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SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON OUR CAMPUS:
UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS THAT PREVENT UNDERGRADUATE PENN
STATE STUDENTS FROM ACCESSING SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

In 2008, 20 Penn State students publicly reported being sexually assaulted. As the most underreported violent crime in the United States, this number accounts for only a small proportion of those that occur as it is estimated that fewer than five percent of sexual assaults are ever reported. While studies have correlated supportive resources with positive coping, many victims do not seek help. Penn State undergraduates were asked to share their perspectives of sexual violence and the accessibility of supportive resources in a questionnaire. Some common themes that arose in participant responses included the persistence of rape myths, particularly the misconception that acquaintance rape is not real rape, the propensity to victim blame, the tendency to minimize sexual violence encounters, and the lack of knowledge regarding supportive resources. The findings of this study indicate a need for greater education on sexual violence and supportive resources. Two specific recommendations are proposed: (1) mandating completion of the Division of Student Affairs Sexual Assault web module and (2) restructuring the student organization index to make it easier to find student groups that address sexual violence.

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Chapter 1

A Problem on Our Campus

One in three women globally.¹

One in four college women in the United States.²

These numbers are not only remarkably high but also incredibly frightening when we consider that they refer to the number of women who are sexually victimized in their lifetimes.

Sexual violence can take many forms and legal definitions vary among states and countries, but the effects on victims are shared: as criminal acts of violence, these encounters have harmful and lasting physical and psychological ramifications.

Even though a third of the world's female population will directly experience sexual victimization and many more men and women will be indirectly affected by it, this issue is still largely marginalized, if not completely ignored (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). The silence surrounding sexual violence in societies all across the globe allows for the perpetuation of this problem and the re-victimization of victims, who are consequently blamed for the criminal actions of their perpetrators. The societal stigma—the shame, humiliation, and fear that victims feel after being physically and emotionally violated—only prevents them from accessing important supportive resources. Such resources can empower victims and help them through the coping process; for some, they are life-saving.

¹ United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2003.

² Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000.

Our Campus

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park campus is located in State College, Pennsylvania, which The Congressional Quarterly recently ranked as the safest metropolitan area in the United States (Morgan & Morgan, 2009).³ Despite this ranking, Penn State is not exempt from sexual violence. In 2008, 20 Penn State students publicly reported being sexually assaulted—and this number accounts for only a small proportion of those that are believed to occur (The Pennsylvania State University, 2009). As the most underreported violent crime in the United States, it is estimated that fewer than five percent of sexual assaults are ever publicly reported (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999). An influential and widely-cited study on “The Sexual Victimization of College Women” sampled almost 4,500 female college students and reported a victimization rate of 35.3 per 1,000 female students (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). At Penn State, which houses an undergraduate population of almost 35,000 students (The Pennsylvania State University, 2010), this statistic translates to *over 1,200 sexual assaults each year*.

Yet, the greater societal stigma actively influences the discourse on this topic at Penn State. While these 20 students reported sexual assaults and sought help and available resources, many more did not. Many students do not publicly report these crimes due to fear of backlash from family, friends, community members, and the perpetrator(s) (Flowers, 2009). Given our culture of victim blaming, in which victims of

³ In this thesis, all mentions of Penn State will refer exclusively to the University Park campus.

sexual violence are held responsible for the crimes committed against them, this fear is understandable. Our unawareness of the dynamics of sexual violence and our unwillingness to engage in constructive conversations in regards to this issue is preventing victims from accessing vital resources. We cannot begin to address the problem—to end these violent crimes and to ensure that those affected by this issue access the help they need—unless we engage in honest dialogue about the realities of sexual violence on our campus and make a conscious effort to remove the barriers that deter victims from accessing supportive resources.

Penn State officials have worked hard to make many services available to victims of sexual violence. For instance, the Center for Women Students (CWS) distributes Resource Cards, pocket-sized, laminated cards containing the telephone numbers of local and national supportive resources, to all incoming students and to all students living on-campus.⁴ Furthermore, the staff at the CWS provides emotional and academic support to victims, helping students obtain medical withdrawals after experiencing assault. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), a service of the University Health Center, offers all students, including those victimized by sexual violence, 10 free and confidential counseling sessions with certified counselors. Off-campus, the Centre County Women's Resource Center (CCWRC), though not directly affiliated with the university, serves as the local rape and sexual assault crisis center, offering 24-hour hotline services, counseling, group support sessions, legal advocacy, accompaniment by an advocate during rape examinations, and a shelter. All of these services are free and confidential.

⁴ See Appendix C for a copy of the Resource Card.

But what good are these resources if they are not actively used by students? With only 20 students reporting sexual assaults in 2008 on a campus of almost 35,000 undergraduates, the unfortunate reality is that many more rapes and sexual assaults are happening but are not being reported. Consequently, many victims are not accessing the help that they need in order to cope positively with their experiences.

We, as members of the Penn State community, have a responsibility and an obligation to ensure that our peers feel comfortable, safe, and secure not just on our campus but also in accessing these resources. This responsibility begins with a careful assessment of this problem and the barriers that deter undergraduates from accessing supportive resources. Furthermore, it requires a proposal of recommendations to increase the availability, accessibility, and scope of supportive resources on our campus.

In order to collect student input, 323 Penn State undergraduates were asked to share their perspectives of sexual violence and the accessibility of supportive resources in a questionnaire. The primary objective of this research study was to assess and to evaluate student viewpoints on the aforementioned topics and to use their suggestions to propose recommendations to Penn State administrators that would improve the accessibility of supportive resources.

The Language of Sexual Violence

Before entering into a discussion of the effects of sexual violence both on our campus and the barriers that prevent undergraduate students from accessing supportive

resources, it is first necessary to define and to make distinctions between some key terms, such as sexual assault, rape, and sexual abuse, which serve as the backbone of this paper. Furthermore, because of the misperceptions regarding many of these terms and the controversy in the usage of others, such as victim versus survivor, there is also a need to designate definitions in order to establish and to ensure a common framework for discussion.

It is important to note that legal definitions vary from state to state; consequently, when applicable, Pennsylvania law will be referenced and supplemented with Penn State university policies.

Victim vs. Survivor

While both of these terms refer to an individual who has experienced a form of sexual violence, they have very different connotations, and there is considerable debate regarding their usage. In this thesis, I will refer to those who have experienced sexual violence as “victims” instead of “survivors” as the latter tends to be a personal term used by some to indicate their coping progress. Since the focus of this thesis is on the effects of sexual violence on individuals and the importance of supportive resources in the coping process as opposed to an individual’s manner of dealing with the issue, “victim” was deemed to be a more appropriate term.

Perpetrator

This term will refer to the individual who instigated and is otherwise responsible for an incident of sexual violence; “perpetrator,” “offender,” and “attacker” will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

Crime

While a crime generally refers to an act that has been found to be against an established set of laws in a judicial system, all incidents of sexual violence will be regarded as crimes regardless of their legal status. It is necessary that the term be used in this manner because a fundamental principle central to this thesis is the belief that all acts of sexual violence are inherently crimes. They not only cause physical harm and violate an individual’s privacy but also cause irreparable emotional and psychological trauma, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Consent

Consent is a crucial term in sexual violence as it differentiates a consensual experience from a criminal act. Thus, it is imperative to establish and to have an unambiguous definition of this term. Consent is the agreement to a sexual encounter from both partners. It cannot be granted when either partner is unconscious, incapacitated, or in any way mentally or physically impaired; impairment can result from the use of drugs, including alcohol. Furthermore, consent is not valid if it is coerced by force or the threat

of force. Another crucial aspect of consent is that it is an “ongoing process” and, thus, “should be obtained with each new level of physical and/or sexual contact/conduct in any given interaction regardless of who initiates it” (The Antioch College Community, 1995).

