

Examining Sexual Assault on College Campuses

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1. Research Proposal

In this project, I plan to investigate the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses as well as the systems and procedures in place to address it. I will focus on the role power has in this issue, including the powerful men on campus such as athletes and fraternity members as well as the ones in power who determine the punishments and actions taken against the perpetrators. The influence of those in power often goes unnoticed in our society because it has become so intertwined with our culture. It starts at an early age and may seem to be harmless, but these teachings and values help create rape myths and perpetuate a rape culture that is especially prevalent on college campuses. Statistics from the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network show that “every two minutes in the United States, someone is raped, and the chances of being that victim are four times greater for a female college student than for any other age group” (Burnett et. al, 2009). Cal Poly is no exception to this statistic. Although I will be expanding my research beyond Cal Poly’s campus, I will be sure to investigate the prevalence of sexual assault on our campus as well as the existence of a rape culture influenced by those in power.

2. Annotated Bibliography

Basow, Susan and Minieri, Alexandra. "‘You Owe Me’: Effects of Date Cost, Who Pays, Participant Gender, and Rape Myth Beliefs on Perceptions of Rape." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26.479 (2011). Print.

This source includes a unique study on the different perceptions of date rape according to the type of date and how expensive it was. This study is based on the principles of sexual social exchange theory as it is applied to current western dating traditions. According to this theory, men pay for dates, and women are expected to reciprocate with sexual favors. If a woman is forced into these sexual favors, it is often justified in our society because the woman "owed" the man. The results of the study supported the hypothesis that the most costly dates would correlate with the greatest expectations for sexual activity. The authors also found that the participants who most agreed with these beliefs were those with greater acceptance of rape myths. This study is especially useful for my paper because it is very current and is centered around dating trends that are common among college students today and explains how rape myths affect these traditions and influence perceptions of rape.

Bohmer, Carol and Parrot, Andrea. *Sexual Assault on Campus*. New York: Lexington Books, 1993. Print.

This book provides an overview of sexual assault on campus and the myths surrounding it. It includes information on athletes and fraternities, and why these groups are so frequently involved in rape cases. The authors address rape myths such as stranger rape being the only "real rape" and victims creating false accusations just for their own personal agendas. They go into detail about how members of our society are socialized to believe these myths, and they become so prevalent that many men who rape acquaintances truly believe they are acting the way men are supposed to act. Although this text was written a number of years ago, its content is still true today and still applies to the topics I will be covering in my paper.

Burnett et. al. "Communicating/Muting Date Rape: A Co-Cultural Theoretical Analysis of Communication Factors Related to Rape Culture on a College Campus." *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. 37.4 (2009): 465-485. Print.

Burnett and her colleagues provide an extensive overview of the rape supportive culture found on college campuses as well as the factors that help create and maintain this culture. An especially interesting aspect of their research is the information on the role of communication theories in creating a rape culture. One particular theory maintains that in the patriarchal, male-dominated society, seen on college campuses as well as society at large, women constitute a co-culture. Due to their status as a co-

culture, they are forced to adopt the language of the dominant culture, which in this case, includes the dominant culture's beliefs about consensual sex. This system perpetuates a rape culture in which men's beliefs and behaviors are placed at a greater value than those of women. This information, as well as the rest of the article, provides a unique perspective that helps add another level of depth to my own research and paper.

Fernandez, Sarah and Houlemarde, Mark "How to Progress From a Rape-Supportive Culture" *Women in Higher Education* (2012). Print

This source is especially interesting because one of the authors was a Cal Poly employee in the housing department. The other author is a residence hall director at Cornell University. Due to their positions on college campuses, they are able to provide first hand insight into the college culture and the problems associated with it. They believe that a rape supportive culture is a product of three different things: rape myths, hegemonic masculinity, and peer support. Although this article is shorter than most of my other sources, it is useful because it provides very clear and concise information as well as specific ideas on how to improve the situation on college campuses and create an alternate culture that does not support rape or rape myths.

Hallett, Stephanie "Rape is Rape." *Ms. Magazine*. Spring 2011. Print

This article differs from the rest because it is found in *Ms. Magazine*, rather than in a scholarly journal. Although this may slightly decrease the source's credibility, the article still provides useful information. The information is especially useful because it expands the scope of the problem and addresses issues with the legal definition of rape used by police officers and judges. This definition includes "forcibly" when describing what constitutes rape, and therefore, limits the definition of rape and often excludes women who were raped under the influence of drugs and alcohol, for instance. The article also mentions that social stereotypes also influence police officers, further expanding the sphere of influence of a rape culture.

Hill, Melanie and Fischer, Ann. "Does Entitlement Mediate the Link Between Masculinity and Rape-Related Variables?" *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. 48.1 (2001). Print.

This article provides information regarding men's sense of entitlement and how that relates to sexual assault and violence against women. This information is helpful because it helps expand both the depth and breadth of the issue by helping explain some of the reasons why sexual assault occurs. The article also attributes causes to our patriarchal society as a whole, which helps establish the larger picture.

Iconis, Rosemary "Rape Myth Acceptance in College Students: A Literature Review" *Contemporary Issues in Education Research* 1.2(2008). Print

This article is helpful because it provides a broad overview of rape myths and their influence in society starting in 1980. Although the information provided is not very extensive or thorough, it helps create an overall understanding of the problem and its main components. Many of these components are seen in other sources I have found, but there are some unique studies that add additional insight. One example is a study of the psychological harm experienced by rape victims, and how widely it is believed that victims of acquaintance rape are not really damaged by the experience. This specific study even included police officers, lawyers, doctors and counselors. Information such as this will be very useful in my paper.

Kahlor and Eastin. "Television's Role in the Culture of Violence Toward Women: A Study of Television Viewing and the Cultivation of Rape Myth Acceptance in the United States" *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. 55.2 (2011): 215-231. Print.

