014)” (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016).

Research Question 4: What policies are implemented that prevent and manage sexual assault on campus and in college communities?

- “Title IX, a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity, is the cornerstone piece of legislation in the fight to end sexual violence within institutions of higher education” (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016).
- “The Jeanne Clery Act, passed in 1990, requires all colleges and universities to release annual security reports tallying the number of crimes reported on or near campus. Under the Act, institutions must provide survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking with options such as changes to academic, transportation, or living,
or working situations, and assistance in notifying local law enforcement, if the student or employee chooses to do so. It also provides both parties in a campus disciplinary process certain rights” (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016).

Research Question 5: What is Cal Poly’s policy on sexual assault on campus/surrounding community and how does it compare to colleges across the United States?

- The president of Cal Poly, along with all other CSU presidents, signed a revised version of Executive Order 1095 on June 23rd, 2015. “This order related to the implementation of Title IX, the Campus SaVE Act, and related legislation on sex discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual violence” (Dean of Students)

- At Cal Poly, the program Safer is the primary resource for addressing sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking (Dean of Students).

Research Question 6: What is being done to prevent sexual assault on and off campus?

- Prevention initiatives that focus on the role of bystanders, including in-person programs and social-marketing campaigns, have the potential to engage the entire campus community. Teaching bystanders to intervene will help stop sexual assaults before they occur. (Potter, 2016)

- Journal of Sex Research suggests that an “increased understanding of sexual consent communication is an important first step to improving communication and decreasing sexual assault” (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013)

- Abby Rosenstein of Advocated for Youth, suggests that “Much of [rape prevention] comes down to what's taught in schools or not” (Wilson, 2016).
• Finally, in order to prevent sexual assault and rape from occurring, a broad cultural shift needs to take place (Potter, 2016).

**Sexual Assaults on Campus Data**

For this study, it was crucial to see what professionals, who are directly involved with dealing with sexual assaults on campus and in the surrounding community on a daily basis, had to say on the subject. In order to gain this insight, Brian Gnandt, California Polytechnic State University’s Title IX Coordinator, Tera Bisbee California Polytechnic State University’s Title IX Deputy Coordinator, Christina Kaviani, Director of Safer, Kara Samaniego, Coordinator of Safer, and Ashleigh Vereen, Education Services Coordinator at RISE were all interviewed. They were each asked the same questions based on a questionnaire specifically designed to answer the original research questions as well as fill in the gaps where the research lacked. The following tables represent the respondents’ answers in the form of their individual perspectives on the original research questions.

**Research Question #1: Considering all campus crimes, how prevalent is sexual assault?**

This research question was studied in response to the increasing amount of national media attention on sexual assault on college campuses. Because of this increasing media attention, there is a substantial amount of research on this topic. The research suggests that the rates of sexual assaults have remained “stagnant throughout the years” (Potter, 2016) but the number of reports over the last decade has increased from 2,300 to 3,300 (Gray, 2014).

This question was studied in order to determine how often sexual assaults occur on campus and whether or not the rates of sexual assaults on campus have increased in recent years.
From the literature, it is apparent that sexual assaults on college campus have remained consistent throughout the years. However, the difference is that the number of reported sexual assaults have gone up. It is important to note that this does not indicate that the rate of sexual assaults have gone up. Table 1 shows this question elicited fairly consistent answers, all of which coincided closely with the literature. Basically, sexual assaults have always occurs, but recently their reports have increased.

Table 1

Sexual Assaults on Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Analysis of reports</th>
<th>Time of influx</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian Gnandt</td>
<td>Generally consistent</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tera Bisbee</td>
<td>65 reported cases 2015-16</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Kaviani</td>
<td>208 survivors sought services</td>
<td>Highest risk first 30 days 2015-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Samaniego</td>
<td>208 survivors sought services</td>
<td>Highest risk first 30 days 2015-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashleigh Vereen</td>
<td>Very frequently</td>
<td>Not a law enforcement agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question #2: What cultural and societal factors influence and affect sexual assault?

This question was studied in order to investigate what social and cultural factors have an impact on sexual assault. According to the research, there are many cultural aspects that influence sexual assault. Experts agree that today’s current “hook-up” culture plays a significant
role in that it has “desensitized today’s youth to sex and sexual imagery so much so that rape has become an accepted part of the ‘hook-up culture’” (Guarino, 2013). Additionally, men and women’s idea of consent is very different, and alcohol consumption plays a huge role in that it is positively correlated to sexual assault. The answers to this research question correspond closely with the literature. Table 2 analyzes the respondents answers to this question. The answers show a similar relation to the literature.

Table 2

*Factors Affecting Sexual Assault*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian Gnandt</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tera Bisbee</td>
<td>Hook-up culture, lack of communication, alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Kaviani</td>
<td>How people are born, how they parent, media and influencing factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Samaniego</td>
<td>Alcohol, societal and gender socialization and how we raise our children to interact with one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Vereen</td>
<td>Our culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question #3: How often is sexual assault on campus reported? Off campus?**

This question is similar to research question #1 in that it was studied in order to determine how often sexual assaults occur on campus and in surrounding communities and how often they are reported. The research is consistent in showing that the number of reported cases have indeed gone up in the past decade, and has “risen from 2,300 to 3,300” (Gray, 2014). It is important to point out that because of the Clery Act, colleges do not have to report crimes that occur “if a student is victimized on a city street or at a house party” (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016).
For this study, determining whether or not the rates of reported sexual assaults have gone up is significant. Experts agree that even though the reports have gone up, this is not necessarily a bad thing nor does it mean that the rates of sexual assaults have increased. Table 3 shows an analysis of the data based on the expert’s responses to this question. Basically, their answers indicate that even though the reports have gone up, this is not a bad thing.