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence will serve as the umbrella term that will encompass all forms of sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse, sexual coercion, and sexual harassment. These terms are defined below.

Sexual Assault vs. Rape

Though often used interchangeably with “rape,” sexual assault is a broader term that encompasses a greater range of violent acts. According to Pennsylvania law, sexual assault is a second degree felony that is defined as “sexual intercourse or deviate sexual intercourse with a complainant without the complainant’s consent” (Pa. Const., title 18, pt. 2, § 3124.1) or, in other words, unwanted vaginal or anal sex. This law explicitly excludes cases of rape, which are regarded as separate crimes with greater punishment. In Pennsylvania, rape is a first degree felony and is defined as engaging:

in sexual intercourse with a complainant: 1. By forcible compulsion; 2. By threat of forcible compulsion that would prevent resistance by a person of reasonable resolution; 3. Who is unconscious or where the person knows that the complainant is unaware that the sexual intercourse is occurring; 4. Where the

person has substantially impaired the complainant's power to appraise or control his or her conduct by administering or employing, without the knowledge of the complainant, drugs, intoxicants or other means for the purpose of preventing resistance; 5. Who suffers from a mental disability which renders the complainant incapable of consent; and 6. Who is less than 13 years of age. (Pa. Const., title 18, pt. 2, § 3121)

Thus, rape is not just sex without consent but also one that is forced. It is interesting to note the differences in the precision of the language in the laws. While the law defining rape provides a clear and exact definition of the circumstances by which consent may or may not be granted, the same is not true for the definition of sexual assault. Presumably, this disparity is due to the difference in the legal severity of the crimes and the societal perceptions towards them.

Acquaintance Rape

Also called "date rapes," these rapes are committed by a perpetrator whom the victim knows. These rapes are more common than stranger rapes though they are often not recognized as such; among college victims, nine out of ten knew their attackers (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999).

Stranger Rape

A rape committed by a perpetrator whom the victim does not know. Stranger rapes are mistakenly believed to be more common than they actually are (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999).

Attempted Rape

Attempted rape refers to threats or the use of force to advance toward sexual intercourse that does not result in penetration. The U.S. Department of Justice includes attempted rapes in their definition of rape, further specifying that “attempted rape includes verbal threats of rape” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

Completed Rape

A completed rape requires penetration.

Sexual Coercion

Sexual coercion is unwanted sexual intercourse “subsequent to the use of menacing verbal pressure or the misuse of authority” (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski 1987).

Sexual Abuse

This term is most often used in reference to child sexual abuse, in which the victim is a minor under the age in which he or she can grant lawful consent and the perpetrator is an adult. It refers to unwanted sexual advances and contact initiated by the adult (Briere & Runtz, 1987).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is the broadest of the terms that fall under sexual violence and includes physical and verbal advances of a sexual nature.

Sexual Violence at Penn State

Introduced in November 1996, Penn State Policy AD12: Sexual Assault, Relationship and Domestic Violence, and Stalking outlines the university's official position regarding these issues. According to Policy AD12, Penn State:

does not tolerate sexual assault, relationship/domestic violence or stalking and will prosecute the perpetrators of such acts of violence, in cooperation with law enforcement officials, to the fullest extent possible. Penn State is committed to supporting victims of sexual assault through the appropriate provision of primary health care and referral services. (The Pennsylvania State University, 2007)

A closer examination of this policy reveals that the disciplinary sanctions were not introduced until September 2002, six years after its initial creation. The only relevant

sentence in this section reads: “Disciplinary sanctions for violations of this policy will be imposed in accordance with the Code of Conduct. The range of sanctions will include expulsion” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2007).

Penn State Policy AD41: Sexual Harassment addresses this form of violence, which it defines as:

unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when: 1. submission to such conduct is a condition for employment, promotion, grades or academic status; 2. submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment or academic or other decisions affecting an individual; 3. such conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive so as to substantially interfere with the individual’s employment, education or access to University programs, activities and opportunities. To constitute prohibited harassment, the conduct must be such that it detrimentally affects the individual in question and would also detrimentally affect a reasonable person under the same circumstances. (The Pennsylvania State University, 2000)

Supportive Resources

Supportive resources provide comfort and general support to victims. Informal resources include friends and family members. Formal ones include available legal, medical, and psychological services. The Resource Card, containing the telephone numbers of local and national supportive resources is included in Appendix C. The potential benefits of these resources are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

A review of the available literature highlights the extent of the problem of sexual violence, particularly on college campuses across the United States.⁵ In 2007, the most recent year for which data and statistics are available, 248,280 incidents of rape and sexual assault were reported in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). This number included 69,850 incidents of rape, 70,770 incidents of attempted rape⁶, and 107,660 incidents of sexual assault⁷ (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

To put these statistics into perspective, these 248,280 incidents translate to approximately one rape or sexual assault occurring every two minutes in the United States. As alarming as this statistic is, it represents only a small proportion of the number of incidents that actually occur (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999). A 1998 study of the sexual victimization of college students reported that rates among this cohort “may well be higher than those for the general population and for a comparable age group” (Fischer, Sloan, Cullen, & Lu, 1998). The researchers cited “the nature of college-student life, which involves the close daily interaction of females and males in a range of social situations, would lead us to predict that college women would have a heightened risk of sexual victimization compared to the general population of women” (Fischer, Sloan,

⁵ Though some of the data referenced in this section is from a research study conducted in 1999 (“Extent and Nature of the Sexual Victimization of College Women: A National-Level Analysis”), the findings of this study are still relevant to contemporary discussions of this issue for 2 reasons: (1) there has not been available funding for another large-scale research study such as the one previously mentioned and (2) smaller, more recent studies support the conclusions from the 1999 study.

⁶ Includes verbal threats of rape.

⁷ Includes threats.

Cullen, & Lu, 1998). In his book *College Crime: A Statistical Study of Offenses on American Campuses*, Flowers supported these assertions: “the convergence of a college environment that is conducive to socializing, underage drinking, binge drinking, drug use, parties, dating, and sexual experimenting only increases the danger for sexual victimization” (Flowers, 2009). Furthermore, the “lack of clarity on what constitutes certain crimes such as sexual assault..., underreporting, institutional shortcomings, and even student peer pressure contribute to continued risk for sexual victimization and its consequences” (Flowers, 2009).

Fischer, Cullen, and Turner reiterated these findings regarding the pervasiveness of sexual violence on college campuses in their extensive 1999 national report, “Extent and Nature of the Sexual Victimization of College Women: A National-Level Analysis,” adding that “research clearly shows that women face a substantial risk of sexual victimization during their lifetime and that college women may face an even greater risk” (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999). This study, which is among the few that “employed a nationally representative sample of college women [and] assessed a range of potential sexual victimizations,” also underscored the prevalence of acquaintance rape among college victims: “for both completed and attempted rapes, about nine in 10 offenders were known to the victim” (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999).

A follow-up research report commissioned by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Institute of Justice in 2000 found that almost 5 percent of college women are sexually victimized in any given academic year (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). The researchers projected that “over the course of a college career—which now lasts an average of 5 years—the percentage of completed or attempted rape victimization among

women in higher educational institutions might climb to between one-fifth and one-quarter” (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). A 2008 study of 910 college students yielded comparable results, with 12.0 percent reporting sexual victimization during college and 26.4 percent reporting sexual victimization at some point in their lives (Forke, Myers, Catalozzi, & Schwarz, 2008). Similarly, a 2007 study reported that “of the 5,446 women [surveyed], 28.5% reported having experienced an attempted or completed sexual assault either before or since entering college” (Krebs et al., 2007).

