

An Exploration of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

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Abstract

Nearly 1 in every 5 women and 1 in every 16 men will experience sexual assault by the end of their collegiate career. While many researchers have theorized that this result is due to drinking culture, athletics, and Greek life, there could be a deeper issue at hand. This observational study is designed to examine the relationship, if any, between higher learning institutions and the rate of sexual assaults on those campuses. This study looked at the largest state institutions in each state in the United States and compared their rate of sexual assault in the year 2014 along with three independent variables: consent, Title IX education meeting, and language used when discussing sexual assault. It is anticipated that each of these variables under specified conditions will have a negative effect on the rate of sexual assault. This paper concludes with an examination of a multiple regression result and proposals for policy change to help lower rates of sexual assault on college campuses.

1. Introduction

In 2015, Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz carried her mattress around her university for more than a semester after the administrator's refusal to expel her rapist. On February 14th, 2016, Delaney Robinson was raped by a UNC Chapel Hill football player and tried to file formal charges with her university, but her efforts failed because the university refused to move forward with the investigation. On Friday September 2nd, 2016 Brock Turner, the perpetrator in a very high profile college rape case at Stanford University, was released from prison after serving half of his six-month sentence for raping an unconscious woman behind a dumpster and received virtually no repercussions from the university. Sadly, these instances are not unique. In fact, they are so common that addressing these issues has become a priority under the Obama-Biden administration. Each year, newspapers are filled with headlines much like these. Many of these cases were brought to the public eye not only because of the horrific nature of the crime, but also because of the nature in which the schools handled each situation. Colleges and universities have been under fire for their less-than-stellar process of dealing with sexual assault, noting failures on behalf of the victim, the rest of the student body, and the perpetrator.

Countless students at universities all across the country have had to deal with the uphill battle that is campus sexual assault. According to a recent survey, one in every five women and one in every sixteen men will experience sexual assault by the end of their collegiate career. That means that 20% of college women will be faced with the possibility of pursuing justice at the mercy of their institution of higher learning⁶.

Our nation's government took universities to task on this very issue some 30 years ago when they instituted Title IX, an early 1970's national policy that set the requirements by which universities in America handle sexual assault. While this statute aimed more generally at gender equality in college athletics, it has a particular focus on the rights and protections of students regarding their safety and the expectation of the university to ensure that safety.

Even with such a policy, however, the rates of sexual assault remain devastatingly high for university students. Universities have discretion in how they implement Title IX at their university. Therefore, though Title IX has sought for years to get at the root of the problem and eradicate college sexual assault, it, much to the detriment of students, has not succeeded. This failure, on the part of universities, suggests that something is not quite right with the system.

As such, this paper will address the question: Are there institutional factors that contribute to the high rate of sexual assault crimes in colleges and universities? This paper explores key differences in institutional models

across a set of specific criteria and, in the end, poses a new model—one that seeks to lower sexual assault rates and generally improve the process by which colleges and universities handle sexual assault.

2. Literature Review

Many researchers have theorized that the rate of sexual assaults at universities in America can be explained by one of three factors: alcohol, Greek life, and athletics. Literature on the subject has largely neglected to look at how variation in Title IX implementation across universities may affect rates.

Mary Koss and John Gaines at the University of Arizona, for example, conducted research to find a relationship between the risk of sexual aggression as determined by alcohol use, athletic participation, and fraternity affiliation. While they found that data considering only alcohol as a predictor of sexual aggression is weak, they found that 11% of the variation in sexual assault was accounted for by taking all three of these variables into account. However, they caution that the effects in their data were extremely small⁴.

Another similar study conducted at the University of Illinois sought to find a relationship between acquaintance rape, the use of alcohol, fraternity membership, and athletic team membership. These researchers found that their results “found that alcohol use was associated with sexual violence and that fraternity members and members of sports teams were overrepresented among the accused” (p 121). This study, much like the one conducted at the University of Arizona, found a weak positive relationship between these variables of interest.

One particularly concerning study looked solely at the relationship between alcohol and sexual violence at colleges and universities. According to the researcher, at least half of the sexual assaults involving college students involve alcohol consumption by the victim, the perpetrator, or both. This researcher found that “alcohol consumption by the perpetrator and/or the victim increases the likelihood of acquaintance sexual assault occurring through multiple pathways. Alcohol’s psychological, cognitive and motor effects contribute to sexual assault” (p 281). In fact, there are quotes within this research paper by perpetrators claiming that had they not consumed alcohol, they never would have crossed the line¹.

