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Sexual Assault Prevention on College Campuses, using Community Based Participatory Research Strategies to Craft a Creative Response

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SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES, USING COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY
RESEARCH STRATEGIES TO CRAFT A CREATIVE RESPONSE

Sexual Assault Prevention on College Campuses, using Community Based Participatory
Research Strategies to Craft a Creative Response

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Honors College Thesis

Bowling Green State University

Abstract

Sexual assault prevention and education programs have been working to develop successful ways to decrease sexual assault for almost to decades. Research has shown that despite efforts there has yet to be a program that effects statistics regarding campus sexual assault. This essay addresses several issues that explain why prevention programs have fallen short. It includes the study of victim blaming, the college party narrative, stranger rape, and bystander intervention. Examples from first hand reports of sexual assault and the study of BGSU prevention programs are used. The essay also addresses how our culture plays a role in sexual assault, and why there is a strong prevalence on college campuses. As a response to this research and essay, I have written poems. Each poem tackles an idea, images, or language, from the research. I use poetry as a response in hope of creating pathos, and to make a stronger connection between the research and the audience.

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It has been two decades since administrations have acknowledged the epidemic of sexual assault within their campus communities. In 1992, Congress enacted the Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights, a law which affords certain basic rights to students in cases of sexual assault (Wooten & Mitchell, 2015, p. 97). More recently, in March of 2013 Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act) was passed into law. The goal of this act was to help colleges and universities to educate, to respond to, and to prevent multiple forms of sexual violence (Wooten & Mitchell, 2015, p. 98). These legislations made a huge step in admitting a crisis, and beginning a wave of prevention programs throughout the country. The truth that we face now is that despite research, activism, and a plethora of programs, there is little evidence that female students are less at risk for sexual assault. By looking at prevention programs currently used on college campuses we can address many of the reasons why they are not working.

As universities and programs look to prevent sexual assault, an important place to start is asking why sexual assault is so common. In 1985, Mary Koss conducted an intensive social science research that that was a reality check to many people. Her and her research team found that one in five women had been victims of attempted or completed rape during their college career. Although sometimes disputed by people who refuse to identify the issue as an epidemic, this statistic has been proven and repeated many times since then. Much more recently, the University of Texas began the most comprehensive study on sexual assault that came up with an alarming statistic. At the University of Texas at Austin it was found that one in ten females had reported being raped during their college careers. In the book, *Unsafe in the ivory tower: The sexual victimization of college women*, authors write that "the risk of female students' victimization is ingrained in the very fabric of normal college life," (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen,

2009, p. 2). Normal college life referring to the common settings in which males and females are not just interacting but forming both casual and intimate relationships. This idea comes from the knowledge that crime comes from opportunity, and enforces a belief that given the chance, men will always be sexual assault violators. Other researchers believe that the prevalent number of students sexually assaulted is to blame on a culture that has always accepted it and a patriarchal state. In *Preventing sexual violence: Interdisciplinary approaches to overcoming a rape culture*, the first chapter addresses how socio-cultural norms are the underlying causes for the continuous victimization of young women. Researchers within this book suggest that we must start by questioning prevailing assumptions about masculinity and rethinking what it means to be a man.

While we continue to study underlying factors of the epidemic of sexual assault we also understand why some of the prevention programs fall short. Prevention programs throughout colleges, including BGSU, have focused on risk management. Risk management is education surrounding the ways in which students can decrease their chances of being sexually assaulted. Risk reduction includes not walking by oneself at night, minimizing ones drinking, watching over one's alcoholic beverage, and avoid putting oneself in an isolated location. Although this type of prevention is aimed at protecting future victims, it creates several issues. The first is that when programs communicate to students how to not be a victim, they are stating, "Not me, them." There is no problem fixed, but when one victim avoids being assaulted, another is put in their place. We cannot expect programs like this to work, because they are not addressing the issue but transferring the attack to another victim.

Another severe consequence of this type of prevention is that it supports victim blaming. In *Campus Sexual Assault; College Women Respond*, women who have been assaulted tell their stories, and the aftermath of what happened. On page twenty two the story of a girl who walked

home with a dormmate, whom she knew from high school, is told. She went with him to his room because he was intoxicated and she thought he might need help, he then sexually assaulted her in his room. The woman, referred to as Alice in the telling, did not report the incident. She believed that because she did not behave in the manner that was told to her by risk management programs, then she would be blamed for the assault. This can also put guilt onto the victim, in addition to any other psychological results from the attack. Risk management is prevention that surrounds the belief that victims can avoid being sexual assaulted. Even if this were true, it puts the responsibility on the victim, when it should be on the assailant.