Even when confronted with such distressing statistics, many deny the extent of this issue on college campuses, focusing on the deceptively small number of publicly reported rapes and sexual assaults and the “many” false reports. Though Purdue University Sociology Professor Eugene Kanin has suggested that false reports constitute 41 percent of all rapes (Kanin, 1994), substantial evidence disproves his claims. Numerous research studies have found that false reports account for 2-3 percent of reported rapes (e.g. Brownmiller, 1975; Katz, 1979; Kelly, 2005).

The reality remains, however, that “fewer than 5 percent of completed and attempted rape incidents [are] reported to the police” (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999). According to the researchers, this low report rate is due to many reasons:

On one hand, the victims cited that they did not think the incident was serious enough to report (the most common reason given), that they were not clear that a crime or harm was intended, and that they didn’t want to be bothered. Other reasons cited, however, included that victims did not want their family or other people to know about the incident, that they feared a reprisal by the offender, that

they lacked proof that the incident happened, and that they feared being treated hostilely by the police. (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999)

These unreported rapes are particularly troubling because many of these victims do not seek help in the coping process.

The importance of increasing supportive resource accessibility and availability becomes apparent as one understands the effects of sexual violence and the help that such resources offer to victims. Before making this connection, however, it is necessary to discuss the short-term and long-term effects of sexual violence, which include an array of physical and psychological health problems. Many studies have revealed a strong correlation between sexual violence experiences and negative health symptoms.

Short-Term Effects

While the trauma resulting from sexual victimization is often not immediately evident, victims do report physical pain and soreness from bodily force or weapons, if and when used, in the aftermath of their attacks. In addition to such physical trauma, victims may have difficulty concentrating (Flower, 2009) and experience “tension or anxiety, inability to sleep or oversleeping, inability to eat or over eating [as well as] anger, guilt/self-blame, paranoia, helplessness, confusion, denial, numbness, shock, depression, low self-esteem, [and] distrust” (Washington University in St. Louis, 2009). These feelings can intensify over time and become more destructive to the victim if they are not adequately addressed. Interestingly, many of these reactions are common to those suffering from depression as well, which is known to have adverse effects on an

individual's emotional and physical health (Frerichs, Aneshensel, Yokopenic, & Clark, 1982).

Long-Term Effects

The effects of sexual violence on an individual's well-being become increasingly apparent and potentially more damaging with time. Numerous research studies have reported that victims of sexual violence experience lowered physical and mental health-related quality of life with 80 percent suffering from chronic physical or psychological conditions (Krebs et al., 2007).

In addition to the immediate physical pain and trauma that victims experience, they also face serious health concerns, such as pregnancy and increased risks of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). According to national estimates, 5 percent of rape victims⁸ become pregnant each year (Holmes, Resnick, Kilpatrick, & Best, 1996). However, only 11.7% of victims receive immediate medical attention and a staggering 47.1% never seek medical attention for the assault (Holmes, Resnick, Kilpatrick, & Best, 1996). Because of the physical trauma they may experience, these female victims are at an increased risk for complications during their pregnancies that can be damaging to both mother and fetus. Rape victims are also at an increased risk of getting STIs. A 1990 study found that 43 percent of women physically examined within 72 hours of their rape had at least one sexually transmitted disease (Jenny et al., 1990).

⁸ Of reproductive age (i.e. aged 12 to 45).

The overall health of victims can suffer as well. A 2002 report found that sexual violence victims are more likely to be obese and to report one or more health risk factors, like hypertension, high cholesterol, or diabetes (Cloutier, Martin, & Poole, 2002). These increased risk factors may be physical manifestations of the emotional trauma afflicting victims (Frerichs, Aneshensel, Yokopenic, & Clark, 1982).

Many victims report significant psychological and emotional problems. A 2001 study found that 33 percent of female victims and 20 percent of male victims reported psychological distress stemming from their sexual violence experiences to affect daily life (Feehan, Nada-Raja, Martin, & Langley, 2001).

In addition, female college victims have reported feeling less safe than non-victims (Culbertson, Vik, & Kooiman, 2001). This heightened sense of vulnerability can produce anxiety and fear, which can further affect daily functioning. Consequently, it is not surprising that many women report gynecologic and menstrual disorders, gastrointestinal upset, eating disorders, sleep disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction following an encounter with sexual violence (Padden, 2008). Many of these problems are not only physically linked but also compounding; that is, not only can depression result in sleeping and eating disorders but the latter can also advance the individual's depression.

Research studies also estimate that almost one-third of rape victims experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at some point in their lives (Flowers, 2009). PTSD is a debilitating anxiety disorder that can cause irritability, insomnia, depression, difficulty concentrating, and other forms of emotional distress. This trauma can come in the form of flashbacks, where the victim feels as though she is reliving the incident.

Avoidance coping and self-blame have been associated with development of PTSD (Ullman, Filipas, Townsend, & Starzynski, 2006). With such severe emotional effects, it may be of no surprise that “rape victims are 13 times more likely to attempt suicide than non-crime victims and six times more likely than victims of other crimes” (Krebs et al., 2007).

In addition to the devastating psychological and physical tolls on victims, sexual victimization is the most financially expensive crime, costing victims as much as \$125,000 in damages (Miller, Cohen, & Wierama, 18). According to this same report, rape produces the highest annual victim costs, which are estimated to be in excess of \$126 billion annually. This cost stands in stark contrast to other “expensive crimes,” such as assault (\$93 billion) and murder⁹ (\$71 billion) (Miller, Cohen, & Wierama, 18).

The literature also suggests that the dynamics of child abuse may differ significantly from adult sexual violence. Studies have found that victims of child abuse experience less negative mental health and behavioral outcomes than adult victims (Maker, Kemmelmeier, & Peterson, 2001). This difference is likely due to the general acceptance of child abuse as a horrific crime that is never the fault of the child. Victims of child abuse are rarely, if ever, asked “were you drinking?” or “what were you wearing?” when they share their stories unlike their adult counter-parts. However, it would be a gross understatement and a serious misrepresentation of the facts to pretend that these victims do not face serious challenges in reporting their stories. Because of the vast power differences between victim and perpetrator, the former have significant difficulties reporting these crimes or even accessing supportive resources. They are often

⁹ Excludes those resulting from arson and drunk driving.

physically or psychologically threatened to remain silent or they lack the knowledge and/or language skills to effectively communicate their story to others. Many times, these victims, especially very young children, do not fully understand what is happening to them.

The Importance of Supportive Resources

Formal and informal supportive resources have repeatedly been shown to help victims in their coping processes (Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006). Informal support networks are especially important as one research study suggested that female victims often share their experiences with friends and family members (Ullman, 1996a). Not only do more women access such informal resources than formal ones but also the former are most often cited as being helpful (Ullman, 1996a).

However, for many, formal supportive resources play a crucial role in the coping process, especially for those not comfortable disclosing their experience to informal support networks or those whose friends and family members are not supportive. In another published study using the same data set, Ullman concluded that “tangible aid/information support was reported more often from women disclosing to rape crisis centers, police, and physicians, whereas emotional support/validation was commonly reported by those telling rape crisis centers” (Ullman, 1996c). As these findings indicate, formal resources provide valuable tangible and emotional benefits to victims. Consequently, these resources can help victims cope more positively with their experiences. According to a 2004 study, social support, approach-oriented coping, and

control over the recovery were among the factors most related to positive life change immediately following sexual assault that also led to improved life change over time (Frazier et al., 2004). By utilizing resources that provide support and control, victims can begin the transition to “survivor.”

The literature on this topic confirms sexual violence as a problem plaguing college campuses across the country. Its effects, which are both short-term and long-term, have been linked to serious health problems. For undergraduate victims, this trauma can interfere with their personal lives and academics. Supportive resources have been shown to be helpful to victims in the coping process. The next chapter describes the research study that was conducted and its findings.