Researchers Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney also sought to explain why high rates of sexual assault are still seen on college campuses. Their working theory is that university party culture, while producing a fun outlet for university students, also produces an environment in which high rates of sexual assault remain. Researchers in this study conducted nine months of ethnographic observation of a women’s floor in a “party dorm”, in-depth interviews with 42 of the floor residents, and 16 group interviews with other students. Their dependent variable was sexual assault, and their independent variables were gendered selves, organizational arrangements, and interactional expectations. Other, minor, independent variables include student homogeneity, expectations that parties drink heavily and trust their party-mates, and residential arrangements. While these variables they included have their merit, the implications of such variables seem disastrous. This article appears as though it could substantially stand as fodder for the argument that if we simply changed drinking patterns in university students, sexual assault would evaporate. This answer seems magnificently naïve. Additionally, their chosen “party dorm” seemed arbitrarily chosen. While it does seem rather obvious that their chosen dorm is a hub for campus parties, there was no specific definition given for what criterion that dorm meets which could lead to a designation as a party dorm. The implications that this research has for this paper are limited. Their variables are of serious interest to this study, however this paper’s research will go further.

The weakness with many of these explanations is that they place the blame or the burden on the victim. As a result, they fail to deal with the issue at hand². While the factors in the extant literature likely do contribute to the rate of sexual assault on college campuses, they do not truly address the problem at its core. The factors discussed might aid in intensifying an already existing problem, but they are not the cause of the problem itself.

Kimberly Handon, an applied psychologist, wrote a review and critique of the effectiveness of programs designed to prevent sexual assault on college campuses. This article pointed out that when looking at whether or not preventative programs work, we must look primarily at how each institution defines said effectiveness. To determine this, they analyzed attitudinal behaviors, directly observed behaviors, moderator variables, and mediator variables. The author notes that the timeline and process of sexual assault reporting and investigation are seriously flawed. The study concluded that programs geared toward sexual assault prevention can influence attitudes and behavioral intentions. This paper builds from their line of research and seriously examines the reporting requirement and other policies universities have in place for sexual assault. Importantly, this paper argues that these rules and institutions are just as important as extra-curricular activities in explaining sexual assault rates.

3. Theory

College institutions in the United States are responsible for educating students about sexual assault and providing a resource for students who feel they have been assaulted, as stated by the regulations outlined in Title IX. This paper argues there are two institutional factors in the control of states and universities that could affect the rate of sexual assault.

The first factor is based on operational definitions, namely how universities define consent. Consent as an operating definition is particularly important because it is the entire basis for what defines sexual assault. All sexual assault is some action performed without the given consent of the victim. As a result, this definition is crucial in the study of sexual assault. State Universities abide by state law in adopting such definitions. As such, this condition varies from state to state. When it comes to consent, most states can be grouped into one of two categories: “yes means yes” policies and “no means no” policies. “Yes means yes” means that explicit affirmation must be given prior to any sexual contact and asserts that students are encouraged to have conversations about the sexual act before the sexual act ever occurs. “Yes means yes” policies are also often referred to as affirmative consent policies. This stresses that a sexual act can only occur once it has been discussed and agreed upon by both parties. This policy is, as a result, a preventative policy. It encourages students to engage in conversations about their sexual experiences before they ever happen, or suggests that students are at least cognizant of the fact that such conversations should occur.

Conversely, other states and their universities use the “no means no” definition of consent. Such a policy assumes that one can move forward in any sexual encounter *until* someone says “no.” This implies a reactionary measure, as opposed to a preventative measure. This policy does not encourage students to engage in conversations before the sex act, but instead incentivizes students to keep moving forward until someone says no. Additionally, this policy does not address the fact that it is difficult to stop what has already begun, thus failing to acknowledge the reality of any sexual encounter. It is the argument of this paper that there will be higher rates of sexual assault in schools with this policy, relative to those with “yes means yes” policies, as students are not encouraged to address their wants and needs beforehand, and are instead encouraged to react to a situation that is already occurring. While both policies typically address the fact that consent can be given and taken away at any time, the differences in the conditioning of students about how sex should be discussed, whether reactionary or preventatively, is significant. Not only could the policy change actual sexual assaults, but it could change reporting as well. For example, on “no means no” campuses, victims might not realize what happened to them is sexual assault and therefore do not report or seek help. This could bias against finding results.