Table 3  
Analysis of On and Off Campus Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Reports</th>
<th>Analysis of Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian Gnandt</td>
<td>Huge # of freshman victims and freshman accused</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tera Bisbee</td>
<td>Off campus can report here or SLO PD, fair amount occur in the residence halls</td>
<td>People are more aware of their rights to report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Kaviani</td>
<td>Higher number of reports</td>
<td>The higher the number, the more people know that there is a problem. The campus and the nation as a whole is doing more talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Samaniego</td>
<td>15%-20% increase in reporting than in previous years</td>
<td>Shows that our resources are getting to where they need to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashleigh Vereen</td>
<td>Calls for sexual assaults have increased</td>
<td>More people are aware of the services available to them and are reaching out for help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question #4: What policies are implemented that prevent and manage sexual assault on campus and in college communities?

AND

Research Question #5: What is Cal Poly’s policy on sexual assault on campus/surrounding community and how does it compare to colleges across the United States?

For the purpose of this analysis, these research questions will be combined given that they serve similar purposes. The first question was studied in order to further analyze current university policies that deal with sexual assault. This question aims at determining whether or not the policies are fair to the victim and perpetrator as well as determine whether or not they are sufficient in sexual assault prevention. Right now, universities are compliant under Title IX, “a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity, is the cornerstone piece of legislation in the fight to end sexual violence within institutions of higher education” (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016). They are also legally obligated to report incidences of sexual violence under the Jeanne Clery Act, passed in 1990, which requires all colleges and universities to release annual security reports tallying the number of crimes reported on or near campus. Under the Act, institutions must provide survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking with options such as changes to academic, transportation, or living, or working situations, and assistance in notifying local law enforcement, if the student or employee chooses to do so. It also provides both parties in a campus disciplinary process certain rights (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016).

Cal Poly and the rest of the CSUs are compliant under Executive Order 1095. This order related to the implementation of Title IX, the Campus SaVE Act, and related legislation on sex discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual violence (Dean of Students). In response to this
question, the experts agree that although the policies are thorough, it is important that they are carried out. They also agree that many things can be done to help prevent sexual assault. Table 4 shows an analysis of the opinions on the policies in place at Cal Poly, and whether or not they believe the policies are sufficient.

Table 4

*Analysis of Current Cal Poly Policies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Compared to other Universities</th>
<th>Areas to improve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian Gnandt</td>
<td>Comprehensive, accurate, complete</td>
<td>Needs more staffing to carry out procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tera Bisbee</td>
<td>Good, not perfect</td>
<td>Needs more bystander training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Kaviani</td>
<td>Way ahead of other CSUs, compliant</td>
<td>Minimal punishment for those accused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Samaniego</td>
<td>Way ahead of other CSUs, compliant</td>
<td>Minimal punishment for those accused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashleigh Vereen</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>More education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question #6: What is being done to prevent sexual assault on and off campus?**

This question was studied to evaluate what can be done to prevent sexual assaults from occurring in the future. The literature is consistent in promoting bystander intervention, stating that “teaching bystanders to intervene will help stop sexual assaults before they occur” (Potter, 2016). It also promotes doing more education.

The experts who responded to this question seem to agree with the current literature in that education is the key in preventing sexual assaults. They also believe that in order for sexual
assaults to stop completely, a full cultural shift needs to take place. Table 5 shows the respondents opinions on what they believe will help stop sexual assault.

Table 5

Prevention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Prevention Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian Gnandt</td>
<td>Education, bystander training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tera Bisbee</td>
<td>Cultural shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Kaviani</td>
<td>Mandatory 10-week class for all incoming freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Samaniego</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashleigh Vereen</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

This study was completed in response to the current media attention on sexual assaults on college campuses, with its overall purpose being in determining why sexual assault occurs at such a high rate on college campuses and in surrounding areas, and what can be done to prevent them. This study aimed at examining the cultural and societal factors that encourage or promote sexual assault, as well as analyze university policies encompassing the issue, Cal Poly in particular.

To find more information on how often sexual assaults occur, what causes them, and what we can do to prevent them, five professionals were interviewed based on a single questionnaire designed to answer the following research questions for the study:

1. Considering all campus crimes, how prevalent is sexual assault?
2. What cultural and societal factors influence and affect sexual assault?
3. How often is sexual assault on campus reported? Off campus?
4. What policies are implemented that prevent and manage sexual assault on campus and in college communities?
5. What is Cal Poly’s policy on sexual assault on campus/surrounding community and how does it compare to colleges across the United States?
6. What is being done to prevent sexual assault on and off campus?

Each research question was adjusted slightly for the interview questions with each respondent. The interviews invoked a variety of responses all of which correlated very closely with the literature on sexual assaults on college campuses.
Discussion

By analyzing the data collected from Chapter 4, connections were made between the experts’ responses and the existing literature found in Chapter 2. Therefore, it is possible to make conclusions regarding the original research questions.

Research Question #1: Considering all campus crime, how prevalent is sexual assault?

In response to this question, all of five professionals interviewed gave a variety of answers. Christina and Kara, both from Safer, said they had 208 survivors seeking services. Tera and Brian, had 65 cases, and Ashleigh said they have people come in very frequently. Clearly all the answers are different, proving this is a difficult statistic to measure. Also, because Tera and Brian cover all cases that fall under Title IX, not all them are sexual assault cases. This is similar for Christina and Kara in that people could have come in for something that happened to them years ago rather than recently.

The literature varies in response to this question as well. One study states that approximately one in four or one in five college women have been victims of sexual assault. (Dockterman, 2016) while another study, done by the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, it shows that the true incidence of campus rape wasn’t one in five but rather 6.1 per 1,000 (French, 2015). Clearly there is a discrepancy in numbers, however experts agree that "Intensified public awareness of campus sexual assault cannot be attributed to an increase in prevalence: the prevalence of campus sexual assault (according to data collected from students regardless of whether they reported the crime to authorities) has remained static since publication of the first study in 1987” (Potter, 2016)
Overall, it is possible to conclude that sexual assaults are a serious crime that has always been prevalent. The main difference now is that more and more of them are being reported due to increased public awareness.