Chapter 3

Methods and Results: Hearing Students' Voices

In order to better gauge and understand Penn State students' perceptions of sexual violence on our campus and knowledge of available supportive resources, a research study was conducted. This study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (IRB #33197), thereby meeting Penn State and national standards for ethical scientific research.

Sampling and Data Collection

Questionnaires were distributed to 323 undergraduate students enrolled in one of eight Women's Studies courses taught at Penn State.¹⁰ Consisting of nine questions, it was expected to take 30-45 minutes to complete.¹¹ Students were instructed to work on the questionnaires in private and to use the provided pre-addressed envelopes to mail completed ones back to the researcher. This method was utilized to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Students were briefed on the purpose, methods, and goals of the research study.

This information was also included in the implied informed consent form, which they

¹⁰ These eight courses were chosen because they each included a unit on sexual violence in the curricula. Consequently, these students were assumed to be more prepared and more willing to participate in this study than other Penn State undergraduates. Furthermore, it was assumed that such selective distribution of the questionnaires would increase the likelihood of finding victims willing to disclose their personal experiences with sexual violence. However, it is important to note that, because this questionnaire was only handed out to students in these eight courses, the results will reflect this specific population and will not necessarily represent the greater Penn State undergraduate student population.

¹¹ See Appendix A for a copy of the Questionnaire.

received along with the questionnaire.¹² Students were informed about their rights as willing participants in this study, which included the right to ask questions and voluntary participation.

Because there were no planned future interactions with potential participants, all were given pocket-sized Resource Cards.¹³ While this Resource Card could influence students' knowledge of supportive resource and, hence, influence the data, the potential benefits of distributing this card and the risks of not making such information available to participants justified the decision to hand them out.

Of the 323 questionnaires that were distributed, 118 completed ones were returned, providing a 36.5% response rate. Of these 118, 74 were completed by those identifying more closely as female and 44 by those identifying more closely as male.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire asked participants nine questions, some of which had multiple parts. Five of these questions could be answered by all participants regardless of their experiences (or lack thereof) with sexual violence, whereas the last four asked about personal encounters with sexual victimization. Terms, such as sexual violence and supportive resources, were not defined. This decision was part of a feminist methodological approach to research that was intended to allow students the freedom to define and to characterize their own experiences.

¹² See Appendix B for a copy of the Implied Informed Consent Form.

¹³ See Appendix C for a copy of the Resource Card.

While all of the questionnaires were read and included as part of the data for this research study, the results, analysis, and discussion focus primarily on the responses of those participants who reported personal experiences with sexual violence.

Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach of quantitative and qualitative data analysis was used to examine the collected data. Responses to the first three questions were quantified, and they are presented in the following section. Responses to these questions and the other six are also discussed and briefly analyzed qualitatively. A more in-depth analysis of victims' personal experiences with sexual violence is included in this chapter as well.

Results

Though the primary focus of this study and the questionnaire was on the accessibility of supportive resources at Penn State, the first three questions provided additional background information on the participants and contextualized this study's findings. They asked participants about their gender, their perceptions of sexual violence on our campus, and Penn State's handling of this issue. After being asked to identify with a gender, the second question asked: "Do you think sexual violence is an issue on our campus? Briefly state why." Ninety-four individuals, or approximately 80 percent of the participants, answered yes; of these 94, 31 were male and 63 were female. Nineteen individuals, 11 males and eight females, responded no to the same question, and four, three women and one man, stated that they did not know enough about this issue to

answer the question. One man did not respond to this question. These results are represented in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1. Student Responses to Question 2: “Do you think sexual violence is an issue on our campus? Briefly state why.”

	Female	Male	Total
Yes	63	31	94
No	8	11	19
Uncertain	3	1	4
No Response	0	1	1
Total	74	44	118

The third question asked: “Do you think Penn State is doing enough to address the issue? Why or why not?” Seventy-three individuals (18 males and 55 females) or approximately 62 percent of participants answered no. A total of 30 individuals, which included 22 men and eight women, wrote that they believed Penn State is doing as much as it can to address this issue. Fourteen others, four men and 10 women, expressed uncertainty, writing that they did not know whether Penn State was doing enough to adequately address student concerns regarding sexual violence. One woman did not provide an answer to this question. These results are displayed in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2. Student Responses to Question 3: “Do you think Penn State is doing enough to address the issue? Why or why not?”

	Female	Male	Total
Yes	8	22	30
No	55	18	73
Uncertain	10	4	14
No Response	1	0	1
Total	74	44	118

When asked about available supportive resources, students referenced “the lights on campus,” “the emergency blue light phones”¹⁴, and the “Security Escort Service”¹⁵. One student wrote that the university and the Penn State community can help make supportive resources more accessible and more available by making “it abundantly clear that even if you’re intoxicated to use the escort [service]” and another proposed having “more campus police around at night.”

Not only did the majority of victims who shared their experiences with sexual violence at Penn State mention alcohol in their stories (either to emphasize that they had not been drinking or were intoxicated) but also so did many study participants who had not noted personal experiences with sexual violence. These individuals correlated sexual victimization and alcohol: “alcohol can lead to abuse,” “it has been proven that alcohol does not directly cause sexual violence but it is certainly related to it,” “alcohol plays an even bigger role in the way violence and sexual violence occurs,” sexual violence is an issue on our campus “because of drinking,” “there is a problem with drunk predators and sexual violence,” “men tend to sexually assault women because of heavy alcohol consumption and a belief that they will get away with taking advantage of her.”

A total of 18 individuals, one man and 17 women, reported a personal experience with some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. For seven (one man and six women) of these 18 individuals, this experience happened before college. For the remaining 11 women, this experience happened during their time at Penn State. Because the dynamics

¹⁴ These phones provide a direct connection to the University Police Department.

¹⁵ The Security Escort Service offers “walking accompaniment for Penn State students, employees, and visitors who may feel unsafe walking alone on campus at night” courtesy of Auxiliary Police (Penn State University Police, 2009).

of child sexual abuse differ from sexual violence experienced as a college student as discussed in Chapter 2, these encounters are discussed separately. The following section recounts the stories of these 18 individuals.¹⁶

Sexual Violence Experience Pre-Penn State

The following seven individuals shared their stories with child sexual abuse.

ALEXA: When asked about any personal experiences with some form of sexual violence, Alexa began by expressing gratitude about never having had any such experiences: “Thank God I have never had sexual violence.” However, she continued to state that she “did [experience] past molestation (not violently) but I was a child and it was by 3 cousins.” Alexa shared her experience with her “other younger cousins and [her] best friends” and was “quite surprised that [the former] had gone through some sort of molestation as well.” She explains that she did not access any supportive resources because she “was to [sic] young and...was afraid that the family would end up being broken b/c of [her] fault”; she reiterated her concerns about “braking [sic] up the family” when answering questions about accessing resources, adding that the experience “has been [in] the past.”

¹⁶ Given that my knowledge of their personal experiences with sexual violence is limited to their responses to the questionnaire, I have tried to use their direct words whenever possible in the following analysis. All names were assigned and are completely fictional; therefore, they do not reveal any identifying information about the participants in this study and are only being used to make the results easier to follow.

BETHANY: Like Alexa, Bethany began by emphasizing that she had not had any experiences with sexual violence, underlining “nothing” though she added “other than sexual harassment @ work.” She did not tell people about it though “it was clearly visible” to others, who “mostly laughed it off.” Bethany did, however, bring the incidents to the attention of her supervisor, who “stopped” them. She added that she did not and has not accessed any supportive resources because “it really wasn’t necessary.”