This source provides vital information regarding the socialization of individuals in our society to believe and accept rape myths. It is interesting because it looks at the role television plays in perpetuating these myths, an approach that is not often taken in the research of this topic. The authors argue that the prevalence of rape myths on television helps to facilitate these myths in society and encourage a rape-supportive culture. Not only does the prevalence of these myths on TV relate to acceptance of rape myths and violence against women, but it is also related to males' self-reported likelihood of raping a woman. Due to the fact that television is a large part of college students' lives, this information will be especially useful for my paper.

Kelly, Conor. "Sexism in Practice: Feminist Ethics Evaluating the Hookup Culture." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 28.2 (2012): 27

This article provides information about the hookup culture that is seen on college campuses and how it puts women at a greater risk for sexual assault and rape. The author discusses the hookup culture in great detail and the components of this culture are seen in other research I have found regarding the rape-supportive culture among college students. This source is unique because it is not directly studying rape or a rape culture, which allows it to provide insight into how this rape-supportive culture is shaped and perpetuated on college campuses.

Phillips, Joshua. "Engaging Men and Boys in Conversations About Gender Violence: Voice Male Magazine Using Vernacular Rhetoric as Social Resistance." *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 20.3 (2012): 259.

This source is unique because it mainly focuses on men: what effects a rape-supportive culture has on them, what led to this behavior, and what men's role is in ending gender violence. The author notes that a culture supportive of rape myths not only blames the victims of sexual assault and gendered violence, but it also eliminates the male's responsibility and allows them to continue to live in a

male centered and dominated society. This becomes even more of a problem when boys grow up in this society and are socialized to accept these roles and continue to perpetuate this rape-supportive culture. This article emphasizes the importance of educating men about how they play into this culture and how it is their responsibility to change it. It suggests simple ideas such as using the phrase “men’s violence against women” rather than just “violence against women” in order to remind society that men are to be held responsible for these actions, not the women who are victims of violence.

Sampson, Rana, "Acquaintance Rape of College Students" (2003). *Public Health Resources*. Paper 92.

This source is useful because it provides important statistics about rape of college students. Included in these statistics are total numbers of women who have been raped, the percentage of these women who knew their attacker, and how many reported the incident to the police. In addition to these statistics, the author also includes information on the role college administrators play in the rape process and the maintenance of a rape-supportive culture. The article notes that college administration can have an impact on campus police and how they treat the situation and whether or not they choose to define the incidence as rape. This process discourages women from reporting rape, which lets men off the hook and enables them to hurt more women and become unprosecuted serial rapists.

Sanday, Peggy. *Fraternity Gang Rape*. New York: NYU Press, 2007. Print.

This source is especially important to me because Sanday’s work was the reason I decided to research this topic in the first place. She provides a unique analysis of college fraternities and how they not only condone but also create this rape-supportive culture. Sanday thoroughly investigates fraternity rituals and initiation practices, as well as normal parties held at the fraternity house. The book provides first-hand accounts from women who have been assaulted in fraternity houses and uses these stories to help illustrate how detrimental these fraternity practices are to women. In addition to these testimonies, she also includes interviews with fraternity members in order to provide both sides to the story. Some critics mention that Sanday’s findings are limited because they cannot be proven true, but for my paper, this book will be incredibly useful and informative.

Schwartz, Martin and DeKeseredy, Walter *Sexual Assault on the College Campus*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1997. Print.

This source has proven to be incredibly useful for the content of my paper. The book provides extensive information about the impact of rape myths and a rape-supportive culture on both men and women. It addresses the issues with underreporting and how it leads men to believe that they are above the law. The authors discuss socialization in America and how growing up in our male dominated society trains men, whether consciously or not, that women are inferior

and should be treated as objects and tools for personal gain. They suggest that young men strongly adhere to rape myths even before they are able to truly grasp the meaning behind them. Although this is an older text, it provides some of the most relevant and in depth information out of all the sources I have encountered.

Ward et. al. "Acquaintance Rape and the College Social Scene." *Family Relations* 40.1 (1991). Print.

This source is very useful because it provides information pertaining specifically to sexual assaults on college campuses, but also includes both male and female college students' perceptions of the issue. It describes a distinct contrast between the two genders, with women reporting that unwanted sexual experiences are common on campus, but men reporting that these occurrences are rare. This information is especially helpful when trying to understand both sides of the issues and having both perspectives provides a deeper insight.

3. Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Methods
- III. The Problem of a Rape-Supportive Culture
 - a. Rape Myths: The Foundation of Rape Culture
 - b. Definition and Impact of Rape Culture
 - c. Rape Culture Seen in Fraternities and Athletes
 - d. Rape Culture Seen Through Administration Responses
- IV. Causes of a Rape Supportive Culture
 - a. Socialization Into Rape Culture
 - b. The Role of Power
- V. Cal Poly as a Case Study
 - a. Rape Culture Seen Through Administration Responses
- VI. Conclusion

4. Introduction

“I felt his hands start to move down towards my shorts as if he was trying to unbutton them or pull them off. I was still crying at this point and felt so scared that I couldn't move” (Henneberger, 2012). These words were written by a college freshman after she had been raped, but they ring true for many others as well. Statistics from the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network show that “every two minutes in the United States, someone is raped, and the chances of being that victim are four times greater for a female college student than for any other age group” (Burnett et. al, 2009). These women may be described as slut, cheap, or ready for action, rather than victim, sufferer, or survivor. Rape myths encourage these derogatory terms for women and mask the reality of a rape culture. In this paper, I will describe the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses as well as the systems and procedures in place to address it. I will focus on the role power has in this issue, including the powerful men on campus such as athletes and fraternity members as well as the administrators in power who determine the punishments and actions taken against the perpetrators. The influence of those in power often goes unnoticed in our society because it has become so intertwined with our culture. It starts at an early age and may seem to be harmless, but these teachings, values, and gender socialization help create rape myths and perpetuate a rape culture that is especially prevalent on college campuses, including Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