**Research Question #2: What cultural and societal factors influence and affect sexual assault?**

Generally speaking, each professional interviewed had very similar responses to this question. They all agreed that our current culture, and the way we are raised plays a pivotal role in sexual assaults. This means that the inequality of the genders, the media, the way men and women interact with one another all play significant parts. Both Tera and Kara added that alcohol contributes to the frequency of sexual assault.

The literature mirrors a similar explanation. When it comes to sexual assault, “The view that responsibility for prevention lies with potential victims is reinforced by products marketed to women, including whistles, flashlights, and alarms, contraptions that put the onus on the victim, not the perpetrator, to head off an assault.” (Potter, 2016) The literature also points to the hook-up culture, saying that it affects sexual assault in that it encourages the casualness of rape. Psychologists agree that this kind of culture has desensitized today’s youth to sex and sexual imagery so much so that rape has become an accepted part of the "hook-up culture" (Guarino, 2013). The literature also points out that alcohol and sexual assaults are positively correlated ((Flack, W. J., Hansen, B. E., Hopper, A. B., Bryant, L. A., Lang, K. W., Massa, A. A., & Whalen, J. E., 2016), as well as the difference in the meaning of consent between the genders.
Based on this, it can be concluded that there are multiple reasons that sexual assault occurs. The main reason, however, is our culture which influences the certain ways in which men and women are taught to think and act.

**Research Question #3: How often is sexual assault on campus reported? Off campus?**

In response to this question, each professional stated that there have been more reports this year than in previous years. Brian added that statistically, there is a high number of freshmen accusing, and accused. This increase is due to a variety of reasons, and each person interviewed had a slightly different answer. Basically, they all agreed that even though the numbers of reports were higher, this was not necessarily a bad thing. It simply means that more people are aware of their rights to report and the services available to them.

The literature had a similar perspective. Over the last decade, the number of college sexual assaults being reported has risen from 2,300 to 3,300 (Gray, 2014). However, to many counselors and advisors, this increase is a sign that colleges have gotten better at handling sexual assault. According to Gray, “This is likely the result of a number of factors: schools becoming better educated about defining sexual assault and more transparent about disclosing when it happens, and victims feeling increasingly empowered to come forward because of these changes.”

From this, it can be concluded that even though the reports of sexual assault have gone up, it does not necessarily mean that the rates of sexual assaults have increased. Additionally, because the reports have gone up, it can be concluded that more and more people are aware of their rights to report and are more knowledgeable of their resources.
Research Question #4: What policies are implemented that prevent and manage sexual assault on campus and in college communities?

AND

Research Question #5: What is Cal Poly’s policy on sexual assault on campus/surrounding community and how does it compare to colleges across the United States?

Due to the nature of these questions, they have been grouped together for the purpose of this study in analyzing their responses. When the professionals interviewed discussed their opinions on Cal Poly’s policies, they all seemed to agree that, compared to the other CSUs, Cal Poly was way ahead. They all said similar things about Cal Poly’s policy in that it was thorough, compliant, and fair, but it was not perfect and there was room for improvement. Brian said that Cal Poly needs more staff to carry out all the procedures that the policies require. Tera said Cal Poly needs more bystander training. Both Christina and Kara said it needs a minimal punishment for those accused, and Ashleigh suggested more education.

The existing literature explains Cal Poly’s policies under Executive Order 1095. Cal Poly and the rest of the CSUs have the same policies. Every university is legally responsible under Title IX, a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity, is the cornerstone piece of legislation in the fight to end sexual violence within institutions of higher education (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016). Additionally, the Clery Act requires all colleges and universities to release annual security reports tallying the number of crimes reported on or near campus. Under the Act, institutions must provide survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking with options such as changes to academic, transportation, or living, or working situations, and
assistance in notifying local law enforcement, if the student or employee chooses to do so. It also provides both parties in a campus disciplinary process certain rights (Peterson & Ortiz, 2016).

Given this information, Cal Poly has the same policies as every other CSU, the main difference being that Cal Poly is thorough in carrying out the appropriate measures. The current policies may seem sufficient, but there is room for improvement.

**Research Question #6: What is being done to prevent sexual assault on and off campus?**

The answers vary in response to this question. Brian, Kara, and Ashleigh all said that education will be a major key in preventing sexual assault. Brian is also an advocate of bystander intervention training. Christina is a proponent in more education as well, but she goes a step further in suggesting a mandatory 10-week class for all incoming freshman focusing on culture, society, and human relationships. Tera believes that in order for sexual assault to stop, a major cultural shift needs to take place.

The literature states similar ideas. Potter suggests bystander intervention as well as a broad cultural shift. Other sources say drinking less alcohol, understanding communication between men and women, and education.

Based on the similarities between the literature and those interviewed, it can be concluded that education and cultural change are two crucial elements in preventing sexual assaults from occurring.

**Recommendations**

At the conclusion of this study, a substantial amount of data has been collected and analyzed on sexual assaults on college campuses and surrounding areas. With the given
information, it is crucial to emphasize the critical components of this study and present it in such a way that can potentially help prevent the frequency of sexual assaults on college campuses. There are three major components to take into consideration when it comes to preventing sexual assault: culture, policy, and education. If we can improve in these areas, we can make major strides in preventing sexual assaults on college campuses in the future.

**Cultural Factors**

When it comes to preventing sexual assault, there are many cultural factors to consider. Every single expert interviewed mentioned our culture and the effects it has on sexual assault. Basically, we blame the victim. We tell women not to drink as much, never go out alone, not to wear certain things etc… This makes women responsible for preventing their own rapes. The conversation needs to change. We need start telling men not to rape. Additionally, the current hook-up culture desensitizes today’s youth to sex, making rape seem acceptable.

