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# An exploration of the quantity and quality of campus sexual assault policies

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
QUANTITY AND QUALITY  
OF CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT POLICIES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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by  
Kayla Ann Bourg  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Sexual assault disproportionately affects female college students, more so than any other group of women in the general population. Therefore, consideration for the safety needs of this particular group of women constitute a great concern for university administrators. Safety measures currently utilized at universities for decreasing sexual assault rates have been insufficient. Some researchers have turned their attention to the role of campus sexual assault policies as a means in which to alleviate this crisis. The present investigation analyzes the prevalence and quality of sexual assault policies at 102 public Doctoral/Research extensive universities in the United States. The majority of institutions in this study, or 55.9% did not have a sexual assault policy in place, indicating an overall lack in the existence of sexual assault policies. Of those 45.1% of schools that do have a policy in place, the majority of these institutions, (67.4%) met at least 60% of the criteria for determining a high-quality policy as defined by the researcher. Overall, the majority of sexual assault policies that are in place are of good quality.

## INTRODUCTION

Women who attend postsecondary institutions are at the greatest risk for experiencing a sexual assault. The majority of college students range in age between 18 and 24 years (DSE, 2003). This age corresponds to the range in age of women in the general population, 16 years to 24 years, who experience rape at rates four times higher than those women younger and/or older than the majority of female college students (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000). Also, these college women are more at risk for rape and other forms of sexual assault than women the same age but not in college (Fisher, 2000).

This epidemic of sexual assault at institutions of higher learning creates a serious concern for university students, faculty and staff, as it constitutes the majority of all violent crimes committed on college campuses (Finn, 1996). Not only is the physical safety of these women compromised, but also their psychological well-being is in question as they are aware that their campus environment is fraught with these violent occurrences, and they must constantly be vigilant in their attempts to protect themselves. This continual focus on their physical safety, which affects their psychological health, can distract them from their studies, and hinder their ability to succeed in their academic careers. For these reasons, college personnel at all levels of the university must acknowledge and address the problem of campus sexual assault.

Current administrative attempts to decrease sexual assault rates by increasing funding for campus safety initiatives, such as increased lighting, police patrols, and night shuttle services for students, as well as prevention programs that teach women how to physically defend themselves, are proving ineffective in lowering campus sexual assault rates. Actually, sexual assault rates continue to remain constant and are even increasing

despite the implementation of these safety measures, due to a lack of effective and efficient tactics for combating the problem.

Several researchers have turned their attention towards the role of the campus sexual assault policies in combating sexual assault. They advocate for policy reforms that increase the quantity and quality of sexual assault policies in place at institutions of higher learning, as a means for alleviating the number of sexual assaults experienced by college women (Parrot, 1991; see also Adams & Abarbanel, 1988; Bohmer & Parrot, 1993; Finn, 1996; Hughes & Sandler, 1987; Sanday, 1990). These researchers, namely Andrea Parrot, believe that the existence of, and quality of, campus sexual assault policies is key to limiting and discouraging sexual predators from victimizing these female students.

In this paper, I will briefly review literature pertaining to sexual assault in general, including the scope of the problem and some common misconceptions. I will then explore the specific dynamics of campus sexual assaults, including the campus environment and the contributing factors that are unique to university settings, which work to intensify the occurrences of sexual assaults overall. Next, the role of sexual assault policies at universities of higher learning is investigated. I examine the prevalence of the existence of campus sexual assault policies at universities across the nation to determine the percentage of institutions that have sexual assault policies in place that address these issues. I then analyze those policies currently in use to determine their overall quality based on criteria I have established. My methodology for investigation is included, along with a discussion of my results. Finally, I will make recommendations for future researchers in this area.