REBECCA: Rebecca described her experience with sexual violence as “degrading to the point of inferiority” and did not elaborate further. While she has since told “a few close friends and [her] boyfriend” about the incident, all of whom were “supportive,” she does not “talk about it,” adding that she has “put up a wall in [her] mind to block it.” Aside from her friends and boyfriend, Rebecca did not access any supportive resources because she “didn’t want to talk about it and didn’t know what to do.” However, she writes that she would have reconsidered her decision had she been “severely physically injured.”

VALERIE: Valerie discussed an incident that occurred “at a party w/ a bunch of people in [her] grade...[in which] an older guy (probably 22) was basically feeding [her] more alcohol even when [she] didn’t want it.” She added that she “only slightly remember[s] him taking advantage of [her] sexually.” She explained that she “was too ashamed to admit that it was what it was” to tell anyone about the incident or to access supportive resources. So, she “played it off as being no big deal.”

MATT: As the only male respondent to report an experience with sexual violence in this study, Matt simply described it as “intolerable.” Though he did not say much more, his word choice reveals that the incident affected him. Despite this impact, Matt has not accessed any supportive resources and would not reconsider that decision “in [his] case.” However, he would have liked “resources to help family units as well as individuals” to have been available to him.

DIANNA: Dianna revealed that she had been a victim of “child sexual assault/abuse” in the past and had shared the experience with others, who were “shocked, believing, and sorrowful.” Unlike other victims, Dianna eventually accessed “counseling [and] legal aid” after recognizing “the experience had affected a lot of other areas of [her] life in long-term, significant ways.” She explained that “before [she] accessed counseling, [she] didn’t think or realize that [she] needed it. [She] didn’t think it would be beneficial.”

BRENNA: Brenna described her experience with sexual violence as “confusing,” noting that she “didn’t really understand what had exactly happened” to her at the time. She eventually came to understand the experience but was left feeling “overly upset and paranoid all the time.” After beginning to tell people about it this year, she found that their “supportive” reactions “helped to calm” her. She received “a number for a psychologist” from one of the individuals to whom she had told her story. Like Dianna, Brenna has found counseling to be helpful in the coping process, noting that she “would have liked to know about the psychologist earlier.”

Sexual Violence Experienced At Penn State

The following 11 individuals shared their personal stories with sexual violence as Penn State undergraduate students.

GLORIA: Gloria shared her experience at a party, in which “a guy grabbed me and refused to let me go.... He squeezed my wrist and arms and [only] after pleading with him...[did] he finally let me go.” Though this incident made Gloria uncomfortable, she was still hesitant to label it as sexual violence, writing: “I’m not sure if that would be considered sexual violence, however, I do believe that I felt threatened and scared that he would try to grab me elsewhere.” Her friends, whom she confided in, “advised [her] not to stray away from the group next time so that the incident would not occur again.” Gloria did not access any supportive resources despite feeling threatened “because [she] did not feel like it was as big enough of a deal that needed to be discussed with a psychologist in CAPS.”

CASSIE: Like Gloria, Cassie experienced sexual harassment. Cassie shared her experience, which involved “a drunk alumni [who] pinched and inappropriately touched [her] while [she] was walking by, and was then yelling things after” her. Her roommates “were disgusted and then also fearful of ‘creepy old men’ walking around campus/downtown drunk” after she told them. While she did not access any supportive resources, explaining that the incident was “not that big of a deal because it’d cause more trouble than just ignoring it,” she “did give [the perpetrator] a piece of [her] mind.”

Cassie reiterated these reasons when asked why she has not accessed resources, writing that it “really would’ve done more harm than good.”

STACY: Stacy described her experiences with sexual violence as “not violence but coercion [sic].” She provided examples of the coercion, in which the perpetrator “kept asking [to have sex], pushing the issue, pulling [her] to him, even though [she] pulled away a number of times.” She added that “he also made [her] feel inadequate because [she] was inexperienced,” thereby attempting to use his power as an experienced sexual male to overpower her physically and psychologically. Sharing the experience with four friends, she noted that only “1 out of the 4 people [she] told called it ‘rape’” and the other three assumed the incident was consensual. Stacy decided not to access any supportive resources because she was “embarrassed and ashamed,” though “much later [she] went for an AIDS test.” She added that she did not access other resources because even though she “felt bad about what happened, [she] didn’t actually believe [she] was sexually assaulted.” When asked what would make her reconsider her decision to not access resources, she answered that the incident happened “a long time ago and I’ve moved on. I did not believe I was raped so I just delt [sic] with my feelings.”

AMANDA: Like Stacy, Amanda was hesitant to label her experiences as sexual violence, writing that she had “been in more forceful situations than actual violent ones.” She expressed gratitude about this fact: “thankfully mine weren’t violently forceful, just males trying to force me to do stuff with them, try to undress me, pull me closer, and hold me so I wouldn’t get up and leave.” Amanda added, though, that these experiences “are

scary and do make you more frightened to go out or trust people.” She also specifically mentioned alcohol, noting that these incidents happened at “times when alcohol was and was not involved.” She told her friends and mother about the incidents, who were “happy it was not as serious as some.” Amanda justified not accessing formal supportive resources as the incidents were “not that serious.” When asked why she did not access other resources that she knew about, she again emphasized that “the situation was not that serious” and that she “was able to handle” it by herself.

SHANNON: Shannon shared her experience with sexual violence, in which a male acquaintance made sexual advances toward her:

I was a freshman in this boy’s room. I was not drunk nor was I inhibited in any way. He just sat me on his lap while he was playing guitar, then he continued to stroke my leg. He was pushing me down on him when I was trying to get up. I told him I wanted to leave and I got up eventually, but he followed me out of the room. I started to walk at a fast pace down the hall. He started to follow me and pushed me against the wall while trying to kiss my neck. He was huge so I couldn’t really push him off of me.

While her experience meets the definition of sexual harassment, Shannon did not access any supportive resources because she “felt it wasn’t a ‘serious’ enough experience.” She later reveals that she “still [doesn’t] know if it was.” Furthermore, she wrote that she “still wouldn’t” access resources because she “was aware” and chose not to access them.

ROSE: Rose described her encounter with sexual violence as “the worst experience of [her] life,” adding that she is “still dealing with it on a daily basis.” She talked to an officer about the incident, who was “understanding and helpful but he was switched off the case due to health issues and [she] didn’t get proper attention and help after that.” Rose added that she “went through judicial affairs who set [her] up with the Women’s Resource Center.” Though she knew about CAPS, she did not access their services because she felt that “they were too pushy and [she] wasn’t ready to talk about it.” She wrote that that she wished she could have just gone to them without feeling “forced to talk.”

KELLY: Kelly wrote of her experience with sexual violence:

I was drinking and my apartment neighbor decided to help me home. I don’t remember much but I woke up next to him in bed with no clothes on. He seemed fine with everything so I didn’t realize at the time what had happened.

She added that when she mentioned this experience to her boyfriend he was “upset more w/ the fact that I had sex than w/ what happened to me” and that this caused her to “push [the experience] out of [her] mind further.” The reactions of her boyfriend and roommate, which were not supportive, kept her from accessing resources as they “didn’t [sic] think it was a big deal.”

TRACY: Tracy described an experience in which she “had sexual intercourse while blacked out and [has] absolutely no memory of it.” While she recognized that “this [incident] falls under the ‘legal definition’ of sexual assault,” she wrote that she

“personally [does not] consider it to be assault.” Tracy does not “really blame [the perpetrator]...because the guy involved was a good friend, [she had] been sexual with him before, and he didn’t know [she] was blacked out.” While she shared the experience with friends, “nobody was concerned because everyone knew the guy involved” though, she added, “some friends were surprised that [she] could black out something as big as sex.” When asked about why she did not access resources, she wrote that she “didn’t feel the need to seek help because [she] didn’t consider [the encounter] a real sexual assault.” She added, though, that had she not known the guy and had she been forced, she “would have wanted help.”