Explanation of Methodology

This research was conducted over the course of Winter and Spring quarters 2013 and included an extensive literature review of the current research as well as secondary analysis of a variety of sources, some specific to Cal Poly and others pertaining to current events occurring at

other schools and universities around the country. The sources specific to Cal Poly included campus sexual assault policies, articles from the school newspaper, The Mustang Daily, and emails from the president as well as timely warning alerts. Newspaper articles and news reports provided the information on current events pertaining to the topic, which were also used for secondary analysis. Throughout the course of these investigations I focused on a few central research questions that guided the collection and interpretation of information. The first initial question simply asks what is going on in terms of sexual assault on college campuses. What type of sexual assaults are most common, how frequent are they, and what measures are taken to discipline perpetrators and prevent more instances of sexual assault? After obtaining this information, the next guiding question asks why things are the way they are. Why are sexual assaults and a rape-supportive culture so prevalent on college campuses, and why are so few people, especially those in power, trying to change things?

The analysis of previous researchers' findings provided the background and groundwork of the project. It allowed me to understand the problem on a larger scale and see how it has affected campuses throughout the United States. The secondary analysis sources allowed me to investigate which themes described in the literature applied to current events as well as to Cal Poly's campus. The inclusion of these sources distinguishes this project from the majority of research on the topic by analyzing a more specific location and including current trends and examples.

The Problem of a Rape-Supportive Culture

Rape Myths: The Foundation of Rape Culture

Lonsway and Fitzgerald define rape myths as “false but persistent beliefs and stereotypes regarding forced sexual intercourse and the victims and perpetrators of such acts” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, cited in Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). These myths include beliefs such as women who dress or act provocatively are asking for rape, or that women claim they were raped when they regret having consensual sex. Although it is a common myth that women lie about being raped, “the fact is that only 2% of rape reports prove to be intentionally reported falsely” (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). Another prominent rape myth is that no really means yes, and that women secretly want to be raped. While numerous rape myths pertain to the victim and what she was wearing or doing, there are also rape myths that describe the perpetrator and create false ideas about who actually commits rape. One such myth is that “rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both” and that rape is purely a crime of passion (Iconis, 2008). These statements contribute to the false ideas many people believe, but an even more powerful rape myth that especially affects college campuses is the idea that stranger rape is the only “real rape.” This widespread notion leads women to fear rapists who jump out of bushes, or randomly attack them while walking home, but it gives no validity to the idea that friends and acquaintances can actually be more harmful. In “real rape”, victims are innocent, sober, modestly dressed women who tried their best to physically fight off their attacker, whose identity is unknown to them. Although this is the picture most people have of rape, in actuality, 90% of college women who are victims of rape or attempted rape know their attacker (Sampson, 2003).

The prevalence of these myths creates widespread negative effects. In the article, “‘You Owe Me’: Effects of Date Cost, Who Pays, Participant Gender, and Rape Myth Beliefs on Perceptions of Rape,” Basow and Minieri found that

“the higher the participants’ level of rape myth acceptance, the more agreement that each character should have expected something sexual from their date, the higher the ratings of the victim’s responsibility and blame, the lower the ratings of the perpetrator’s responsibility and blame, and the higher the ratings of rape justifiability” (Basow & Minieri, 2011).

These findings show the negative effects associated with belief in rape myths that not only affect the one holding these ideas, but also everyone around them. The continual acceptance and perpetuation of these rape myths make them a norm in our society, laying the foundation for the rape culture prevalent on college campuses.

Definition and Impact of Rape Culture

A rape-supportive culture is one that accepts rape myths, blames victims rather than perpetrators, and contributes to an increased frequency of rape rather than working to stop it. It is often easier to identify the existence of this rape culture when reactions to rape are compared to reactions to other crimes, such as robberies. Robbery victims are never told that “they were asking for it” because they were wearing an expensive watch or suit, they are never asked why they didn’t struggle with the robber or scream for help. Although it is unheard of for these questions to be asked of robbery victims, these questions and conclusions are the norm for victims of rape. In addition, it is rare for victims of other crimes to be blamed due to whether or not they had been consuming alcohol that day, or whether they had ever voluntarily given money

away before. This victim-blaming attitude is unique to sexual assault crimes and is a distinct aspect of rape culture.

Burnett et. al's "Communicating/Muting Date Rape" discusses the impact of rape culture on college campuses and how it "increases not only the risk factors related to sexual violence, it influences post-rape behaviors, so as to conceal and perpetuate rape and the culture of rape" (Burnett et. al, 2009). When women are constantly surrounded by these myths suggesting that the incident was their fault, that they should have dressed better, drank less, and fought harder, it becomes their reality, so much so that they don't even know to question it. Studies done by both Koss et. al (1987) and Schwartz and Pitts (1995) found that, although all of the women in their study described experiences that legally qualify as rape, only 27% believed they had been raped and defined it as such (Schwart & DeKeseredy, 1997). Those studies help explain why fewer than 5% of sexual offenses against college students are reported to law enforcement (Burnett et. al., 2009). By blaming victims and discouraging them from reporting their experiences, this rape culture supports men who rape and helps justify and perpetuate the crime. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) paints a clear picture of this issue with their findings that "out of every 100 rapes, 46 get reported, 12 lead to an arrest, 9 get prosecuted, 5 lead to a felony conviction, and 3 rapists will spend even a single day in prison- the other 97 will walk free" (RAINN). After viewing these statistics, it is not surprising that 90-95% of rapes are committed by serial rapists who continue with the same behavior because they were never punished or held accountable (Hallett, 2011). Schwart and DeKeseredy poignantly note: "If college men feel that they are above the law when they rape women, it is because they too often are" (Schwart & DeKeseredy, 1997). These men embrace a "macho" personality in which violence and danger are desirable, but even worse is the fact that the society around them encourages these beliefs

and places great value on hyper-masculinity in males (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). Hyper-masculinity can be summarized as an exaggeration of typical male behavior. More specifically, Mosher and Serkin (1984) define hyper-masculinity in terms of three variables: “callous sexual attitudes toward women, the belief that violence is manly, and the experience of danger as exciting.” These different factors associated with hyper-masculinity increase the prevalence of rape on campus, while the acceptance and encouragement of hyper-masculinity in our society creates a lack of accountability for attackers, perpetuating the rape-supportive culture.