The second grouping of institutional factors has to do with prevention. This include measures taken to ensure that sexual assault is being prevented on college campuses, including a Title IX education meeting and any literature given to the students about advice for preventing an assault.

As universities are required by law to have resources available to students about Title IX, many of them host a Title IX education meeting at the start of the year for students. At some universities, this is a required meeting for first year or transfer students to educate them on the operating definitions of that university for sexual assault and consent, and about the resources available to them as students. This education can be an extremely crucial point in the prevention process as many students simply do not know what they do not know. The education of what is legal and what is not, as well as how to handle difficult situations, can be extremely influential in affecting the calculus of the individual in situations of sexual encounters. If nothing else, universities are giving students a foundation of knowledge and understanding so that they may make informed decisions from that point forward. It is expected that at universities where this meeting is required, there would be lower rates of sexual assault because students would understand what is allowed and what is not. This could also potentially affect reporting. At schools with training programs, there might be more reporting because students are educated about sexual assaults. Again, with this it would be expected that, relative to schools without such programs, it would look like there are more sexual assaults because students are more inclined to report at such universities.

Title IX programs are singularly focused on prevention and rehabilitation. As a result, universities also, in their education process, give out advice to prevent sexual assault. The language used to give such advice can be consequential. This advice can be grouped into one of two categories: 1) victim centered language, and 2) perpetrator centered language. By “victim centered,” this means that the advice is geared toward victims and what they should and should not do to prevent assault. By “perpetrator centered,” it means that the advice is directed at those that would commit the crimes and tell them not to do so. Victim centered advice leaves room for students to blame victims for the crimes committed against them. For example, some of the literature might talk about dressing modestly, or not drinking too much when a student attends a party. This all implies that the victim has some sort of responsibility in the situation and that if a crime is committed against them, they could have done something different to prevent it. This language is damaging not only because it wrongfully blames the victim, but also because it allows the perpetrator to believe that they lack guilt and sole responsibility in any instance of sexual assault. This can not only affect how the perpetrator thinks after an assault, but also their calculus beforehand. For example, if a perpetrator is considering an assault, they might feel validated in doing so if the

victim has been drinking or is not dressed in what society would consider traditionally modest clothing simply because of the way in which that person's university has discussed prevention and who is to blame for any assault.

Victim centered language also hinders perpetrator knowledge. While placing blame on the victim and absolving the perpetrator from any real responsibility, it also hinders those who have been or would be abusers from learning the right and wrong of sexual assault. Additionally, this type of language can have an alarming effect on the rate at which people report sexual assault. For example, if a person has been a victim of sexual assault and happened to be drinking at the time of the assault, they might assume, based on the information given to them by their university, that it is their fault. As well as affecting their perception of themselves and their psychological well-being, they might not be compelled to report the assault if they think it is their fault. This could have an even more detrimental effect on the university because the university might assume that their Title IX program is effective because they have a low rate of sexual assault. However, what could really be happening is simply that no one is reporting their assault because of the victim-centered information the school is promoting.

Perpetrator centered advice focuses on the intentions of those that would commit the crime, offering them counselling services if they have certain urges, or directing them toward anger management meetings or Alcoholics Anonymous meetings if they have problems with control and substance abuse. This language reminds students that it is never the victims fault, and focuses on telling perpetrators not to commit a crime rather than placing the responsibility on victims. That is not to say that universities must only have perpetrator centered advice, it just means that they must have both victim and perpetrator centered advice.

As such, the hypotheses this paper will explore are:

H1: In the case of the operational definitions, if a university has a "yes means yes" policy versus a "no means no" policy of consent, there will be fewer instances of sexual assault.

H2: In the case of prevention and education, if a university has a mandatory Title IX education meeting, there will be a lower rate of sexual assault.

H3: If a university uses victim centered language as opposed to perpetrator centered language in discussing ways to prevent sexual assault, there will be higher rates of sexual assault.