CAMILLE: Camille wrote that she “can’t really describe something that [she doesn’t] really remember.” She clarified that she “was inebriated and blacked out” and that all she does “remember is the night before being over [her] friend’s apartment” and being offered wine. Her friend had mentioned that “two guy friends who lived in the same building on the upper floor [wanted] to come down.... It was starting to get late and feeling a little tipsy, [Camille] didn’t think [the guys] were coming over...until [she] noticed the next morning” that they had. She awoke to find herself “in the bed with [one of the guys who had] his clothes off (except for his boxers).” She added that “fortunately...[she] still had [her] clothes on.” Though she does not remember much about the night, she does “remember...him trying to put [her] on top of him. At that moment, [she] pushed away from him and left without any knowledge where [her] friend was.” Camille’s experience highlights an attempted rape, in which sexual intercourse was not completed though the perpetrator did try. She told her friend and a professor about the

incident. She noted that her friend was in “denial until [Camille] ‘convinced’ her and [her friend] confronted [the perpetrator].” Camille added that her friend “laughs at [the incident] still today.” In contrast to her friend’s reaction, the “professor played the very supportive, understanding, and believing approach although she did not let that affect her instruction in the classroom with which, once again, he was in.” Camille also accessed the Centre County Women’s Resource Center because she had heard that “they are well-equipped in various ways to deal with these situations.” Though she knew about CAPS, she did not access this resource after hearing from a friend that “they are not very helpful or supportive at all.”

WHITNEY: Whitney wrote that she “was a victim of unwanted sex.” Though she told her friends about the experience, “they weren’t as supportive as [she] would’ve liked.” Her “friends thought [the rape] was ok because [she and the perpetrator] had been talking” though she explicitly states she “didn’t consent to sex.” She did not access supportive resources because, given her initial interest in the perpetrator, she thought “that it wouldn’t be considered rape.” She added that she also “didn’t want to make trouble [as] the guy was in [her] social circle.”

JENNA: Jenna shared her experience from early in her freshman year, when she “was at a party with [her] friends...[where she] was very intoxicated.” She wrote of the experience:

I was dancing with this kid, who I only knew a little bit, kept kissing me. I was too drunk to be out [at a party], so I told a friend of mine I wanted to leave. [The

guy who was kissing me] heard and told my friend he would make sure I got home okay. He walked me home and came into my dorm room. The next thing I remember, I woke up naked, in pain next to him.

When she told people about the experience, she was told that she “had to know what he was after and going to do—because [she] let him walk [her] home.” She added that “other people didn’t know how to react, and [her] mother cried.” She noted that she “did not access any” resources “because [she] thought by avoiding the problem it would go away and [she] just didn’t want to deal with it.” She wrote that she would reconsider accessing resources because the perpetrator should have to face the consequences” and she “could have used someone unbiased to talk to, because it has absolutely affected [her] negatively.” She also added that she would have liked people to have “been more supportive than judgmental.”

SOPHIE: Sophie shared the story of her rape in the questionnaire:

I was raped by a...boy who I was friends with.... I had had too much to drink and was alone, so [I] called my friend.... One of the...boys [there] said he would drive me home but instead drove me to his apartment. The next thing I remember is him having sexual intercourse with me at least twice. I was naked but I don’t remember him taking my clothes off. I was very near unconscious, and even if I had been sober, I would never have given him consent to have sex with me but I had no choice. The next thing I remember is waking up in his bed the next day. He acted like he had done nothing wrong so I thought maybe it was my fault and I had led him on. I stayed at his apartment for a while then he drove me home. He

sent me a text later saying he felt bad and can we still be friends. I said it was ok and we are still friends but I haven't wanted to see him since. I never want to see him again.

When asked why she did not access any resources, Sophie responded:

I didn't want to get my friend in trouble with a serious allegation like rape even though I realize now (I didn't at the time) that he raped me. I was scared no one would believe me, I knew it would interfere with college and I didn't want a physical exam. I thought if I access resources I would be pushed to tell the police. I told another boy...[who knew the perpetrator] and he said [the perpetrator] does it a lot (has sex with girls when they are passed out). He made it sound like it was no big deal.

She noted that she "just wanted support not to press charges. There is still a stigma attached to a girl who cries rape when she has been drunk."

These stories show that sexual violence is an issue on our campus that has affected and continues to affect the daily lives and emotional and physical well-being of undergraduates. The next section takes a closer look at commonalities among students' answers.

Analysis and Discussion of Common Themes

The need for this study becomes increasingly evident upon review of participant responses. Some common themes that arose in responses to the questionnaire included

the persistence of rape myths, particularly the misconception that acquaintance rape is not real rape, the propensity to victim blame, the tendency to minimize sexual violence encounters, and the lack of knowledge regarding supportive resources.

The Persistence of Rape Myths

The persistence of “rape myths,” or common misperceptions regarding the dynamics and circumstances of sexual victimization, was evident in participant responses. This finding is particularly troubling as these students, who were all enrolled in Women’s Studies courses, are considered to be more knowledgeable and, hence, more sympathetic to victims of sexual violence. Despite this knowledge, 20 percent of those who participated in this study did not consider sexual violence to be an issue of our campus and 25 percent believed that Penn State is doing as much as it can to address this issue. Such results indicate a lack of understanding regarding the realities of sexual violence and suggest a need for greater education on this topic.

“It is not rape if it involves someone I know”

While the stranger in the dark alley myth continues to define the circumstances concerning rape in the minds of many, overwhelming evidence indicates that most rapes are committed by acquaintances in rooms and locations that the victim often willingly enters—unknowing of what lies ahead. In fact, studies have suggested that 90 percent of rapes are acquaintance rapes (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 1999). The persistence of this

myth prevents accurate discussion of sexual violence on our campus and deters victims from accessing supportive resources.

Even when victims recognized that they had experienced sexual violence or had not consented to a sexual encounter, they hesitated to label the incidents as rape or assault when they involved friends and acquaintances. For instance, Tracy wrote that she did not “really blame [the perpetrator]...because [he] was a good friend [and she had] been sexual with him before.” She added that none of her friends were “concerned [about her] because everyone knew the guy involved.” Her misconception that acquaintance rape is not real rape is troubling not only because it is inaccurate but also because she used it as justification to not access supportive resources, which may have been helpful to her in the coping process.

The Propensity to Victim Blame

Victim blaming, or the attitude that holds victims of sexual violence responsible for the crimes committed against them, is common among both victims and non-victims. One research study found that “79.3% of the women who were raped while intoxicated put all or part of the blame on themselves...[and] 50% percent of the women raped by force or threat of force also took on some degree of self-blame” (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). The same study reported that almost 26 percent of female victims blamed themselves completely for their rapes (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999).

This attitude was also expressed by participants in this study. Alexa and Valerie both discussed feelings of fear and shame in disclosing their experiences with child

sexual abuse to family members and friends. Alexa wrote that she “was afraid that the family would end up being broken b/c of [her] fault,” and Valerie explained that she “was too ashamed to admit that it was what it was.” Alexa’s fear about breaking up her family and Valerie’s shame kept them from accessing supportive resources. Their erroneous belief that they were responsible or could be held responsible for their experiences reflect victim blaming tendencies.

