

## Sexual Assault on the College Campus

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A college campus is a very unique place. There is a flow of independence throughout the student body that is both terrifying and spectacular at the same time. It is spectacular because of the growth of knowledge and an ability to act on it, terrifying because sexual assault is one area of knowledge that has now engrained itself in my brain. Sexual assault can be found anywhere, yet when studying a college campus, the rates of attempted or completed sexual assault, one in four students, rank much higher than in other settings (Foubert, Tatum & Godin, 2010). To grasp students' ideas and knowledge base per sexual assault issues on college campuses, I circulated a small journal around campus where I prompted students to anonymously respond to scripted passages on or about incidences of sexual violence. It is important for those who read this piece to gain knowledge from the personal words of students. These voices, presented as a progressive narrative, follow:

### *One in Four: Rape and Sexual Assault on Campus*

*One in four is such an alarming statistic! That means in every one of my classes there are going to be women who have dealt with sexual assault. I cannot imagine dealing with this issue in such a fishbowl environment, having to face your attacker, having to tell so many people...*

*This ratio is very alarming. There needs to be more that's done to help women, or anyone, ... on a college campus avoid these horrible situations...I think that violence against women does not get the attention that is needed. Why are we not in crisis mode about this...*

*If this is the case, while males are the majority of these assailants on women, then how are these men being so ignorant...*

*Many students are also currently, if not in the process of moving off of campus. Yes many sexual assaults occur on campus, but students under age and of age, go off campus to drink and lose control of what they want etc. → Why don't we consider off campus where many horrible things occur as well...*

*My friend Dan met a guy and took him home because they were having fun and things seemed normal. While making out this*

acquaintance pulled out a gun. Dan lied [sic] there in fear and was raped. Though not "forcefully" he was raped. He is waiting to find out if he got AIDS (rapist didn't wear a condom). I am terrified. This is my best friend....

Numerous women on this campus feel as if they have been raped and/or sexually assaulted but refuse to do anything because they believe it's their fault for being so drunk....

Rape is perpetuated as something accepted that happens to everyone all the time and everyone should just deal with it. It is seen as something men are supposed to do and women need to guard against and nothing needs to be done about it....

I have followed this rape cycle my entire adolescent/adult life. I thought I was smart to be preventative/cautious as a woman until I was raped, by my friend who I knew for years. Thankfully, with the help of God in my life, I forgave him and myself and restored that piece of myself. In a way that experience patted my career choice as I will counsel men/women (victims) and offenders as a mental health counselor. It's critical to be aware that most rapes do not occur behind the bushes by a stranger or that women are always the targets. It's also of critical importance to know that forgiveness heals all wounds in time....

I don't think a mini shirt is what causes rape. Generally, how the girl is acting while wearing the mini skirt will cause rape. Although these indicators of rape seem accurate, anyone can be raped....

I think that sexual assault is influenced by what people wear because people still wonder what a woman was wearing if/when she was assaulted. I think it's a little too brash to say how a girl was acting caused rape because you can get assaulted at any time doing anything or nothing. It's important to know that rape is apart of sexual assault, but assault can mean other things as well and is not just encompassed by being raped....

The only thing that causes rape are rapists. Not how the victim's acts. Not what the victim wears. Not what the victim does or does not do. The person responsible for the rape is the rapist, but quiet often that's not where the responsibility is placed....

Scared, embarrassed, threatened, shammed, don't think they'll be believed....

A lot of victims blame themselves. It is easier to put things on me, instead of on someone else that now scares the shit out of you. You know? This makes sense. If I was at fault, I can punish myself and move on...I wouldn't want to give a lot of that trusted power to someone....

If most victims know the person that raped them, they may not want to report the case. My friend was raped by her family friend that babysat her, this has caused a huge impact on her love and

*relationship life today, but her family does not know, and she never reported the continuous rapes while he babysat her...  
The fact that a rapist is someone you know makes me not want male friends just because they could think my friendship means more.  
Then having that mis-communication turn into rape...  
I am fearful of being friends with men. I am a rape victim and I was sexually assaulted by a man I was friends with. I was only 16 years old. The trauma of being raped is still with me today that I constantly find myself straying from my male counter parts. I find that many of my male friends have crushes on me or find me physically attractive. I am usually with that being said, I am constantly afraid of them trying to get physical without my validation. Rape has caused me to not trust men, especially the ones I know very well...A woman should be able to wear whatever she wants without having to worry about being judged by men, therefore sexual assault is definitely not justified by revealing clothing.*

### **Rape and Sexual Assault in Context**

Research tells us one out of four college women are sexually assaulted on college campuses (Office on Violence Against Women, 2012). Sexual assault can impact anyone; this is not a women-only phenomenon. Men may be sexually assaulted as well, there are just lower statistics reported for it. Variables associated with college-aged rape and sexual assault are many.