This set of hypotheses all generally assert that the universities method of discussing and educating students about sexual assault is extremely influential in the lives of the student body as well as on the rates of sexual assault for that university.

4. Research Design

To test these hypotheses, an observational study will be conducted. To gather the data for the analysis, this paper relies on the Clery Report and the Title IX office's website for each university. The unit of analysis is the largest state institution in each state of the United States in the year 2014. The schools used in this study are available upon request. These schools were chosen because they are all federally funded and, as a result, must have a Title IX office, and because they are all beholden to their respective state for certain policies, namely the definition of consent. A list of each university used can be found in Appendix 1.

Each university is required by law to have a Title IX Coordinator and is also required to share a yearly report, called the Clery Report, in accordance with the Clery Act, about their fire and safety statistics from that year. The Clery Act, "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"⁶. As every university included in the study is a recipient of federal funding, they all have these reports readily available to the public. This document includes that campus's operational definition of consent and often includes any measures they take to ensure students' safety. To that end, Clery Reports define sexual assault as anything included in rape, statutory rape, incest, or fondling. There are also charts included in the report that state the rates of sexual assault by year and type of assault for the last three years for that institution. For any information not included in this document, the Title IX website of the university was used to code this data, as stated previously.

The number of sexual assaults in a year is compared to the number of students at each institution for that year, which produces a rate to compare institutions to one another. This is the dependent variable in the analysis. Sexual assault rates will include any rates found under fondling, rape, incest, and statutory rape as stated by each Clery Report. Within the Clery Report, and in accordance with Title IX guidelines, each school must report each of these statistics as a part of the sexual offenses data. Before 2014, school would report sexual assault crimes as either forcible or non-forcible sex offenses. Beginning in 2014, a new mandate passed that required all schools to furthermore report sex offenses into one of four specific categories (rape, fondling, incest, and statutory rape) and

no longer as either forcible and non-forcible. The Clery Report also separates data based on where the offense occurred. The distinctions are on campus, residence halls, off-campus, and public property. For many schools, they also include the total for all crimes committed either on or off campus. The number of sexual assaults included in the data set was the total number of sexual assaults committed on and off campus. Any data within the Clery Report that was included in the sex offenses data either on or off school property was included in the number of sexual assaults for that university. The Clery Report separates sex offenses and dating violence. Because there was no way to conclude what type of violence was committed in the dating violence category and because the Clery Report does not state whether or not these two things are mutually exclusive, all dating violence statistics have been omitted from this study. To determine the proportion of sexual assaults for each university, the reported student population for that given year was used. This figure was either found in the Clery Report for that given year, or on the university's website.

To retrieve data for whether an institution offers a Title IX education meeting, the Clery Report was consulted. Many of the schools in the study disclosed that said education meeting was a part of Freshman/Transfer Orientation. For some of these universities, it explicitly states in the report that this meeting and/or orientation was mandatory. For the others, this study referred to the university's orientation web page to see if orientation was mandatory and, if not, whether or not the specific sessions were mandatory. To code this variable, universities will either be coded as "yes" or "no" for whether or not the meeting is mandatory. Universities that have a mandatory Title IX education meeting, thus answering "yes" will receive a 1. Conversely universities that do not have a mandatory Title IX education meeting will receive a 0.

For data regarding the language used when describing sexual assault, the Clery Report and the Title IX office of each university were found to be most useful. In the Clery Report universities are required to disclose any programming available to students with regards to sexual assault prevention, among other things. From there this study searched the individual programs to determine whether or not they were victim or perpetrator focused. Additionally, this study searched each Title IX office to see if they had any tips for sexual assault prevention. Many did, and from there this study was able to determine what kind of language that university used. To code this variable, universities will be grouped as either using victim centered advice or perpetrator centered advice. Within those groups this study will compare which universities have above a certain percent of sexual assaults in that given year. If a university, at any point, mentioned advice directed at the perpetrator, they will receive a 1. If they fail to mention the perpetrator at all, they will receive a 0.

Through these sources, several variables are of interest to this study. The dependent variable is the rate of sexual assault at each institution. The independent variables are the definition of consent, the Title IX education meeting, and the prevention advice given out by each institution.