**Policy Improvement**

There are areas to improve regarding the current policies on sexual assaults on college campuses. Ideally, university policies need to be fair, thorough, and completed in a timely fashion. In order for universities to carry out their policies, more staff should be hired. Because many investigations are inconclusive, policies should have a minimum sanction for those accused. This sanction could be an educational course on sexual assault/rape. Doing this would ensure that the accused would at least be more educated on the topic, and could help prevent something similar from occurring in the future.
Education Matters

In order for a cultural shift to take place, we need to make education a priority. This means beginning at a younger age, and not only educating on what sex is, but on what consent is. Ideally, universities should provide a mandatory all encompassing course, like the one Christina suggested, that covers cultural and societal issues (including sexual assault).

Study Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was conducted in order to provide more information on the topic of sexual assaults on college campuses. The study was completed in hopes of starting a conversation about why sexual assaults occur, and what we, as a culture can do to prevent them from occurring in the future. In all, the study presents a review of literature on the topic as well as the collective opinions of several professionals who were interviewed. Based on the overall findings of the study, there needs to be a better method in collecting the data of sexual assault rates. This data needs to be collected routinely. Universities also need to be held accountable for their policies. Finally, an overall cultural shift needs to take place in order to stop sexual assaults. This study can serve as an educational tool for those who want to take action in actively preventing sexual assault. Ideally, it will spark the necessary conversations that will lead to a cultural shift.
References


Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Brian Gnandt

The following interview was conducted in order to further understand how sexual assaults that occur within the Cal Poly campus community are handled. The interview is based on a questionnaire regarding sexual assaults and the policies colleges have implemented, Cal Poly in particular.

Interviewer: Rachel Seymour
Respondent: California Polytechnic State University’s Title IX Coordinator, Brian Gnandt
Date of Interview: 7/26/2016

Interview Transcription:
Rachel Seymour: The first question I have for you is, why, in your opinion, does sexual assault occur so frequently? What are some factors that contribute to its frequency?

Brian Gnandt: One of the reasons I believe sexual assault occurs so frequently is cultural. These kids just coming into college grow up thinking it is okay. However, sexual assault has been going on for a long time. People are only just now reporting it because they are beginning to understand their rights.

RS: How often are sexual assaults reported to you and what steps do you take after one is reported? What happens if/when the perpetrator is a student? What happens if the perpetrator is found guilty?

BG: Often times, reports come in waves. They are generally consistent, but we tend to get an influx at certain times of the year. Last spring, for example. We get reports from pretty much everywhere, as all Cal Poly employees are mandatory reporters (nurses and therapists exempt.) Students either come here or go to Safer. I think it is more common for students to go to Safer because Safer is another group who does not have to report. We also work with reports from SLO PD and UPD. When a case is reported, we evaluate it and then decided where to go from there. Each case is different, so the case itself depends on the investigation going forward. This office is neutral. We have a job to do, so we need to get all the information, the accounts, and analyze the information through the eyes of the policy in place. This is not a criminal investigation, and often times the cases are a lot of he said, she said. So we have to do a credibility analysis. So, in general we do an investigation. We give each party a chance to come in. If either party does not like the outcome, they get the chance to appeal. If we find that a student is in violation, we send our sanction recommendation to Student Affairs. Sanctions can range from suspension to expulsion if they are our students.

RS: In your opinion, how are Cal Poly’s policies compared to other Universities?

BG: Cal Poly is very comprehensive. Its policies and procedures are accurate, complete, and thorough. Cal Poly also has Safer, which is huge. When you don’t have a Safer, everything just gets messy.
RS: And why is that?

BG: This office is neutral. Safer is there for the victims. It is good for prevention, support, and education.

RS: Why do you think there is so much attention on this issue right now?

BG: This is something that just can’t be shoved under the rug anymore. The issue now is, how are we handling it. People need to know that there are consequences for their actions. We are adults now, and every year we get a new batch of freshman. Statistics show that there is a huge number of freshman victims and freshman accused. They need to know that drinking, being incapacitated, does not equal consent. You need to be capacitated to give consent.

RS: What are your thoughts on having a nationwide policy that is the same for all campuses?

BG: I think each campus needs to do what is best for them. Each campus should have a policy that covers the basics (prompt and effective response, thorough, fair, appropriate sanctions etc.) It is surprising how many Universities fall short even of that.

RS: If you could do anything about implementing the policies, what would you do?

BG: Staffing. I would hire more staff. We need more people to carry out all the necessary steps.

RS: In your opinion, what can be done to prevent sexual assault from occurring?

BG: Education. People need to be educated. They need to be aware and know that what they are doing is wrong. We have mandatory online training, which is a good baseline, but not enough. And then each group, athletic, Greek, employees, etc have special training. I think bystander training is important because honestly the majority of people are good people who want to do the right thing. Education is key, but it can only go so far.
Appendix B

*Interview Transcripts: Tera Bisbee*

The following interview was conducted in order to further understand how sexual assaults that occur within the Cal Poly campus community are handled. The interview is based on a questionnaire regarding sexual assaults and the policies colleges have implemented, Cal Poly in particular.

**Interviewer:** Rachel Seymour

**Respondent:** Tera Bisbee, California Polytechnic State University’s Title IX Deputy Coordinator,

Tera Bisbee

**Date of Interview:** 7/?/?2016

*Interview Transcription:*

Rachel Seymour: In your opinion, why does sexual assault occur so frequently, and what are some factors that contribute to its frequency?

Tera Bisbee: There are a lot of factors. One is our current hook-up culture. Another is the lack of communication between the parties involved. They are not comfortable talking about intimacy/sex. On college campuses, alcohol plays a role. People have a lot to drink, and behaviors change because of that. On both sides. People also don’t understand what affirmative consent means. Which is important. The vast majority of those assaulted are females. I think its because of our culture. There is male entitlement, and they objectify women. The inequality of the genders plays a huge role.