Rape Culture seen in Fraternities and Athletes

Sarah Fernandez and Mark Houlemarde, employees in the housing departments of Cal Poly and Cornell University, respectively, and authors of “How to Progress From a Rape-Supportive Culture” believe that the major elements of a rape culture are rape myths, hegemonic masculinity, and peer support. Donaldson (1993) defines hegemonic masculinity as “a culturally idealized form of masculinity, a personal and collective project that emphasizes aggression, dominance, heterosexual performance and homophobia as normal for men” (Donaldson, 1993 cited in Hearn, 2012). This concept, as well as the other elements of a rape culture, is especially prevalent in male social groups such as fraternities and athletes, which are known for committing a great number of sexual assaults on college campuses. According to one study, 35% of fraternity men reported having forced someone into sexual intercourse (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). For college athletes, an FBI survey discovered that NCAA basketball and football players were reported for committing sexual assault 38% more often than the average for college males (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). In another survey of ten Division I schools, male athletes accounted for 3.3% of the student body, but were responsible for 19% of the sexual assaults (Crosset, McDonald & Benedict, 1996 cited in Burnett et. al., 2009). This high incidence rate among

athletes and fraternity members can be partially attributed to the high level of homosocial interactions within these two groups. Homosocial interactions include nonsexual interactions between members of the same gender (Bird, 1996). According to Lipman-Blumen (1976), these interactions “promote clear distinctions between women and men through segregation in social institutions” (Lipman-Blumen, 1976 cited in Bird, 1996). In these types of groups, women are most often referred to as “them,” and are often referred to as mere objects, signifying that they are clearly outsiders who are unimportant and insignificant (Bird, 1996). This view of women as not only an “other” sex, but also as a lesser sex promotes the idea that they deserve to be abused (Schwart & DeKeseredy, 1997). Such a mentality allows the violence against and mistreatment of women to be rationalized and justified through the eyes of the men in the homosocial group.

Fraternity pledges are the ones who are most likely to rape in college, according to Bohmer and Parrott (1993), and a large part of this is due to the initiation rituals that emphasize masculinity and force all feminine characteristics out of the pledges. Schwart and DeKeseredy note that “brothers commonly learn from their friends that they are supposed to have stereotypical masculine attributes, such as a clean cut, handsome appearance, athletic skills, wealth, a high tolerance for alcohol, and sexual success with women” (Schwart & DeKeseredy, 1997). In addition, many times at fraternity parties there is a sexual discourse and culture that sexual exploitation of women is not only a desired characteristic of masculinity, but it is a necessary condition of manhood (Ward et. al, 1991). Peggy Sanday, author of “Fraternity Gang Rape,” describes an example of one fraternity brother who set sex quotas for different time periods. According to him, the joy of sex was “not just the pleasure from the act, but the feeling of acceptance and approval of my masculinity which goes along with having sex with a new

person” (Sanday, 2007). This need for affirmation and legitimation in one’s masculinity is a product of hegemonic masculinity’s presence and power in our society. As stated by Bird (1996), “Within the existing gender order, meanings associated with behaviors that challenge hegemonic masculinity are denied legitimation as *masculine*; such meanings are marginalized, if not suppressed entirely.” In settings such as fraternities, these men feel they have to continually legitimate their masculinity in order to be affirmed by those around them who are embracing the idea of hegemonic masculinity and competing for the recognition of being the most masculine. This system that embraces hegemonic masculinity focuses on sexual dominance and power over women, which encourages fraternity members to believe rape myths and help perpetuate a rape-supportive culture. Similar beliefs are seen in college athletes, where coaches, parents and teammates “underline and force-feed boys views of masculinity that are based as much on being ‘not female’ as on anything else” (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Burnett et. al. also notes that men’s athletics help foster a rape culture because the nature of their sports revolve around being dominant, and athletes often gain prestige by being physically dominating (Burnett et. al., 2009). The power gained through treating women solely as objects they can control allows these men to remain dominant off the sports field as well.

The other aspect of rape culture that is especially prevalent in fraternities and athletes is the role of peer support. These social groups are so tightly knit that they learn from each other and support each other no matter what. They have a group secrecy that prohibits revealing the deviant behavior of others in order to protect members of their group, as well as the group’s reputation. As Schwartz & DeKeseredy (1997) note, “this secrecy tells violent men that their actions are not wrong.” This secrecy allows fraternity brothers and athletes to justify and promote rape, because they have support from their closest friends. Not only will men keep each

other's secrets, but they also approve and encourage these actions. When men are dating women who challenge their power, or refuse to gratify them sexually, their friends tell them to sexually, physically, and psychologically mistreat these women (Schwart & DeKeseredy, 1997). All three aspects of hyper masculinity that were noted earlier: callous sexual attitudes toward women, the belief that violence is manly, and the experience of danger as exciting, are seen in responses such as this, which are supported and encouraged by brothers and teammates. In addition, "Ageton (1983) found that over 40% of the perpetrators of adolescent sexual assaults reported that their friends knew about their behavior and that virtually all approved of it or at least expressed indifference" (Ageton, 1983 cited in Schwart & DeKeseredy, 1997). Statistics such as these show how influential the role of peer support can be and how essential it is to the promotion of a rape culture.