Another core issue with risk management prevention is that it completely misunderstands campus sexual assault. Most colleges are focusing on stranger rape, rather than acquaintance rape (Burnett, et al. 2009.) Through Koss's research we also learned who is committing sexual. According to the victims who reported, 35.5% of completed rape was done by a classmate, and 43.5% of attempted rapes. Friends were the second most common perpetrators of rape and attempted rape, and ranking third is boyfriend/ex boyfriends. What this shows us is that often time risk management is making a moot point. By telling females not to walk alone at night, we might be helping them avoiding the "dark alley" assaulter, but we know that this is narrative is not realistic to most attacks.

The "dark alley" narrative along with others are commonly presented in sexual assault education programs. Often times these narratives produce consequences First, is the previously mentioned "dark alley," narrative. This is the image of an attack that happens at night, when one is in an isolated area, and the perpetrator is a stranger. This image encourages the idea that any other kind of rape, is not "real rape." As shown in *Campus Sexual Assault; College Women Respond*, this image tends scare victims into not reporting rape. Many victims think that they

will not be believed, or because their assault does not fit into this narrative, then it was not rape. The second harmful narrative that is produced, is the college party narrative. College drinking culture might give assault perpetrators opportunity to commit sexual assault, but the idea that is the reason is incredibly damaging. Although it is true that alcohol and drug use has been linked to sexual assault, it is because a perpetrator is more likely to become aggressive after using drugs or alcohol (Germain, 2016, p.7). By telling females that they can avoid being sexually assaulted by taking themselves out of situations, such as parties, they are being told that if they do get assaulted in that type of situation, it is their fault. Through first hand stories of campus sexual assault we see that many victims are not willing to report the crime because they fear the interrogation that might come afterwards. Victims worry that they will be asked if they are drinking, or why they were at a party, or what they might have been wearing. This college party narrative not only influences the likelihood of a victim reporting, but it can make victims feel guilty for what happened to them.

Another issue with the party scene narrative is that, in many cases, it produces one image of an assaulter. An example of this was seen at the presentation of “Sex Signals,” a prevention program that came to BGSU on October 18, 2016. The program was defined as an “unorthodox, humor-facilitated approach to examining our culture, sex, and the core issue of bystander intervention.” This program was two young adults, one female, and one male, who acted out skits with the audience of college students. These skits attempted to address sexual assault, many misconceptions students might have about sexual assault, and what they could do to prevent sexual assault from happening. Within this skit there were two images of an assaulter that the audience saw. One was of a stereotypical “douchebag” at a frat party who was trying to take advantage of a freshman by trying to get her too drink too much. The other image was a male at

a gym that was making bets with his friends, about hitting on a girl. These images are things we often see in sexual assault prevention programs. What happens is that it makes it seem that there are only certain types of men that commit sexual assault. Which is not only harmful to men that are portrayed as assaults, but also the victim. When there is no other image presented besides one type of assaulter, it leads victims to question the believability of their assault, and question whether it was an assault or not. It is clear that there is not one type of perpetrator, often is a friend, or someone that the victim trusted.

Recently, a new program called bystander intervention has been implemented at many universities. The main goal of bystander intervention is to stop sexual assault before it happens (Gary et al. 2016.) These programs asks students to commit actions that could stop the act of sexual assault. A scenario in which someone might intervene would be when they seem someone taking another person home, when that person is notably intoxicated. Another scenario might be when witnesses see an assaultor inappropriately touching a victim without consent. Bystanders are taught how to stop the perpetrator by saying several different phrases, and intervening before something more serious happens. In a study done do show behavior change in male college Sophomores, it was found that a rape prevention program was successful in motivating men to intervene as bystanders (Foubert et al, 2010). Although this seems to be promising because it changes the beliefs of males and females regarding their ability to stop sexual assault, there is little research showing that it has been effective. Similar to risk reduction programs, bystander intervention does work to avoid the kind of sexual assault that is happening on college campuses. There is also proven to be few situations in which a bystander is able to see something happening and say something. Because a large percentage of victims know their assaulter, it makes it less likely that someone would step in. One of the most important things that bystander intervention

must do is teach people that even if they are unsure they should be confident in stepping between them. In many situations there is no one around to stop what is happening. It seems that right now, bystander intervention is the most promising prevention program that has been enacted, although it still has problems.

Within the stories from Germain (2016), females are assaulted by friends, classmates, sometimes in their own dorm rooms. This is the problem with bystander intervention, although it might be successful in some scenarios that happen in public, it does not address the issue at the start. Gray et al. identifies the program as hopeful, but research shows that the results are ultimately unclear (2016). Even if someone truly believes they would intervene if they see a situation of sexual violence, there is a disconnect between ones attitudes and behaviors (Henry & Powell, 2014, p.171). It is hard to determine which attitudes link to which behaviors, for whom and for what circumstances.