The stories of those who experienced sexual violence at Penn State also reveal victim blaming attitude—though more often by the victim’s friends. When Gloria told her friends about her encounter with sexual harassment, she was blamed for not staying with them and reprimanded to not “stray away from the group so that the incident would not occur again.” Jenna was also blamed for her rape by friends, who told her that she “had to know what [the perpetrator] was after and going to do—because [she] let him walk [her] home.” Instead of providing comfort and support, their friends blamed Gloria and Jenna for their sexual victimization. Not only are such reactions detrimental to victims’ coping processes but also they avoid the issue. It is not the victim’s responsibility to ensure that she is not violated; the perpetrator is the one at fault and the one who committed a crime. Ignoring this reality prevents accurate discussion of this issue and further harms victims. One female student succinctly expressed the thoughts of many participants, remarking in the questionnaire that “fear/judgement [sic]” would prevent her from accessing supportive resources because “many women who claim to be victims of sexual violence are judged by outsiders as ‘asking for it.’”

It is imperative that victim blaming attitudes be addressed as they have been shown to have serious detrimental effects on victims. A 1996 study reported that being

believed was linked to better recovery and fewer psychological symptoms whereas being blamed had negative effects on recovery and resulted in the development of more psychological symptoms (Ullman, 1996b).

The Tendency to Minimize Sexual Violence Encounters

Many of the victims who shared their stories in this study attempted to minimize their experiences by not recognizing their sexual victimization or by not refusing more serious labels such as “sexual assault” or “rape.”

In regards to the first point, Alexa and Amanda both expressed gratitude about having never experienced “sexual violence.” Alexa wrote “Thank God I have never had sexual violence [happen to me]” before continuing to state that she had experienced “past molestation.” Similarly, though Amanda described experiences with sexual coercion, she wrote “thankfully mine weren’t violently forceful.” Likewise, Bethany wrote that she had experienced “nothing other than sexual harassment @ work.” The language in these three victims’ responses reveals their personal definitions of sexual violence, which do not include molestation (or other forms of child abuse), sexual coercion, or sexual harassment. Not only is such a definition not legally accurate but also it shows an effort to minimize victimization experiences. By minimizing these encounters, Alexa, Amanda, and Bethany justified their decisions not to seek formal supportive resources. While perhaps not needed, this denial may have been negative to their coping processes.

Many victims wrote about their encounters not being “serious” enough to report. Gloria and Cassie, who experienced sexual harassment, both wrote that it was not that

“big of a deal.” Similarly, Shannon stated that her encounter with sexual harassment “wasn’t a ‘serious’ enough experience.” Amanda wrote of her sexual coercion that the incidents were “not that serious.” Even Kelly, who experienced sexual assault, stated that she “didnt [sic] think it was a big deal.” Stacy wrote that she “did not believe [she] was raped so [she] just delt [sic] with [her] feelings.” Though Stacy did not label the incident as rape, her descriptions made it apparent that it was.

While these efforts may have been part of a survival tactic for some, they hint at the effects of living in a rape-supportive culture. One male student working for campus security noted that “victims themselves usually pass...off [their experiences] as ‘just another day.’” But, he pointed out, sexual violence is a serious problem that is not being addressed and “actions need to focus on [its] trivialization.” Thus, this attitude and these denials are especially worrisome because they minimize victims’ experiences and rationalize decisions not to access supportive resources.

A 2006 study of female college rape victims reported comparable findings with less than a quarter of these women identifying their experiences as rape (Littleton, Axsom, Breitkopf, & Berenson, 2006). Similarly, another study reported that women whose experiences met legal definitions of rape often did not label their experiences as such (Schwartz and Leggett, 1999).

The Lack of Knowledge regarding Supportive Resources

Students displayed a lack of knowledge regarding supportive resources when they listed “the lights on campus,” “the emergency blue light phone,” and the “Security Escort

Service” as ones. While these services are helpful and important components of campus safety, they are not supportive resources. They do not meet the definition presented in Chapter 2 of being legal, medical, and psychological services available to and accessible by victims and their families that provide comfort and general support. Their inclusion as such suggests not only a need for greater education about what defines a supportive resource but also a lack of understanding about the realities of sexual violence.

The above analysis of common themes underscores the need for education on sexual violence and supportive resources. Even participants in this study, who represented a more informed segment of the undergraduate Penn State population, were misinformed or expressed gaps in their knowledge regarding this topic. The next chapter provides recommendations that can be enacted at Penn State to better address this issue.

Chapter 4

Conclusions and Recommendations: Effecting Change at Penn State

Upon review of the results of this research study, it becomes abundantly clear that sexual violence is indeed a problem on our campus and that Penn State can do more and should be held more accountable in addressing both this issue and the accessibility of supportive resources. The question remains, though: what specifically should Penn State do?

As stated in Chapter 1, Penn State officials have worked hard to make many services available to victims of sexual violence. For instance, the Center for Women Students (CWS) distributes Resource Cards, pocket-sized, laminated cards containing the telephone numbers of local and national supportive resources, to all incoming students and to all students living on-campus. Furthermore, the staff at the CWS provides emotional and academic support to victims, helping students obtain medical withdrawals after experiencing assault. CAPS offers all students, including those victimized by sexual violence, 10 free and confidential counseling sessions with certified counselors. Off-campus, the Centre County Women's Resource Center (CCWRC), though not directly affiliated with the university, serves as the local rape and sexual assault crisis center, offering 24-hour hotline services, counseling, group support sessions, legal advocacy, accompaniment by an advocate during rape examinations, and a shelter. All of these services are free and confidential.

The issue, thus, is not the existence or prevalence of supportive resources but, rather, their accessibility. The persistence of rape myths and stereotypes and the resulting fear and shame that they produce in victims act as barriers to students identifying sexual violence, acting upon it, and accessing supportive resource. Furthermore, as highlighted in Chapter 3, student responses in the questionnaire indicate a lack of education in regards to both sexual violence and supportive resources. Consequently, any efforts to increase the accessibility and availability of these resources at Penn State must include efforts to increase the knowledge of what they are, how they can be accessed, and how they can help. Such education would benefit and empower victims not only by encouraging them to access help if and when they need it but also by removing the societal stigma and stereotypes associated with sexual victimization.

Two specific recommendations are being proposed: (1) mandating completion of the Division of Student Affairs Sexual Assault web module and (2) restructuring the student organization index to make it easier to find student groups that address this issue.

1. Mandating completion of The Division of Student Affairs Sexual Assault web module

The Division of Student Affairs recently designed a web module on sexual violence to raise awareness about this issue on our campus.¹⁷ According to their website, the module is an “interactive, Web-based multimedia program [that] utilizes real-world video scenarios paired with instruction that immerses you in the content immediately; and then provides resources and individualized feedback to help you discover the answers

¹⁷ It can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.sa.psu.edu/cws/awareness/>.

you don't already know" (The Division of Student Affairs, 2009). Currently, it is available and accessible to all students with a valid Penn State ID though its completion is not mandated.

The web module begins by asking students to answer 20 questions regarding sexual violence. Upon completion of this initial examination, students are told their scores and redirected to the instructive portion, which allows them to fill in the gaps of their knowledge. One of the many strengths of this program is that it blends video content mirroring college students' realities with information about sexual violence and available resources.

Because this module has already been made, a mandate of its completion can be implemented without any additional costs to the university. However, this policy change requires the action of administrators, who need to be more proactive in addressing this issue on our campus.

2. Restructuring the student organization index

Many student organizations host events relating to sexual violence awareness. However, at a university the size of Penn State, it can be difficult to locate these resources as there is no centralized organization dealing with this issue or even a centralized means of learning about what organizations are doing. Student organizations are crucial to raising campus awareness because they are readily available to all students and can be accessed before an assault happens. Furthermore, they promote activism and the involvement of students who may otherwise not be involved. There are multiple

student organizations, such as Men Against Violence (MAV), Peers Helping to Reaffirm, Educate, and Empower (PHREE), Knitivism, and many sororities, that host educational events regarding sexual violence.