RS: How often are sexual assaults reported to you? What steps do you take after one is reported? What happens when/if the perpetrator is a student? What happens if the perpetrator is found guilty?

TB: In the 2015-2016 year, we had 65 reported cases (however, not all were sexual assaults, but they still fall under Title IX.) An example of a general case would be something like this: Female reports sexual misconduct. We have someone reach out to her. See if she needs remedies (ex. If the guy is in the same class as her etc we can make an interim remedy.) We will typically get in touch with the compliant. We will then do an investigation. Each party can provide witnesses. We will then write an investigation report which is about 20-30 pages in length. It is very thorough, and ultimately the investigation determines whether or not there was a violation. If either party is unhappy, they can appeal. Based on the severity of the case, we will work out the appropriate sanction. These can range from the Men and Masculinity education program to expulsion.

RS: Are sexual assaults that occur off campus handled differently than those that occur off campus? How does this skew data when it comes to reporting? Do you know how the rate of sexual assaults at Cal Poly compare to other school and has the rate gone up or down in the last 10 years? The last year?
TB: If the assault occurs off campus, students have to option of reporting here or to SLO PD. If the person accused has no affiliation with Cal Poly then we have no jurisdiction over them. A fair amount of sexual assaults occur in residence halls, and there always seems to be a spike in the fall. At Cal Poly, reports have definitely gone up, but it is because people are more aware of their rights. Nationally, there has been more awareness and attention brought to this issue.

RS: In your opinion, are the policies implemented on campus sufficient? Are they fair? What would you do to change them/what would you keep the same?

TB: I would say that the executive orders are good, but they are not perfect. For example, they added an appeal process which was good. Honestly, I think one thing that would be most helpful in prevention would be doing more bystander training. That way, we can stop assaults before they happen.

RS: And finally, what is being done now to prevent sexual assault? Why are most tips directed at women, and what can we do in the future to prevent sexual assault from occurring?

TB: Right now, there are mandatory online programs for each student, and each “special group” on campus has training. I think sexual assault is a culture thing, because most victims are female. If we are going to stop it, it has to be by males stopping other males. They have to think “I wouldn’t want this to happen to my sister” and they need to speak up. I believe that this is a society/gender inequity issue and that if women were treated with the same amount of respect as men then this would not be happening so frequently.
Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Christina Kaviani and Kara Samaniego

The following interview was conducted in order to gain expert opinions and insight into sexual assaults occurring on campus, in particular Cal Poly’s campus. Both interviewees are integral parts of Cal Poly’s program Safer, which aims to serve as Cal Poly’s confidential advocacy, education and support resource for addressing sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking.

Interviewer: Rachel Seymour
Respondents: Director of Cal Poly’s Program Safer, Christina Kaviani and Coordinator Cal Poly’s Program Safer, Kara Samaniego
Date of Interview: 7/?/?/2016

Rachel Seymour: In your opinion, why does sexual assault occur so frequently and what are some factors that contribute to it?

Kara Samaniego: So I think the highest risk time during college is that first thirty days for freshman on campus. It’s their first time being away from home, having sort of that independence and in most cases sort of just being separated from that social network, from their support network so as a result a lot of those relationships have to be formed again, and as we know alcohol is involved in those first thirty days. People are experimenting for the first time and learning what their limits are. So that’s why we see an increased rate in those first thirty days, it’s a vulnerable time. But then there is the whole societal and gender socialization aspect of it and how are we raising our children to interact with one another.

Christina Kaviani: Yeah, I mean I guess starting from like how people are born and how people parent, and how certain behaviors are expected from girls versus boys. Females are more raised to be less assertive, to be pleasing, to not be aggressive. And media and influencing factors allow that thought. And then a lot of times parents don’t do a great job in talking to their sons in this is what I expect from you, this is how people should be treated. They talk to their daughters about safety and take a self defense class and stuff like that. Our nation as a whole is really focused on what to do to prevent women from becoming victims when really the dialogue needs to be what do we need to do to prevent men from perpetrating because 99% of the time males are the perpetrators to women and other men. So yeah that, and then there’s like gaming and porn and media influencers and what sex should be when you get to college so they think that what they watch is real, when it’s not. And then, the criminal justice system doesn’t show that when you rape someone, you go to prison because there’s such low rates of that. It shows you get away with it. And then as a University we need to show that you won’t just get a slap on the wrist.

RS: So, you just talked about preventative tips. I was wondering why most of them are directed at women and why it was like that?

KS: I think primarily those tips are focused on women because in the media we hear a lot about victim blaming. And there must be something she could have done to have this not happen. So I
think having the tips go in that direction very much fits in with that train of thought. But, that’s the problem. We need to be having those conversations with boys. How to not perpetrate, how to respect boundaries and how to ask for consent. I think at Cal Poly we have started to change that. We don’t really give tips, and if we do they are more like respect boundaries and those types of things.

CK: Yeah and I think some of the tips, like certain ones we have to say about bystander intervention like if you see something bad say something. It’s never your fault. Like those are the things we add. If you see someone intoxicated, don’t have sex with them. We try to spice up the tips so it’s not like all like know that you can say no. I think the tips are just an easy way out for us to feel like we are doing something. Just like self defense. But I mean it’s also skirting away from the reality that males are the ones doing this. Males are perpetrating. It leads to male defensiveness, so that’s why we have to go to prevention tips. I don’t really think they work in the college setting.

KS: They’re not really realistic to what’s actually happening.

RS: So how often are sexual assaults reported to Safer, and then after they are reported, generally what are the steps you would take after something is reported to you?

KS: So this past year we had 208 survivors come into our office to seek service. But that’s a number of things that could be a recent trauma or it could be from fall quarter and they’re only coming in for spring, or it could be from childhood, but we do see, this year was pretty high compared to previous years in terms of seeking services. From there, we connect them with counseling services. Or RISE, the off campus resource. And then we also do advocacy, if we’re doing advocacy with them through the Title IX process. RISE also does something similar and we work really closely with them.