With a newfound sense of independence, college freshmen have a vast amount of new resources available to them. One of these is alcohol, which can play a large socialization role as groups of students acclimate themselves to campus life. Sadly, violence, and sexual assault correlate with alcohol use. Researchers have begun to study the connection between the use of alcohol and incidences of sexual assault (Abbey, 2002). Campus culture can normalize sexual assault with behaviors, language, and the active interaction between coed groups that hides sexual transgressions. Jokes and the way teens talk can bring a victimizing nature towards women, which reinforces rape culture.

There are multiple triggers embedded into our society at large, particularly in media, which reproduce rape behaviors. Magazine covers broadcasting terms like “sex sells” along with provocative, sexualized images of women, are prevalent to supermarket checkout aisles. Are these images of women dressed in scantily clad clothing empowering, or does the media’s use of sexualized images encourage sexual assault and pornographic objectification?

With the prevalence of sexual assault many women unconsciously navigate their lives dictated by a “rape schedule,” which is the idea that women consciously or unconsciously do things throughout their day in accordance with their beliefs and ideas of when and how rape occurs (Yin, 2011). Holding your keys between your fingers in defense while walking to your car at night is an example of navigating your movements with rape in mind. Rape culture spawns beliefs and stereotypes about rape behaviors and causes. Among these ideas is the act of “victim blaming”, a phrase that explains the act of taking ridicule and blame off of the accused or perpetrator and in turn placing it back on the victim (M., 2010). A person seeking to reason why a rape has happened to a loved one may ask the victim what she/he was doing to cause the rape. Was the victim drinking or dressed promiscuously?

No one should be sexually assaulted, but rape can happen to anyone whether single, married, lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans identified. In heterosexual relationships until the 1970s, a woman could not accuse her husband of sexual assault because it was seen as part of a wifely duty to have sex with her husband (Mahoney & Williams, n.d.). However, no matter what relationship position you are in, your body is yours alone with which to decide with whom you have sex.

Sexual assault is the most under reported crime (Office on Violence Against Women). A well-known case is that of Jeanne Clery, a college freshman raped and murdered in her bed at

Lehigh University in 1986. Her parents later uncovered that the university had failed to report 38 other violent crimes that had occurred on campus, crimes that would have restricted their daughter from attending the university. Due to their efforts, the Clery Act was passed in 1990. The Act mandates all federally funded college campuses to compile all crimes that had occurred in that year by October 1<sup>st</sup> of every year. The reports must be visible to anyone seeking the information (University Police, 2011). The College at Brockport's report can be found directly on the campus safety webpage, but the reporting numbers are very low. If one in four college women are affected by sexual assault, the numbers do not add up. In the last three years, Brockport reported four, two, and three assaults respectively each year (University Police, p. 18).

Survivors of sexual assault may choose one of many reasons not to report what has happened to them. Some perpetrators threaten their victim saying either their family or the victim will be hurt if they tell anyone what has happened. Others may fear that friends of the accused may re-victimize the individual through comments or actions in retaliation for what their friend is being accused of. Another cruel fact is the perpetrator may be a member of the victim's family, someone they're supposed to be able to trust and love (RAINN, 2009).

Rape myths, as stereotypes or untrue reasoning about rape, reinforce rape culture by contributing to low rates of victims reporting rape and by perpetuating violence through media and language that reinforces rape behaviors. These widespread false beliefs about rape tally up to walls survivors have to break down to continue with their lives (Smith, 2010). One specific rape myth is that a rapist is a stranger who jumps out from the bushes as you pass by at night. In actuality, acquaintance rape, where most victims know the perpetrator, is a far more common rape phenomenon.

On a college campus there could be a multitude of things students fear. Sexual assault is one I think students should be educated on more frequently. Despite a good amount of knowledge at Brockport, there appears to be a lack of awareness about rape across the campus. In personal trainings and conversations with people about my internship work with campus sexual assault prevention, most are surprised that rape could be happening here at Brockport. For example, I felt a role reversal when talking with my teacher about presenting on this topic at Scholars Day. She asked whether it was really necessary for me to be addressing sexual assault on this campus as part of the work I was performing in my internship. She didn't think it was something that was happening here. For these reasons, rape and sexual assault should continue to be addressed and educated campus wide.

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