MAV and PHREE are two student organizations advised by the CWS. MAV seeks to engage male students in the movement to end violence toward women. According to their mission statement, “MAV specifically asks men to join together to demonstrate a model of masculinity that helps and heals, not harms and hurts” (Center for Women Students, 2010). PHREE is a female empowerment and peer educational group that “utilizes a peer-based approach to educate and promote awareness about some of the most critical issues facing college students today” (Center for Women Students, 2010). Furthermore, they are “responsible for facilitating educational programs and participating in other types of campus activities to raise awareness about issues such as sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, healthy relationships, and body image” (Center for Women Students, 2010). Knitivism is a progressive activist organization that uses knitting as a peaceful and artistic form of activism. Furthermore, they seek to provide an opportunity to educate, build awareness, and fundraise for a number of issues regarding human rights, specifically women’s rights. Since their establishment in the Fall of 2008, they have hosted numerous events to raise awareness about sexual violence, specifically those happening on our campus and in Darfur, Sudan.

Reorganizing the student organization directory to include subcategories of causes would facilitate student involvement and participation in raising awareness about sexual violence on our campus. This cause currently lacks centralized leadership, which makes it difficult for students interested in becoming involved.

While these recommendations will not end sexual violence on our campus, they are a worthy start. By educating all students about the dynamics of sexual violence and supportive resources, we can empower one another to be more proactive about this issue with the hopes of one day ending sexual violence.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

DIRECTIONS: Please do **not** include your name or any other identifying information on any part of this questionnaire. After you have completed this questionnaire, please use the pre-addressed envelope to mail it using campus mail; do **not** include your name or address on this envelope. Please feel free to use additional paper to answer the following questions if necessary.

Pages 1, 2, and 3 include questions applicable to all current undergraduate students who are older than 18. These questions ask you about your knowledge of supportive resources.

Pages 4, 5, and 6 include questions for those who have experienced sexual violence; it asks you about your personal experiences.

1. What gender do you identify with more closely?

Female

Male

2. Do you think sexual violence is an issue on our campus? Briefly state why.

3. Do you think Penn State is doing enough to address the issue? Why or why not?

4. What supportive resources do you know about?

a. How did you find out about these resources?

b. Would you feel comfortable accessing these resources? Why or why not?

i. What factors do you think may prevent you from accessing these resources?

5. In your opinion, what role can the university and the Penn State community have in making supportive resources more accessible and more available?

6. If you have experienced some form of sexual violence, how would you describe what you experienced?

7. When did you experience this incident? (Check all that apply)

Before
College

Freshman
Year

Sophomore
Year

Junior
Year

Senior
Year

8. Did you tell anyone about this experience?

a. If so, how would you describe their reactions?

9. What, if any, supportive resources did you access?

i. Why did you choose to access these specific resources?

a. If there were any resources that you knew about but did not access, why did you decide not to access them?

i. What would make you re-consider your decision to not access these resources?

a. What resources do you wish had been available to you or that you had known about?

Appendix B

Implied Informed Consent Form



Implied Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

ORP OFFICE USE ONLY
DO NOT REMOVE OR MODIFY
IRB# Doc. #
The Pennsylvania State University
Institutional Review Board
Office for Research Protections
Approval Date:
Expiration Date:

Title of Project: Sexual Violence on Our Campus

Principal Investigator: Farnaz Farhi, Undergraduate Student
315 Health and Human Development
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-0190; fzf5000@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Patricia Koch
315 Health and Human Development
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-0190; p3k@psu.edu

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to explore undergraduate students' perceptions of sexual violence at Penn State and the accessibility of supportive resources for those who have experienced sexual assault.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to answer 9 questions on a questionnaire.
3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort.
4. **Benefits:** By participating in this study, you might learn about supportive resources currently available to undergraduates at Penn State who have experienced sexual assault.

This research might provide a better understanding of the importance of supportive resources and how Penn State can make these resources more accessible and more available to its students; this information may help future students affected by sexual assault in better coping with their experiences.

5. **Duration:** It will take about 30-45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.
6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The survey does not ask for any information that would identify who the responses belong to. The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections, the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses.
7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Farnaz Farhi at (814) 863-0190 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.
8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Completion and return of the questionnaire implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to take part in the research.

Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

Appendix C

Resource Card

Front

RESOURCES

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Medical Treatment

- Mount Nittany Medical Center
Emergency Department234-6110
- Women's Health, Student Health Center (SHC):
Services 8 a.m.—5 p.m.863-2633

Emotional Support

- Counseling and Psychological Services
(CAPS) - (SHC): 8a.m. - 5p.m.....863-0395
- Women's Resource Center
of Centre County (24 hours)234-5050

PSU Referral Information and Advocacy

- Center for Women Students
Services 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.863-2027

Police/Legal Information

- Police Emergency Number911
- University Police Services863-1111
- State College Police234-7150

Safety

- Escort Service
(dusk to dawn)865-WALK (9255)

CENTER FOR WOMEN STUDENTS

204 Boucke Bldg.
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-2027 www.sa.psu.edu/cws

Back

CENTER FOR WOMEN STUDENTS

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE RAPED

1. Go to a safe place as soon as you can.
2. Try to preserve all physical evidence.
Do not bathe, shower, douche, use the toilet, brush teeth, or change your clothing.
3. Contact a close friend who can be with you until you feel safe again. Your friend can also accompany you to the medical exam.
4. Get medical attention as soon as possible to make sure that you are physically okay and to collect and preserve evidence.
5. Contact the police. Rape is never your fault—it's a crime. You are encouraged to report it.
6. Seeing a counselor is important to help you understand your feelings and begin the process of resolution and healing.

PENNSTATE



Division of Student Affairs
U.Ed. STA 08-116

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VITA

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, The Schreyer Honors College, Expected
May 2010

B.S. Biology, Vertebrate Physiology Option

B.A. Women's Studies, Expected with Honors

Minor: Civic and Community Engagement, Expected with Honors

Liberty High School, Graduated 2006

Valedictorian, 1st of 574

RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

Centre County Women's Resource Center, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Counselor/Advocate, Fall 2007–Present

- Provide counseling, assistance, and information to sexual assault hotline callers.
- Work closely with physicians, nurses, and law enforcement officials as part of the sexual assault response team to provide support and care to victims during rape examinations.

Knitivism, Vice President/Active Member, Fall 2008–Present

- Knitivism is a progressive activist organization that uses knitting as a peaceful, yet powerful form of activism; we are largely focused on issues stemming from human rights violations, such as the genocide in Darfur, Sudan and violence against women.
- Led the planning and implementation of numerous club initiatives.

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), Public Policy Research Intern,
Summer 2008

- Researched past and current federal and state legislation regarding marital rape, sexual assault aboard cruise ships, and sexual assault on college campuses.

RAINN, Community/Volunteer Outreach Intern, Spring 2008

- Contacted universities about increasing sexual assault awareness on their campuses.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Schreyer Honors College Scholar, 2006–Present

Schreyer Honors College External Advisory Board Scholarship. One of four recipients of annual \$10,000 scholarship on the basis of distinguished academic record, 2006–Present.

Department of Women's Studies Student Marshal, Spring 2010.

Dean's List, Fall 2006/Spring 2007/Fall 2007/Fall 2008/Spring 2009/Fall 2009

Laura Richardson Whitaker Award recognizing outstanding undergraduate research focusing on women in history, Spring 2009.

Penn State Schreyer Honors College Research Grant given on the basis of research potential in the amount of \$2,000, Summer 2007, 2008.

The Phi Beta Kappa Society (National Academic Honor Society), Spring 2010–Present

Omicron Delta Kappa (National Leadership Honor Society), Spring 2009–Present