There are numerous examples in the news today that illustrate the concept of peer support and athletic dominance, but there are two particular cases that are especially telling. The first involves St. Mary's College freshman Lizzy Seeberg and a football player from the University of Notre Dame. In August 2010, Lizzy was visiting Notre Dame with a friend one weekend and ended up being left in a room alone with one of the football players, where she was sexually assaulted by him. After the incident, Lizzy was incredibly shaken up, but managed to write down a statement and reported it to the campus police. After this, however, she began receiving threatening text messages from the football player's best friend and teammate stating "don't do anything you would regret," and "messing with Notre Dame football is a bad idea" (Henneberger, 2012). After ten days of this, the police had still not interviewed the suspect. It was on the tenth day after the incident that Lizzy committed suicide, but it still took five more

days for the police to conduct interviews because “they said they were pretty busy, [since] it’s football season and there’s a lot of underage drinking” (Henneberger, 2012).

The Notre Dame football player and his friend were never named or prosecuted. This example just proves how much power athletes have on college campuses, especially those known for their sports teams. The role of peer support is also prevalent in this case, as the perpetrator’s friend not only knew and accepted what his friend had done, but continued to threaten the victim to ensure his teammate would not be punished. Although the perpetrator had his teammates, administration, and the campus police behind him, Lizzy had no such support. A teacher at St. Mary’s College notes that when she asks her students about Lizzy’s story, “their reaction is ‘she was so foolish to go to his room.’ I’ve been surprised by the lack of a sisterhood mentality” (Henneberger, 2012). It seems even more hurtful that other women responded in such a non-supportive and accusatory way, but Iconis (2008) notes that many women have this reaction and choose to believe rape myths as a way to deny their vulnerability to rape. If they blame the victim it leads them to believe that they have control over these types of situations, so there is less likelihood that it will happen to them. No matter the reasoning behind it, the fact is that Lizzy failed to receive the support she deserved.

The Notre Dame case provides a sharp contrast to the second example, a recent incident in April 2013 of a UCLA water polo player accused of raping an acquaintance in the dorms. The perpetrator in this incident, Hakop Kaplanyan, was shown an overwhelming amount of support. There was a video made proclaiming his innocence, which goes into detail of all his athletic accomplishments. While Hakop was being supported and fought for, the victim in the situation was the one being blamed and forced to deal with statements such as one from Hakop’s attorney stating, “People with personality disorders, people who want to be famous, they make wrongful

accusations.”¹ This statement implying that the victim only accused Hakop because she either had a personality disorder or wanted attention is a perfect example of a false rape myth that is prevalent within fraternities and athletic departments. Combined with the high level of peer support and brotherhood, and a lack of consequences, these attitudes create and normalize a victim blaming, rape supportive culture.

Rape Culture Seen Through Administration Responses

College administrators are not immune to the prevalence of a rape culture, and the influence of rape myths on administration responses is far more detrimental than on the individual level. According to Burnett et. al. (2009), “Since administration is clearly the dominant group on college campuses, it has the power to validate date rape experiences by preventative education and post-rape support, but co-researchers did not feel such validation existed.” Many other researchers have come to the same conclusion as Burnett and colleagues, that college administrators and disciplinarians are not responding to incidents of sexual assault in a way that supports the victims and validates their emotions and experiences. Recently, on April 27th, protests were held at Dartmouth College that help illustrate this point. The students protesting were ones who have personally encountered sexual assault and were protesting the campus’ “inability to foster a safer environment” (Mukherjee, 2013). Other Dartmouth students threatened these protesters with rape and death threats via anonymous online message boards. The telling part of the story, however, is not the protests or threats themselves, but how the college administration handled them. In an email sent to the Dartmouth community, the Board of Trustees combined the actions of the protesters and those threatening them into the category of “declines in civility.” The equating of non-violent protests against sexual assaults as the same

severity of violent threats being made exemplifies the college's lack of supportive and validating responses to sexual assault on campus.

Rana Sampson, author of "Acquaintance Rape of College Students," believes that administrators' insufficient responses are due to a fear that the incident will damage the university's reputation. They think that if the incident is given a great deal of attention, unwelcome publicity will ensue and students and parents will start to consider that the occurrence of sexual assault on their campus is higher than other campuses. By ignoring the problem of acquaintance rape, college administrators perpetuate the rape myth that rape carried out by a stranger who jumps out of the bushes at night is the only "real rape." Since this type of rape is the only rape that is validated by administrators, students begin to accept this belief as well. In Sarmiento Ilaria's "Rape Stereotypes and Labeling: Awareness of Victimization and Trauma," he discusses his study in which 210 participants were asked to discuss two different scenarios of sexual assault, one being a forced rape and the other an acquaintance rape. Of the 210 participants, only 48% thought that the case of acquaintance rape should be tried in criminal court (Ilaria, 2011).

Another way that college administrators attempt to quell these incidents is by assigning perpetrators minimal discipline. Criminal charges are rarely pursued, and there are many cases where the men involved are let off with only a lecture and no other discipline. These minimal punishments further worsen the situation for victims who are then forced to continue to see their perpetrators often, live in the same areas as them and even remain in classes with them. Although this lack of discipline is intended to protect the college's reputation, it also protects the attackers by removing any expectations of accountability for their actions. It was previously mentioned that 90-95% of rapes are committed by serial rapists (Hallett, 2011). A main reason

why this statistic is so high is because of the leniency in administration responses and the reluctance to bring criminal charges against the perpetrator. These actions, or lack thereof, contribute to the prevalence of a rape culture on campus and because administrators are in positions of power, the influence of this rape culture on the student body is greatly increased.