BGSU has shown its dedication through the It's On Us campaign. It has brought programs to the schools such as the "Sex Signals" program, and often has event on campus surrounding the discussion of sexual assault. The university has a peer education program in which students leaders address organizations about certain topics, one being sexual assault. Besides issues discussed previously, another reason why these programs fall short is as easy as the fact that most students will only see them once or twice. Universities cannot expect students and communities to change behaviors that have taken lives to develop. It is suggested that yearlong programs be put into place, and while also including high intensity periodic programs (Paludi, 2016). This would mean students would repeatedly experience programs, not only educating them, but also showing victims that this issue matters.

One problem that programs have been working to overcome is the lack of male interest in them. In a study done to find why males are uninterested in programs, an alarming finding came to the surface. Rich et al found that not only were men uninterested, they did not understand the relevance to their own lives (2010). The researchers believe that programs must show males that prevention is not a waste of their time, and they also have to debunk commonly believed rape myths. Although disheartening, this fact can help prevention programs identify reasons they are not reaching men and work to help men understand their importance in prevention.

In the 1990's there were several laws put into place to protect the victims of sexual assault on college campuses. Universities are required to notify victims or counseling services and must inform survivors of their options with law enforcement (Wooten, 2016, p. 97). These laws are still in place, but now federal laws have been put into place that require universities to address sexual assault through prevention programs and/or education. Although maybe not progressing as fast as we need, it is clear that prevention programs are developing and working towards improvement. Prevention programs need to make an effort to address the issues of sexual assault that are commonly ignored, such as acquaintance rape. They need to steer away from victim blaming strategies, and address the problems where they start without blaming them on college party culture. It is awful to think that the current state of prevention programs is doing more harm than good, but this is a realistic issue that we are facing. This essay shows the need for aggressive improvement and further study.

Poetry as a Response

One of the requirements of the Honors Project is to be interdisciplinary. This means that it must make use of the bodies of knowledge and methodologies of two different fields. Within my essay I made use of the methodologies I have learned through my Communication degree. My second degree is Creative Writing, at first I thought that this might be hard to combine with that I have learned in the field of Communication. But by choosing the subject of sexual assault, I have been able to realize how these two fields could give me the ability to address an issue with both research and art. Through research I have been able to identify issues with sexual assault prevention programs, issues that are clearly stated and understandable. Through poetry I have been able to explore the images and emotions of sexual assault while using the skills I have developed in the BFA program. Not only does this prove to be an interdisciplinary project, but it also addresses sexual assault in an uncommon way. It is hoped that through poetry that the audience can understand the real impact of unsuccessful sexual assault prevention programs.

The poems are not only general images of sexual assault, but they address images that I have found in my research. The first poem, *Measuring Cups*, presents the repeating statistic of one in five college females who are sexually assaulted. The image of a measuring cup, which often has fractions on it, is meant to represent the statistic. It also contains images of what this might mean to become a statistic and how harmful that feels.

The poem *Risk Reduction* addressing what risk reduction looks like in the mind of a lot of people. It brings up the concept that when we teach students not to get raped, we are not changing statistics, but changing the victim. The poem also addresses how by telling students to watch their drinks and avoid walking alone, we are placing the responsibility on them, instead of

the perpetrator. This idea is heavily shown in the second stanza when I refer to “walking without the dark.”

The third poem that I included is, *Showers*. I thought that this poem was important because while reading *Campus sexual assault: College women respond* there was constantly an image of victims showering after their assault. They say that this is the first thing that they wanted to do, rid themselves from what happened to them. This causes some issues because for a rape kit, doctors need as much evidence as possible so they suggest not to shower. I hoped to convey the feelings of having this type of evidence on your body. Rape kits search for pubic hairs and bodily fluids, anything that could prove who the assailant was. This image of having unwanted evidence on the victim’s body is important when we talk about sexual assault. It helps us understand why a shower is often the first thing a person does after being assaulted. They want to have some sort of control back over their body, and they want it to be their own again. The poem also suggests that this evidence left behind is often not enough. Even when it is proven that an assaulter was there, and had sex with the victim, it must also be proven that the sex was not consensual. I wanted this poem to show how hopeless this process can feel.

The poem *Consent* is straightforward about what consent is, and how it is often perceived differently, even when it shouldn’t be. People believe that alcohol blurs the lines of consent, but one cannot give consent if they are under the influence of alcohol this refers to the line, “alcohol washes the chances away.” The poem also makes comments about ivory towers, referring to college campuses, and bystander intervention.