It is my intent that this study be understood as the first step in what I hope will become a series of studies that explore the correlation between high-quality campus sexual assault policies and their effectiveness at decreasing the rates of sexual assaults actually experienced on campuses. Before it can be determined whether high-quality policies actually deter incidents of sexual assault from occurring, an exploration of the current status of campus sexual assault policies is necessary. Once this has occurred, future research will be better prepared to correlate any decreases in campus sexual assault rates to the quality of the policy an institution utilizes. Therefore, this study intends to lay the necessary groundwork for future investigations of what methods are actually useful to campus administrators for combating the epidemic of sexual assault on their campuses.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Sexual assault is a crime that will penetrate the lives of many women either directly or indirectly at some point in their lives. Current research indicates that one in six women in the general population will experience an attempted or completed sexual assault in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). This number increases to one in four when considering the special population of campus women (Koss, 1987). Several factors contribute to this epidemic, including societal constructions of women as property, gendered socialization practices, the perpetuation of sexual assault myths, and campus environmental factors. A brief review of these themes and trends in the current body of knowledge pertaining to sexual assault is provided, to set the stage from which the researcher will make suggestions for change in the higher education environment.

### **Sexual Assault in an Historical Context**

Some of our society's earliest surviving works of literature address the issue of sexual assault against women. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, which depicts the rape of a young maiden by her uncle, dates back over twenty-five hundred years (Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomperoy, & Shapiro, 1994). This early literary work exemplifies an historical context of sexual assault against women. The story also highlights that the crime of sexual assault is neither a contemporary construction, nor an isolated byproduct of our current culture.

Another trend that exemplifies the historical context of sexual assault against women is that of wife rape. Wife rape has presumably been a part of our society as long as we have participated in the institution of marriage. The laws pertaining to marital rape have historically denied women the right to refuse sex with their partners, as women were

considered to be the property of their husbands. Therefore, men could not be prosecuted for the crime of sexual assault against their lawfully married partners (Smith, 2001).

While currently these laws are changing as states begin to acknowledge the crimes taking place within the institution of marriage, the number of women who experience wife rape is still alarming, with one in seven women who have ever been married reporting being raped by either their husband or ex-husband (Russell, 1982).

### **Cultural Context of Sexual Assault**

Although sexual assault occurs in every country in the world, the United States experiences the greatest amount of any industrialized society (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). In more egalitarian societies the percentage of women who report being sexually assaulted is much lower. In our society however, boys and girls are generally conditioned to adhere to gendered behavioral norms, which they internalize and recapitulate in their actions. Because we engage in gendered socialization practices that construct masculinity as aggressive, dominant, and superior, and femininity as passive, dependent, submissive, and inferior, we are continually constructing men who feel entitled to sexually assault women (Scully & Marolla, 2005).

Within this masculine identity lies the essence of man as powerful. There are ample situations and times in a man's life in which he can express his power. In our society, men are the breadwinners, the heads of the households, and protectors of their family and home. Despite these socially-acceptable outlets for attaining the sense of power which is tied to their gender role, there remain situations and times in which men feel powerless and emasculated. In these instances, men may turn to sexual assault as a means in which to regain a sense of power. Exerting physical and/or psychological

control over their victims via sexual assault fulfills the attacker's need to feel powerful and in control, if only temporarily. In this sense, sexual assault can be understood as a means in which men seek to simultaneously gain and exert their power over women (Brownmiller, 1993).

### **Common Misconceptions about Sexual Assault**

Understanding sexual assault as an exercise in power instead of an expression of sexual desire undermines one of common myths about sexual assault. Traditionally, sexual assault has been depicted as the actions of sexually deprived men with no other outlets for relieving sexual frustrations (Burt, 1991). As the reality of sexual assault continues to be explored and examined by contemporary scholars, these misinformed notions have begun to disappear. Current research on sexual assault supports the idea that sexual perpetrators are indeed looking to exert power over their victims instead of experiencing sexual desire. One example of this assertion is that of men who assault other men, as in the case of prison assaults. In the incarceration setting, sexual assault rates are high, with twenty-one percent of inmates reporting incidents of sexual assault (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2000).