Each Clery Report defines several relevant terms for the statistics in the report, one of them being consent. Through reading each definition, this study determined into which of the two categories it fell. Consent will be coded as either "yes means yes" or "no means no." A university will receive a 1 for "yes means yes" and a 0 for "no means no." If a university does not supply a clear definition for consent, they will receive a 0. For this variable this study would like to compare which universities have a "no means no" definition of consent and whether or not their sexual assault rates are higher than those with a "yes means yes" definition of consent.

Table 1. Summary Statistics

| | |
|--------|-------|
| Mean | 17.52 |
| Median | 14.5 |
| Range | 75 |
| Min | 0 |
| Max | 75 |
| Sum | 876 |
| Count | 50 |

In general, the average number of sexual assaults for all universities in the study was 0.000606% of the population with a minimum of 0% and a maximum of 0.0025% of the student population.

As you can see in Table 1, the most sexual assaults at a university was 75 assaults. In fact, there were 8 universities with over 30 sexual assaults and 14 schools with over 20 sexual assaults. The purpose of the Title IX program as it functions in the university setting is to completely and entirely prevent sexual assaults on college campuses. The aim of Title IX is not to keep the rate of sexual assaults low, but to eradicate that statistic entirely. It is easy

to believe that the problem is insignificant when you see that the proportion of students affected is a mere 0.0303% of the population of all the universities in my study. This number, not even reaching 1% of the population of students in the study, is seemingly inconsequential. However, when you learn that the percentage you are looking at translates to 876 people who were raped, abused, and violated, it becomes a problem too significant to ignore. At the University of Iowa at the maximum of the data there were a total of 75 sexual assaults in a student body of 32,129. Yes, that is a small percentage of the population and for our statistical measures it is essentially indiscernible from zero, but if the goal is to have no students harmed, any number above zero still a non-negligible amount of students being affected by sexual assault. Substantively, these proportions are significant, regardless of their statistical merit.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Each Independent Variable

| | Consent | Meeting | Language |
|--|--|---------|----------|
| # of schools receiving a 1* | 39 | 21 | 18 |
| # of schools receiving a 0* | 11 | 29 | 32 |
| Average number of sexual assaults for schools receiving a 1* | 16 | 19 | 11 |
| Average number of sexual assaults for schools receiving a 0* | 22 | 17 | 21 |
| *Note: | All values rounded to the nearest whole number | | |

As you can see in Table 2, the average number of sexual assaults for universities with a “yes means yes” definition of consent was lower than those universities who used a “no means no” definition of consent. Similarly, the average number of sexual assaults for universities with “perpetrator centered” language was lower than for those universities that used only “victim centered” language for sexual assault prevention. Not only was it lower, but on average the number of sexual assaults was cut nearly in half for universities that used “perpetrator centered” language to help prevent sexual assaults. Interestingly, however, the average number of sexual assaults for universities who had a Title IX meeting was higher than for universities who did not have a required Title IX education meeting. While this seems shocking at first, logically, this follows suit. For example, if a university has a mandatory Title IX education meeting, we would expect that students understand what sexual assault is and understand what consent really means. While this might not lower the number of sexual assaults in a given year, students might have a better understanding of reporting procedures and the resources that are available to them as a victim. Therefore, we would expect a higher reporting rate for those universities.

This study was also interested specifically in the mean sexual assault ratio for both victim and perpetrator centered language. Of the 50 schools in my study, only 18 of them used any language that was directed at those would-be perpetrators.

Many of the researchers that came before me theorized that the rates of sexual assault came as a result of the presence of Greek life organizations and athletics on campus. To ensure that the results were the results of the variables of interest, this study controlled for both Greek life and athletics at each institution. That is to say that each institution in my study has both an athletics department and Greek life organizations. As a result, those two factors cannot be what are explaining the rates of sexual assault in my study.