RS: So when someone reports to you, do you guys have to report it to someone else?

CK: No, us and counseling are the only places that are confidential. Also, when we talk with someone from the start we tell them that we are confidential unless they tell us they are underage or intend to seriously harm themselves. When someone reports to us and wants to do an investigation, that’s when we would send them to the university. If they want to report to the university we would call Brian right away and then either him or Tera would assign an investigator to the case.

RS: So Safer is more just support and education?

KS: Yeah, and also advocacy. So going to these Title IX appointments or going through law enforcement we are there to remind them what their rights are, and it is a very stressful process for the survivor and we are there to you know help them through it and let them know they don’t have to answer that question or if they need a break, take a break. I think the advocacy piece is really important.
RS: So what do you think is the best way to educate people on sexual assaults, and if you could do anything what would you guys like to do?

KS: There’s so much.

CK: Well I mean I don’t even think the online education is useful for most people. I mean it is useful to introduce the topic, and then one time awareness events that students have to go to I mean research shows that it does not have long lasting effects. So I would want, I went through a class at UC Santa Cruz called Cultural Intersections and it focused on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, social justice. It talked about nature vs. nurture, how have we socially developed into who we are, who we want to be, morals ethics etc. and I had ten weeks straight of that when I first got to Santa Cruz. So I mean starting out like that, I had to think about the kind of person I wanted to be. Like you have to think wow I really do care about people, I have empathy, sustainability matters in all of the discussion. It’s like we are all human, the core parts of why we are living has to do with being social beings, and having a class that connects all that right from the start. I am a huge proponent of that. So I think if you want culture change on a campus there has to be something like that. The confidence level of our students at Cal Poly are so low. They are stressed so they are drinking more, and then when the alcohol factor comes in it is just catastrophic. So it’s like here, you play hard, you party hard. And there is unintentional consequences for a lot of these perpetrators who really thought I did not know I was hurting them. I thought this was okay. I literally thought giving five shots to someone and when they said they would go into my room, I thought that they wanted to have sex. And then they’re thinking well I was hammered, about to pass out, I did want to make out with you but I didn’t want to have sex but then they’re not confident at their age development at their psychological development to actually say what they want to say and they’re hammered. So it’s just like this mess of how do we build students self confidence and assurance and how do you engage in really awesome sexual experiences. I think we need to break down those kind of conversations, and in a dialogue sense like what could change it and the education. That needs to happen.

People need to be saying this turns me on, and this is what I like. That kind of dialogue between men and women needs to happen instead of assumption based. I think we have a lot more to go if we want to change a culture like as a nation. We need to incorporate the discussion of consent with our children. Like I have a two year old and I see it with him. You have those tiny moments like as a parent where you can intervene and then as a school system you have tons of moments. It’s just a flawed system.

KS: Yeah, and I think making it personal for people. Not just seeing women in relation to other people. Yeah she’s a sister, a friend and all that and seeing them as a person and bringing that personhood and that humanness. And then taking advantage of those moments as a parent and as a teacher. It just takes that intentional effort to bring it up and talk about it.

RS: You mentioned the reports are higher this year than in previous years. Why is that and what do you think that means?

KS: It is higher this year than in previous years, not crazy higher. I think it was maybe about a 15% or 20% increase than in the previous year, but I don’t see it as a bad thing. We are at a point where it shows that our resources are getting to where they need to be, that people are
comfortable now, more so, to come forward and to just get some resources. Maybe they are not comfortable reporting, because our criminal justice system still has a lot of work to do, but at least they are coming to get some resources. I think the point to come forward and talk about it, I think that is a good thing.

CK: I think the campus, and the nation as a whole, is doing more talking, so we are doing better. And the online training. There are more touch points with students so now they know where to go. And honestly, the higher the numbers are the more people know like hey, there’s a problem.

RS: So, in your opinion are the policies implemented on our campus sufficient in preventing sexual assault? Are they fair? What would you do to change them/ keep them the same etc…

CK: I think we as a CSU, I mean all 23 campuses have the same policy, but we are instigating them. So some universities have policies but they are not actually following through with them. We are on top of it, and even talking to the other 23 campuses we’re way ahead of them. I think we are doing a good job of what makes us compliant. We are doing that and we are going beyond that. I think you know, there are flawed pieces within the system. Like it is hard to find a lack of consent. If a person is hammered, blacked out, if they are talking to people, having a good time, but they are blacked out during that whole session and then you know come to, they realize they had sex with someone, I don’t even remember it where’s my underwear all this and they report it to the university. Well, the fact that they were a good drunk basically makes it that they have a hard case. So it’s someone’s word that I was blacked out, I don’t have any memory, is not enough even for a university system, is still not enough for sanctioning. I think a better system for us would be, any student who has been accused should have some sort of minimal sanction. Whether the investigation has an outcome, I do think that just the fact that someone has come forward, and especially if we are verifying like this is not a made up story and we are professionals doing this on a regular basis, that the person who did this, that the minimal thing that they should have is an educational class or something. So that, out of all of it, is the only piece that really pains me.

KS:I agree especially because we know that like 98% of the people who come forward are telling the truth so to have the university not find an outcome is frustrating.

RS: And the investigations tend to take a little bit longer because of the executive orders right?

KS: Well, the executive orders do direct how long an investigation can take. Sometimes it does take a little bit longer to get witnesses to corporate and those sorts of things, but the executive order does give a number of days that an investigation has to be done in. It’s 60 working days and then they can ask for an extension of 30 days for the investigation piece.

CK: So it can be about three months, but if you work with advocates like us, we are on them. The investigator needs all the information so if there is a lack of witnesses or haven’t heard from the accused they are playing a kind of waiting game. We try to prep students if they decide to go through the reporting process then they should know this is them becoming an activist. They are doing something to voice what happened. This is them making sure the person knows what they
did was wrong. If you report it, whatever the outcome, that person knows they hurt someone, they did something wrong.
Appendix D

Interview Transcript: Ashleigh Vereen

The following interview was conducted in order to gain an expert’s opinion and insight into sexual assaults occurring in the community, in particular San Luis Obispo. This interview will be useful in comparing the community program RISE, to Cal Poly’s program Safer.