A recent example of this lack of adequate discipline is seen at Occidental College in Los Angeles where students decided to take a stand against the administration earlier this month. In this case, a complaint was filed formally with the US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. According to an article in the Huffington Post, thirty seven female students, faculty and alumni composed this 250 page complaint describing the hostile environment the university has created for sexual assault victims (Kingkade, 2013). This environment discourages victims from reporting their experiences, but even when they are reported, little punishment is given. According to the complaint, one student was found to have raped a woman, but his sole punishment was to write a five-page book report (Kingkade, 2013). A sociology professor at the university comments that "the fact that Occidental has invited rapists back to campus and even told survivors not to worry because 'he's reformed now' after these types of inadequate sanctions is an abomination" (Kingkade, 2013). Similar responses have occurred at UC Berkeley, where students also filed a formal complaint this May. In one example, a female student filed a report of being sexually assaulted but did not receive any response until seven months later when she was notified that "the case had been solved through 'an early resolution' process" (Castellanos, 2013). These examples illustrate the impact of lenient disciplines and how a lack of responsibility for perpetrators not only perpetuates a rape culture, but also contributes to the unsafe environment on campus by letting rapists walk free.

Causes of a Rape Supportive Culture

Conor Kelly, author of “Sexism in Practice: Feminist Ethics Evaluating the Hookup Culture,” believes that one reason rape culture is so prevalent on college campuses is because of the prevalence of a hook-up culture on campus as well. Hooking up, defined as “the practice of pursuing sexual activity without any expectation of a relationship,” undermines the equality and safety of women on campus (Kelly, 2012). Within a hookup culture, many women are looking to hook up, but not have intercourse. However, “for some men, this initial attention is the only thing they see, and they choose to interpret a woman’s later resistance as inauthentic after the first expression of attraction” (Kelly, 2012). This belief is consistent with the rape myths supported in a rape culture: that a woman only has to say yes at one point, and if she changes her mind and begins to say no, that can be ignored. These ideas are rooted in a sense of male entitlement, specifically sexual entitlement. Hanson, Gizzarelli, & Scott (1994) define this as the belief that “[men] have strong sexual needs that must be satisfied...that men, in general, are entitled to act out their sexual impulses.” Kaschak (1992) expands the idea further and states that “a sense of entitlement to women...is extended to all men in a patriarchal society, who have the right to view and evaluate, to sexualize any woman who falls within the range of their sight.” This sense of male entitlement is intertwined with the concept of masculinity in our culture, perpetuating the idea that the two go hand in hand and with masculinity automatically comes entitlement. Hill and Fischer (2001) tested these theories in their research, surveying 114 college men to determine the relationship among masculinity, entitlement, and rape-related behaviors. Their results showed that “masculinity factors were found to predict both men’s general and sexual entitlement and both general and sexual entitlement, in turn, predicted an array of rape-related attitudes and behaviors” (Hill & Fischer, 2001). These findings emphasize how

influential masculinity and men's sense of entitlement can be in perpetuating a rape-supportive culture.

Socialization Into Rape Culture

The rape culture seen today is a product of years and years of socialization regarding gender norms and acceptable roles for men and women. As stated by Schwart and DeKeseredy, "Only a male dominated society that trains men to use women as objects, and that legitimizes violence as a tool to achieve personal goals with a callous indifference to the feelings of victimized others, could breed a large number of men who openly assault women they know, and, in fact, may even like it" (Schwart & DeKeseredy, 1997). This training begins in early childhood, when boys and girls first learn that women are expected to perform the domestic duties, and men's responsibilities are those associated with strength and power. Parents play a vital role in this socialization, and the relationship between fathers and sons are especially telling. As stated by Harper (2004), "no father wants his son to grow up being a 'pussy,' 'sissy,' 'punk,' or 'softy' - terms commonly associated with boys who fail to live up to the traditional standards of masculinities in America" (Harris & Harper, 2008). These fears cause fathers to over-emphasize the importance of stereotypical masculine characteristics such as toughness and aggressiveness. As they continue to get older, boys are looking to gain the approval of their peers as well as their parents. Harris and Harper (2008) note that "men's adherence to unproductive masculine concepts such as sexism, homophobia, violence, and anti-intellectualism are often requisite for their access to male peer groups." Because fitting in is everything in junior high and high school, these beliefs and behaviors continue to be supported and reinforced.

In addition, school principals and administrators also play a vital role during this coming of age process. One specific article, “How Slut Shaming Has Been Written Into School Dress Codes Across the Country,” written by Strasser and Culp-Ressler and recently published on thinkprogress.org takes note of how school rules, and dress codes specifically, can contribute to this rape supportive culture even at a young age. The article lists several dress codes specific to different schools that forbid female students to wear “inappropriate” attire such as strapless dresses, short skirts, or tight pants. One specific middle school claimed that girls are not allowed to wear tight pants because it “distracts the boys” (Strasser & Culp-Ressler, 2013). The article emphasizes that, “at its core, every incident has a common thread: putting the onus on young women to prevent from being ogled or objectified, instead of teaching those responsible to learn to respect a woman’s body” (Strasser & Culp-Ressler, 2013). Dress codes designed with the intentions of keeping boys from getting distracted and holding girls responsible for the boys’ actions instill a victim blaming attitude in both boys and girls, students and administrators. These attitudes continue with them as they enter into high school and college, contributing to the rape-supportive culture we see on college campuses.