The last poem, *Change of Fault* is different than the rest of the poems. My word, are written over a page out of the book *A better safe than sorry book: A family guide for sexual assault prevention*. This book addresses how parents should talk about sexual assault to their

children. It highlights the fact that it is never the child's fault. This page is important because it addresses how even if the child cannot say no, it is not the child's fault. My words, written in different font address at what age we start to blame victims for what happens to them. By putting these words side by side it exemplifies the difference in how we handle sexual assault when the victim is a child, and when the victim is a college student. We are more likely to ask what someone is wearing, who what they were drinking, before we tell them that it wasn't their fault.

Measuring Cups

Prayers, numbers, knees, curls, curves.
Fractions in a kitchen cupboard
a women's worth. You scored
my body with strokes of love.
They appeared on the surface as blooms of purple.
Too rough I pleaded with you.
Not rough enough I told myself,
wanting you to leave me unrecognizable.

Sometimes when I touch myself,
I still smell like you. I am waiting
for the day that I don't have to
wash you off like bad news.
Waiting for the day that my skin
doesn't remind me of yours.
Poured out, taken apart,
a portion of a person. All of
us, blended and broken.
To make one fifth.

Risk Reduction

I sit in a cold chair,
repetition of "risk reduction"
overflows within the room.

I hear, "not me, but the other girl."
I may not become a statistic,
this does not mean the numbers change.

Walk without the dark,
drink with your eyes,
never be alone.

Until you are,
until you didn't listen. Until
it is your fault

and responsibly.

Showers

Stories start with a shower.
A need to clean oneself, get rid of what was left behind.
Foreign objects – that which does not belong.
That which was never supposed to be there.
That which did not ask permission.

Stories start with a shower,
the one thing we were told not to do.
They said showers washed away the
evidence, the proof,
which was still not enough.

Stories never end with a shower.
They end with questions, pricks, prods, protocols.
Cases in which the victim is the evidence
and the evidence is still
not enough.

Consent

A definition – easy.
For those who have had it
taken away.

Dark alleys don't allow it,
bedroom foreplay blurs it,
unsafe ivory towers protect it.

Alcohol washes it
away. Moans
and nods do not give it.

A Change of Fault

At what age do we stop telling victims that it is not their fault?

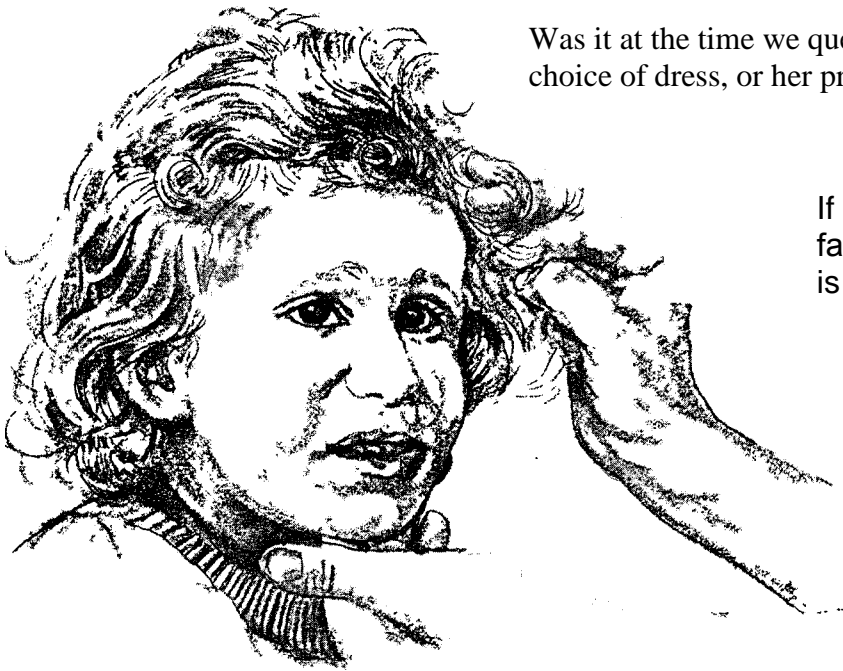
The really bad thing is that sometimes even when you say "NO!" a grown person might force you to do something you don't want to do.

Was it at the time we questioned her blood alcohol level, her choice of dress, or her previous nights.

If this happens, it is NEVER your fault, even if you can't say "NO." It is always the grownups fault.

The difference between nineteen and eight isn't years but transfer of guilt.

Is it the formation of our grown bodies that creates justification for them to be violated?



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