5. Results

Below, the results of a multiple regression are presented, including the three variables of interest. The results in the study were more unique than expected.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Output

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Coefficients</i> | <i>Standard Error</i> | <i>P-value</i> | Confidence Intervals (95% confidence) | Confidence Intervals (90% confidence) |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Intercept | 0.000759 | 0.00016 | 0.00000205 | (0.000437, 0.001081) | (0.000491, 0.001027) |
| Consent | -0.0001 | 0.000179 | 0.565613 | (-0.00046, 0.000257) | (-0.0004, 0.000197) |
| Meeting | 0.00000526 | 0.00015 | 0.72694 | (-0.00025, 0.000345) | 9-0.0002, 0.000304) |
| Language | -0.00026 | 0.00015 | 0.086587 | (-0.00056, 0.00000391) | (-0.00051, -0.0000011) |

Above are the results of my multiple regression equation on my three independent variables, consent, language, and meeting, against my dependent variable, the rate of sexual assault. My coefficients for my consent and language variables were negative, as expected, however my meeting variable had a positive coefficient. Each of my three independent variables under the 95% confidence were not statistically significant.

The coefficients are the quantities of interest, as they indicate the size of the effects. For each negative coefficient, it is expected that as the coefficient moves from 0 to 1, there would be a negative effect in the rate of sexual assaults. For consent, as we move from “no means no” definitions to “yes means yes” definitions, we expect that the rate of sexual assaults will go down by 0.0001 percent. For the meeting variable, the coefficient was positive at 0.00000526 meaning that schools with meetings have slightly higher rates of reported sexual assault, contrary to H2. However, it is such a small value that the positive effect does not mean much for these results. For language, as we move from victim centered language to perpetrator centered language, the rate of sexual assault to go down by 0.00026 percent, consistent with H3.

The confidence intervals serve as a set of parameters that indicate how confident one can be in the coefficient estimates. The 95% confidence is the standard in research to measure statistical significance. For the consent variable, this study can be 95% confident that the results will fall between (-0.00046, 0.000257). For the language variable, this study can be 95% confident that the results will fall between (-0.00056, 0.00000391). For the meeting variable, this study can be 95% confident that the results will fall between (-0.00025, 0.000345). As you can see, each of the results contain zero in the confidence interval, meaning that the actual effect could be zero—that there is no effect shown. That is, the results are not statistically distinguishable from zero at the 95% level. In addition, all p-values are above 0.05. This study also estimated the 90% confidence intervals. The 90% confidence intervals for consent, language and meeting are (-0.0004, 0.000197), (-0.00051, -0.0000011), and (-0.0002, 0.000304) respectively. At this level of confidence, the language variable has a statistically significant effect. If the 90% confidence is considered, the result for the language variable becomes statistically significant with a p-value of 0.086587 because under the 90% confidence it would have to be less than or equal to 0.1 and the confidence interval at 90% does not include zero. As a result, for the language variable, we are able to reject the null hypothesis. Despite the fact that this does not achieve standard levels of significance, this study is comfortable operating within 90% confidence because my sample size is so small with only 50 schools in my study. This study is willing to accept more uncertainty in estimates for a more precise range.

This paper proposes a hard test of the proposed hypotheses. The variables of interest likely have an effect on assault rates, as argued, but they may also affect reporting of sexual assault in ways that bias against finding the hypothesized results. As such, the bias works against the theory, making this a conservative test. Thus, any results in the face of such bias would be very robust and telling. This is discussed in more detail in the Analysis section.

6. Analysis of Results

The null hypothesis of no effect could not be rejected for the three variables of interest at standard levels of confidence. At 90%, however, the language variable performed as expected. In some ways, these results are not surprising. One of the biggest hindrances to research on sexual assault is the non-reporting bias. Essentially, the

number of sexual assault crimes reported is only a portion of the number of sexual assault crimes actually committed in a single year. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, more than 90% of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report the assault. Many things can affect such a bias. For example, whether or not it is mandatory, whether or not a student feels as though the assault was their fault, or whether or not they knew the procedure for reporting for their university. Reporting a sexual assault crime to a university is discretionary on the part of a regular university students (i.e. those not employed by the university). Title IX does not require anyone other than university employees (students and non-students alike) to report any instance they hear that violates the student code of conduct regarding sexual assault. Students who are not beholden to such a mandate could either experience or hear of a sexual assault and not report without any university enforced consequences. As a result, there could be a large portion of sexual assaults that are not being reported by universities, simply because they are unaware that they have ever occurred. Similarly, if a student feels as though the assault is their fault, they might not be so inclined to report it to the university. This thought process can often be driven by the language a university uses when discussing sexual assault. If a university is singularly focused on victim centered prevention education, then victims might feel that it is their responsibility to prevent an assault and would therefore feel a pang of guilt if one occurred. For this statistic, however, this paper was able to determine statistical significance even with the non-reporting bias working against the data. The variables of interest in this study could very well affect the incentive to report. For example, if a student is not required to attend a meeting teaching them about sexual assault, consent, and the resources available to them, they might not know when they have been assaulted or how to report. Were these policies in place (required meetings and perpetrator centered language) the number of reports could increase because students know how and under what circumstances to report. Thus, this result is very robust.