Another source of socialization that is increasingly prevalent in our society is television and the media, both of which play a huge role in creating these attitudes and supporting a rape culture. Advertisements are known to portray women solely as sexual objects and emphasize the role of men as strong and dominant. According to an article by Oliver Bendza (2010), the average American faces 3,000 advertisements each day, and these repeated sexual depictions of women continuously contribute to the rape culture accepted by society. In a study conducted by Brinson in which he reviewed and analyzed 26 storylines on prime time television, it was found that “42% of the storylines suggested the victim wanted to be raped, 38% suggested the victim

lied about the sexual assault and 46% suggested the victim was to blame for the assault” (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). But, it is not only fictional television that influences our society’s thoughts on rape; the way these incidents are depicted on the news also has a great impact. An example of the media reinforcing a rape supportive culture is found in the recent case this March in Stuebenville, Ohio where a sixteen year old girl was raped by two football players. In one of the video releases, a CNN reporter discusses the trial of the two perpetrators. The focus of the story is solely on the two football players and on how difficult it was for the reporter to watch “as these two young men that had such promising futures- star football players, very good students- literally watched their lives fall apart” (CNN, 2013). The reporter then goes on to describe the lasting effect this conviction will have on the two boys, and how being a registered sex offender is “really something that will have a lasting impact” (CNN, 2013). There is no mention, however, of the lasting impact this incident will have on the victim, or how her life will be forever altered. These messages portrayed through various types of media constitute a larger force of creating these rape myths and influencing the perceptions of rape most college students hold.

Although prevalent and influential, the media is not the only contributor to our rape culture. Burnett et. al. discusses the idea of dominant and co-cultural communication. In our traditionally male dominated society, women have previously and still continue to constitute a co-culture. According to the authors, this status as members of the co-culture forces women to adopt the method of communication used by the dominant culture- men. This leads women to adopt phrases such as “the guy might not pick up on the signals” or “guys get that way [drunk], and having sex makes them heroes” (Burnett et. al., 2009). Because they have been socialized to

adopt this language, women do not see themselves as victims, and they often blame themselves just as much as do other members of society.

Another theory involved in the creation and perpetuation of a rape culture is sexual social exchange theory. This theory states that there is an exchange value associated with female sexuality, but male sexuality has no exchange value. Basow and Minieri apply this theory to dating practices seen in our western culture and propose that “sexual social exchange theory would predict that the cost of the date and who pays for it would affect attributions regarding what the participants should expect as well as the justifiability of, and blame allocated for, forced sexual intercourse” (Basow & Minieri, 2011). Muehlenhard and colleagues tested this belief and found that respondents rated women more sexually willing and believed forced sexual acts were more acceptable when it was noted that the men paid for the date (Muehlenhard, 1988; Muehlenhard et al., 1985). This response seems shocking, but it just proves that traditional practices that are rarely questioned can have a huge impact and are major contributors to the rape culture and acceptance of rape myths seen on college campuses and throughout society today.

The Role of Power

An underlying factor within all of these different causes is the concept of power and the role it plays in fostering rape and a rape-supportive culture. Our patriarchal society is controlled and dominated by men, which in turn supplies them with the great majority of the power. Men in our society are born into this power, which provides them with the luxury of entitlement, and the permission to treat women as a sub-culture. These “privileges” instill in men the belief that they have complete power over women and they therefore have the right to demonstrate that power through sexual assault. The role and influence of power not only causes rape, but also

explains why these beliefs have permeated our society as a whole. One feminist researcher, Yodanis (2004) notes that men currently dominate women in the majority of our institutions such as politics, the workplace, and the family, but “furthermore, men’s dominance is considered right and ‘natural’ not only in these institutions but also throughout society in general” (Yodanis, 2004 cited in Kahlor and Eastin, 2011). In the examples above, all of the socializing agents are people of power, the majority of which are men. Principals, fathers, coaches, and the media as a whole are all known to possess a great deal of power. The rest of us are led to believe that these figures know best and we should learn from them, acting out their beliefs in our own lives. This creates a society that perpetuates the beliefs, in this case the rape supportive ideas, of a few powerful individuals.

Cal Poly as a Case Study

Rape Culture Seen Through Administration Responses

Numerous characteristics of a rape culture discussed above are evident at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. This campus especially relates to the idea of protecting the University’s image and eliminating any negative publicity. I was first exposed to this as I began collecting research for this project. I had originally intended to conduct interviews with Cal Poly administrators and various other members of the university community in order to gain a better understanding of their views on the topic. Unfortunately, I was met with great resistance from Cal Poly administrative staff and was not able to conduct these interviews. My conversations with these individuals revealed how important it was for them to protect the faculty, staff, and University’s reputation and how they would take no risks to jeopardize that. This protective and risk avoidant attitude prevents significant change from occurring because it discourages conversations about

these important but difficult topics, and without conversation and openness to new ideas no progress will be made.

Another example of this is seen in the story of the red handprints here at Cal Poly. These handprints were placed in front of residence halls and other places on campus, marking the location where a sexual assault has taken place. A number of these handprints were removed in 2005 because, according to the director of housing and residential life at the time, “the prints have been causing parents and students to feel uneasy” (Rancer, 2005). These handprints were painted starting in 1999 and were intended to remain for ten years, but these concerns prompted an early removal. Members of Administration address the concerns and fears of parents and outside spectators with high priority and make sure others are aware of the preventative measures that are being taken, such as installing cameras around campus, running student shuttle services, and improving the lighting around campus (Sampson, 2003). Although these measures are commendable and executed with good intentions, they do nothing to address the greater problem of acquaintance rape and take no precautions against these types of attacks.