Interviewer: Rachel Seymour
Respondent: Education Services Coordinator for RISE, Ashleigh Vereen
Date of Interview: 7/18/2016

Interview Transcription:
Rachel Seymour: In your opinion, why does sexual assault occur so frequently and what are some factors that contribute to it?

Ashley Vereen: I think one of the main things that increases the frequency of sexual assault is really our culture. We have a really really interesting viewpoint on sexuality in our society and power control. So when we live in a world that says sex is the number one way for someone to gain popularity um, look at any kind of media that you see. Movies, they pretty much solely depict men going out and trying to have sex with anything that moves and they kind of make you think that men want sex all the time and they portray women as not really having a sex drive or if they do they should kind of be ashamed of it or that they need to kind of hold back but men are supposed to want to have sex all the time. It sends very mixed messages and then we have these very weird ideas about emotions. Men are told to you know push those emotions down, to man up, to be strong. Women are told to be open and nurturing and fragile. And then we are just like well wait why does sexual assault happen? Um, literally those reasons. It’s a very toxic kind of mixtuer, and we don’t have a full understanding of what consent is.

RS: Right.

AV: It scares the crap out of me when I go on to college campuses and I am explaining you know what consent is and people are saying things like okay but what if both people are drunk then what does it mean? This isn’t a situation where it cancels each other out and then it becomes consent. It’s still not consent. And that’s startling. This is not a situation where the first time people are hearing about consent should be in college. It boggles my mind that we have 18 year olds, and the first time they are hearing about consent is their freshman year of college. That should not be happening. These need to be conversations that we are having way earlier. And it needs to be of course age appropriate, but we need to be having these conversations so much earlier. We need to be having them when we are in health class with kids. You know we are telling them the mechanics of sex, we’re telling them how someone gets pregnant, we’re telling them these things, but we’re not talking about boundaries. We’re not talking about communication and we’re not talking about consent we’re not talking about any of that and then we are like oh well I don’t know why sexual assault is happening.

RS: So how often are sexual assaults reported to you/to RISE?
AV: People come in very frequently and report to us. When I say that they report to us, you know we’re not a law enforcement agency or anything like that, but a lot of times people don’t want to go to law enforcement. And there are tons of reasons for that you know, but we don’t ever make someone report to law enforcement. The only time we would have to do that is if they are under the age of 18 because of mandated reporting. But, basically I would say that the majority of our clients don’t report to law enforcement.

RS: So after they report to you what do you guys do next?

AV: The next steps are basically all up to the client. We lay out every step available to them. So we will explain to them what the reporting process would look like if they want to go to the police. We would explain what the reporting process would look like if they wanted to go to a medical facility and get a check up because a lot of people don’t seem to understand that if you go to a hospital they are mandated reporters. We want people to fully understand what they are doing. So the reason why we make sure they know is so that they can have that power over their lives, in their own hands because again sexual assault is about power and control, and I don’t want anyone to ever feel like they don’t have control over their lives. We will let them know what services are available to them. So you know we will talk them about what counseling we have, crisis support sessions, which are basically with someone that’s been trained through our agency to kind of offer them that intermediatory support because some people are not ready to do counseling, but they still want some support so they might do that in between step. We can talk about restraining orders, we can talk about our safe houses, we can talk about just those little steps in between and just let the client choose what feels best for them.

RS: My project is on sexual assaults on college campuses, so do you know what happens to the perpetrator if they are a student?

AV: As far as I know, it varies from case to case. So I know that some students can be expelled, I know that some can be removed from classes if they have a class with you know the person that they’ve assaulted. I know that some can be suspended. It just varies, and it depends on the case.

RS: Okay, so the next question I have is why are sexual assaults that are happening on campus handled differently than ones that occur off campus?

AV: You know I am not quite sure why they are handled differently, but I will say Cal Poly actually has a lot of leeway when it comes to handling sexual assault and they can do a lot of things that the police can’t do. So for example, they can remove the perpetrator from the survivors class, and police would never really be able to do that. I know they can move either the survivor or the perpetrator out of the dorms and into somewhere else, and again the police wouldn’t be able to do that. So, I don’t know if you’ve seen the documentary the Hunting Ground?

RS: No, I haven’t watched it.

AV: It’s actually pretty good, and they’re rightfully so, they’re critical of the way that colleges handle sexual assault because there’s a lot of improvement to be done. And I think that anybody
who works within in the college system would say that there’s room for improvements. But I would say that Cal Poly does a pretty good job of trying to take care of their students and Safer does a really good job of advocating for their students. They do everything they can you know to move students around within the power system that is there. Sometimes I wish that we had the power that they do, to be able to move people out of their living situations and things like that because the police don’t get to do that, we don’t get to do that so sometimes there are advantages for clients to go through that system if they are Cal Poly students rather than to go through the legal system and vice versa. Sometimes there’s advantages to going through the legal system versus the Cal Poly system. And, at the end of the day I just try to give the clients as much information about each system as possible and let them choose. I’m not the one that has to live with it, they are.

RS: So, do you know if the rates of sexual assaults reported to you has gone up or down in the past couple years? The past year?

AV: So, as far as I know from our own agency, we have been receiving more calls related to sexual assault. But I wouldn’t necessarily classify that as more reports, if that makes sense. I think what that means is that more people know that we exist. And that more people are reaching out for help. And, if you think about it, sexual assault has been in the news more. We’ve been talking about it more, as a society, as a community. And, our name and logo has been in the news more too. So, I think that people are more aware of the services, and are starting to be more willing to reach out for help. So, I wouldn’t necessarily say the reports of it have gone up, it’s people that are feeling more comfortable and want to reach out for help. Which, it feels weird to say this, but it feels like it’s a good thing, because I don’t really feel like sexual assault rates ever really go up or down, at least in this point in time. They kind of just feel like they are staying stagnant. But, I know the demands for our services are increasing which is actually good because it means that people are getting the help that they need. It just feels weird to say I’m so glad we’re getting more calls on the crisis line! But, you know if you think about it that way it’s actually a good thing.