So where does this data leave us? While Title IX offers mandates for the conduct of universities, many of what it offers is an outline from which universities construct their own programs. One of these arenas in which the university is given more autonomy is in the prevention language used. As a result, from the data that has been collected, a step toward a solution to the sexual assault problem on college campuses is one that is within the capabilities of each university. Nearly twice as many universities in my study used victim centered language in their prevention advice than did schools that used some form of perpetrator advice. Given the results collected, this discrepancy is startling. Title IX does not mandate how universities choose to educate their students about sexual assault. The only definition that they enforce is that of consent, which now cannot definitively say has an effect on the rate of sexual assault. However, institutions are fully autonomous in their ability to decide what language they use when discussing sexual assault. Universities are allowed to develop prevention programs at their will, as this is not regulated by Title IX. Many of the issues seen in their prevention education came in the fact that every single program offered to students for sexual assault prevention was victim-centric. Countless seminars on how to maintain a buddy system, numerous information sessions on watching your drinks and dressing appropriately, and even some self-defense classes. While all of these programs are wonderful, and in many cases are necessary, if they are only the programs offered by a university they create an environment conducive to further violence, as supported by the results. It is the recommendation from this study that universities strongly consider the impact of only using victim centered language, and that they add programs that are created solely for the purpose of educating people on how not to commit a sexual assault crime. This could come in the form of a seminar that teaches young men, as we know that men are perpetrators of 96% of sexual assault crimes⁵, how to channel their anger differently, or how to learn to communicate their desires in a safe and productive way in a sexual relationship.

7. Conclusion

College campuses are meant to be a haven for students during their four years of undergraduate study where they can learn, grow, and challenge themselves both academically and in their extracurricular activities. College should never be a place where one has to question their safety or their worth, particularly not at the hands of the university. Unfortunately, this is the case for too many university students.

This study endeavored to test the relationship between institutional factors and the rate of sexual assaults by comparing definitions of consent, Title IX education meetings, and language used by an institution when describing sexual assault. To do so, a regression was run on this data, consisting of the fifty largest state institutions in the United States in the year 2014. Through this research it was concluded that the Title IX meeting and the definition of consent have no statistically significant relationship with the rate of sexual assault. However, a statistically significant result was found, under the 90% confidence, with the language variable.

What does this result really mean in practice? What do we do with this information? It is proposed that school policy change regarding the language used in describing sexual assault. According to the results it is expected that the rate of sexual assaults will go down if universities use perpetrator centered language, as opposed to only victim centered language. As a result, it is proposed that universities create programs geared towards would-be

perpetrators as well as would-be victims. Programs of this nature could include forums on healthy relationship practices to discuss what sex looks like in a healthy and consensual relationship, aggression redirection seminars to help those would-be perpetrators with anger issues that negatively impact their sexual relationships, male intervention seminars to teach men how to intervene and become a part of the solution instead of the problem, substance abuse therapy for those would-be perpetrators whose behavior is intensified by the use of illicit or illegal substances, and/or therapy groups for those who truly have predatory behaviors.

For future research, two aspects of this study could be changed. First, more universities could be included. It was extremely difficult to find any conclusive results given the small sample size of my study. This study should be expanded to include every state institution in the United States. Secondly, private institutions should also be considered. This was difficult in this study for comparison because the definition of consent was included which is dictated by the state for each institution, whereas private institutions do not have that same obligations to adhere to state policies on their definitions of consent.

As Vice President Joe Biden said, “we must and we can change the culture so no abused woman or man ever feel they have to ask themselves, ‘what did I do?’” We cannot and we must not sit idly by and continue to fail students in the university setting by not doing everything in our power to protect them from sexual assault. If there is any chance that any action we take can improve the life of even one university student, we must take that action.

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