Also of specific concern at Cal Poly is how the rape culture is often evident in the tone and wording of the campus alerts after a sexual assault has occurred. These reports almost always include a lengthy discussion of the victim’s alcohol use and how important it is to drink responsibly, as well as numerous precautions women can take to avoid sexual assault. In 2011 there were three reported rapes at Cal Poly within a short period of time. Due to the frequency and limited amount of time between attacks, the University President Jeffrey D. Armstrong sent out an email to the Cal Poly community addressing the issue, but the content of this email was just as troubling, if not more, as the campus alerts. In this email, the president poses numerous questions: “What can we learn from these incidents? What more will we do as a community to

prevent sexual violence? [and] What more will we do to eliminate use of illegal drugs and reckless consumption of alcohol?" The inclusion of this last question takes the focus away from creating a safe place where female students need not worry about being sexually assaulted and turns it into a focus on blame. It blames the incident on the use of alcohol, which in turn blames the victim for consuming this alcohol. The focus on alcohol continued when, a few days later at a news conference, the president stated that those of us at Cal Poly "need to take a hard look at ourselves, particularly (at) sexual violence, alcohol and drug abuse." (Borgeson, 2011) This statement takes the focus off of the perpetrator and fails to assign him responsibility. In addition, the combination of alcohol abuse with sexual violence wraps the two problems into one, denying victims the validation that they are truly victims, with no complications or conditions.

After these three consecutive rapes occurred in 2011, with the previously mentioned victim-blaming emails following these incidents, several Cal Poly students decided to create a petition and stand up against administration. The petition called for Cal Poly to change its responses to such incidences so that they convey the severity of these situations and validate, rather than blame, the victims. This petition was signed by 719 members of the Cal Poly community, but no progress was seen. As I am writing this paper, three years after the petition circulated, another email was just received by Cal Poly students alerting them of a sexual assault that occurred this past weekend. This report was worded similarly to all the rest, focusing on the victim's alcohol consumption and outlining measures women can take to stay safe. This report, however, varies from the others in that it does include a statement at the very end stating "if your date or partner appears intoxicated, don't have sex with them." This statement is one of the very first that places the responsibility of preventing sexual assault on the men in the situation, and it provides some hope for the elimination of a rape supportive culture on Cal Poly's campus.

In order for significant change to occur, however, the change would have to take place within Cal Poly administration. Currently, Cal Poly's policy for sexual assault states that "This institution will vigorously discipline and/or prosecute persons identified as responsible for assaults as described in this policy" (Cal Poly Sexual Assault Policy). Unfortunately, in all of the recent cases of sexual assault at Cal Poly, it is rare that any punishment is assigned to the perpetrator. Instead, headlines such as "No Investigation for Sexual Assault Report,"² "Alleged Sexual Assault Investigation Stalled,"³ and "Reported Sex Assault at Cal Poly Won't be Investigated by Police"⁴ are seen in the Mustang Daily and The Tribune newspapers. These headlines representing the lack of action taken against perpetrators goes against the university's claim to vigorously discipline persons responsible and only helps perpetuate sexual assault. In one specific case of a sexual assault at a Cal Poly fraternity house, an officer in the San Luis Obispo Police Department told a Mustang Daily reporter that "When police attempted to ask her questions about the alleged assault, the woman became confrontational." He also added that "in order for us to investigate rape allegations, we need a willing victim" (McMinn, 2012). This statement offers no support or sympathy for the victim, but instead places the blame on her, completely accepting and promoting a rape-supportive culture. Another example of this victim blaming culture is seen in the conclusion of Cal Poly's policy on sexual assault which states that, "It is only through either formal or informal reporting that the incidence of sexual assault can be reduced." This sentence implies that women who have been victims of sexual assault hold all the responsibility for preventing further instances. It makes no mention of the fact that sexual assault can be prevented if men learn to respect and value women as equals, but rather continues to perpetuate the rape-supportive culture that is already evident on campus.

Bohmer and Parrot's 1993 book, *Sexual Assault on Campus*, includes numerous suggestions on how to successfully reduce the incidences of sexual assault on campus and deal with them in a supportive and effective manner. Included in these suggestions is the note that "Appropriate administrative responses must include evaluating and revising existing campus policies..." (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). Cal Poly's policy on sexual assault was approved by the president in 2006, but there is no mention of the policy having been revised since then. In addition, Bohmer and Parrot note that the most successful system for dealing with sexual assault is an open system in which "there is a high degree of communication among the administration, special interest groups and related agencies" (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). If Cal Poly administration worked more collaboratively with the student community and organizations such as SAFER and the SARP Center, it would achieve greater progress in dealing with sexual assault and creating a safe and supportive community.

Conclusion

It is a sad truth that Cal Poly exemplifies a number of the characteristics of a rape supportive, victim blaming culture, but an even sadder truth is that we would discover similar themes at every single college in the United States if we were to investigate them as well. The influence of countless years of socialization and reinforcement of rape myths from those in power has allowed this rape supportive culture to become normal for today's society. In the end, it all comes back to those initial research questions. We now know the truth about what is going on in terms of sexual assault on college campuses. We know that one in four female college students will experience sexual assault⁵, most likely by someone they know and possibly trust. These women will be faced with blame, criticism and doubt and will be denied the support, acceptance, and respect they deserve. They may hope to escape these accusations and negative

remarks by turning to people in authority- staff members, school presidents, or police officers- the ones we are taught to trust. Unfortunately, they will receive no solace there because these leaders have also been socialized into the same culture as the perpetrators of the sexual assaults- a culture where men support each others' violent acts against women, and where those in charge assign little or no discipline or consequences for the acts. Not only do we now understand this hostile environment female students must live in, but we have a better understanding of why so few people, especially those in power, are trying to change things. The countless years of socialization in a patriarchal society continually reinforces men with a sense of dominance and entitlement, and when these attitudes are combined with the need to protect the university's reputation above all else, it is nearly impossible for change to take place. So, the question is no longer what is going on with sexual assault, or how did things get to be this way, but the question that now remains is when will things change? How many papers must be written, how many protests must take place, and how many women must suffer before colleges and universities begin to take change seriously? I can only hope that this paper adds one more straw to the camel's back, so to speak, helping to break down the resistance to change and hastening the arrival of a better future for female college students around the country.

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