RS: No, honestly I agree. Everything you are saying too goes along with what the research says. And you kind of already answered this, but what would you do to improve the policies implemented on campuses? Or what would you change, if you could?

AV: Well, if I could do anything, I would do, and this is probably because of what I do at the agency which is education, but I would do more education. I would love to do more education, and I think that Safer would say the same thing. It’s just a matter of time, and what every administration will allow. I can speak from working in the high schools, they’re like oh yeah come on in, do an hour presentation on sexual assault for like the entire school once a year. And I’m like oh yeah no that’ll work.

RS: Haha.

AV: I mean, it’s better than nothing. It’s way better than nothing, but it needs to be way more it needs to be so much more of a conversation, and it needs to be more small group conversations. That’s how you change a culture. It’s talking to people, not just talking at people. So, I think that
it’s the education piece that really changes things. As far as policies and things like that, I think its two fold. Stronger support for people who have experienced sexual assault so figuring out how do we support them, and integrate them back into campus life. And, when we find out someone has committed a sexual assault, how do we make sure that they are both punished for what they have done, because it’s important that we hold them accountable, but also, how do we make sure that we rehabilitate them? We’re not just going to lock them away, but we need to make sure they don’t do it again. Now is that the colleges job? Probably not, no. That’s something larger that’s something in our justice system that’s something much bigger and I don’t know what the answer is to that. But it is a much larger picture, a much larger conversation. And I think people are willing to have, but they need to know it goes way beyond college campuses. It goes to elementary school, middle school, high school, it goes to our justice system. It’s huge.

RS: Yeah, and it’s hard because you can’t lock them away if they’ve grown up thinking that it’s all fine.

AV: Exactly, and you know we can’t just say they’ve done this bad thing, let’s lock them away forever because that’s not realistic we’re not going to do that as a society. So then we let them out, but we haven’t rehabilitated them, what’s going to happen? Well, they’ll do it again. And then what do we do? We’re right back where we started, so there’s got to be something.

RS: What do you think about the college culture in general? Just like with alcohol, partying and things like that. And then with bystander intervention, that are your thoughts on all of that?

AV: Yeah, that’s hard. That’s never going to go away, and it’s been there forever. You know, and I don’t think alcohol causes sexual assault. But, it is a factor in it. But, I do think that we, as a movement, need to focus on this bystander piece. I don’t think we live in a world full of evil people. We live in a world full of people who are passive about it. And they don’t know how to intervene because they are so worried about disrupting the status quo, and so worried about being told that they are cock blocking or whatever. Because that’s what I hear all the time. It’s like well I don’t know maybe they want to hook up. And all of that and I’m just like oh my god my job is exhausting. And you hear this from ninth graders, so I know it’s just going to get more ingrained the older they get. And so I look at the people from Safer and think oh you have your work cut out for you. Because if I am hearing this from 15 year olds, I can’t imagine what you’re hearing from people in their twenties.

RS: So, next I have, what is being done now to prevent sexual assault?

AV: Particularly at RISE, the programs that we have been running are called Her Power and My Strength. Her Power is for female identified students and My Strength is for male identified students. Her Power focuses on bystander intervention and understanding that you always have the right to say no. It focuses on awareness of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, all of that. My Strength focuses on bystander intervention, and really understanding that women are more than just objects, which is really important for men to learn. We try to bring them together at the end of the program at 16 weeks and have them work on a project together to build awareness to their schools. So, this year at the end they did the clothesline project. That went really well. So there are programs like that running all over the country, but especially in
California. And, it’s awesome, but they’re only at certain schools and they are relatively small. So it needs to be more widespread.

RS: And how would you do that?

AV: I mean if we wanted to spread this throughout the nation, it would have to be some sort of presidential mandate, and you know you would have to start state by state. But, basically you have to have a program that they can replicate. Something that they can say this is working, and we can repeat it over and over and over again. It’s really really hard to measure what someone is not doing though. So, it’s really hard to do prevention education because you are saying this person is not raping. This person is not beating someone. That’s really hard to measure. So that’s the struggle, and that’s where we are at in the prevention field. And there’s new grants coming out all the time, it’s a really innovative field it’s just people are kind of at a loss right now in figuring out how to measure it. So, we need people who are really into research and things like that.

RS: I noticed that right now, a lot of preventative tips are directed at women, at the victims. Why is that?

AV: Well, it’s our culture it’s that double standard. Women, watch your alcohol consumption because you’ll get preyed upon, but we don’t tell men to watch your alcohol consumption because you might become a rapist. Like it just boggles my mind because it puts all the ownership onto the victim, and none onto the perpetrator. And that’s why we haven’t stopped sexual assault.

RS: So how do change that?

AV: I don’t know. Every time I talk to students, I feel like I am reiterating so many times that it is never the survivors fault. It is always the perpetrators fault. I think you know every educator is trying to get that point across, but there is not enough of us. And I think we still live in a society that still gives all those subtle messages. I mean, look at the Brock Turner case. We had so many people saying well look at his future, this poor guy, all of that. And we didn’t really hear much about what was her future going to be? So, we might have people saying you know don’t blame the victim, but we still have all this other noise saying blame the victim. It’s a balancing act, and we have to tip the scale. And it’s going to take time. And when I feel all discouraged, I look at where we were five years ago, ten years ago and see that we are getting there, we are making progress. Culture change doesn’t happen in a year. You know, it takes decades.

RS: I agree. That’s pretty much all I have for you.