Perhaps the most common misconception of sexual assault is that the victim usually does not know her attacker, or that most rape is "stranger rape". This myth continues to be perpetuated today, despite the fact that the majority of sexual assault victims know the identity of their attacker (Renzetti & Bergen, 2005). Accompanying the stranger rape myth is the idea that sexual assaults only occur at night and most often to women who dress seductively. These ideas are unfounded; as women are attacked at all times of the day regardless of the way they are dressed. Believing in these myths

provides women with a false sense of security, and that if they avoid going out at night or dressing in a certain manner they will greatly reduce their chances of being attacked. As long as we continue to perpetuate these myths, we will continue to blame the victims for the attacks they suffer (Burt, 1991).

### **Sexual Assault on College Campuses**

The epidemic of sexual assault becomes intensified on college campuses. Many of the contributing factors to sexual assault are unique to the university setting. These factors become compounded and increase the amount of sexual assault experienced by female students, who are at a greater risk for victimization than women in the general population. Therefore, campus sexual assault should be understood as a manifestation of the larger societal problem of sexual violence against women, and acknowledging and addressing the issue of campus sexual assault is an integral component of combating the problem of sexual assault.

Women's participation in higher education has continued to grow steadily over the years, with women now comprising the majority of undergraduate students in public universities in the United States (Greene & Greene, 2004). As the number of women participating in higher education grows, so does the amount of campus sexual assaults they experience, as it constitutes the single most common crime committed on college campuses (Finn, 1996). In a landmark study of the scope of sexual assault on college campuses across the nation, Koss and colleagues (1987) found that 53.7% of collegiate women surveyed experienced some form of sexual victimization. Of this 53.7%, 27.5% of these women reported experiencing an attempted or completed rape.

This study highlights the extent to which the occurrences of sexual assault have permeated the lives of college women.

The campus environment plays a large role in contributing to this phenomenon. Campus risk factors for sexual assault include the following: female students are surrounded by male classmates roughly their same age with whom they interact daily (Fisher, 2000), they have a greater amount of contact with Greek and athletic organizations than women in the general population (Berkowitz, 1992; O'Sullivan, 1991; Pinar, 2003), and their common socialization practices include and encourage the consumption of alcohol (Finn, 1996, Mohler-Kou, 2004). Common misconceptions about the nature of sexual assault also contribute to the growing problem of sexual victimization of female students. Belief in the stranger rape myth misdirects the attempts of campus administrators to address the situation appropriately (Fisher, 2000). Finally, there is a lack of research that explores effective and efficient proactive measures of decreasing sexual assault rates. Therefore, campus administrators lack the knowledge and resources necessary for combating the problem in a meaningful way. These themes are discussed in further detail in the following review of literature that pertains to campus sexual assault.

### **The Campus Environment**

The campus environment is unique in that it unites both male and female college students of roughly the same age on a daily basis. College campuses house a disproportionate amount of young women and men, with a large amount of non-resident students commuting daily. This unique composition of persons of relative age interacting

in a limited space, frequenting the same common spaces, and engaging in similar activities, creates an environment that is not found elsewhere in our society.

One aspect of the campus environment that increases the likelihood of the sexual victimization of female students is the common socialization practices that both campus men and women engage in. The most common factor in all reported campus sexual assaults is the involvement of alcohol (Mohler-Kou, M., Dowdall, G.W., Koss, M.P., & Wechsler, H., 2004). The consumption of alcohol by students at campus events is a common occurrence, and this behavior is not only permissible by the university, the sale of liquor is often sponsored by the institution itself during athletic events.

Attending any campus social function where alcohol is consumed greatly increases a woman's chances for being sexually assaulted. Researchers who examine the correlation of alcohol and campus sexual assault have concluded that the overwhelming majority of both victims and perpetrators are under the influence of alcohol during the assault. Mohler-Kou and colleagues (2004) estimate that approximately 72% of female victims were under the influence of alcohol, while Finn (1996) estimates that in approximately 75% of attacks, either the victim or her attacker is under the influence.

The physical presence of fraternal and athletic organizations and housing facilities on campus is another unique aspect of the campus environment that makes female college students more susceptible to sexual victimization than women in the general population. O'Sullivan (1991) asserts that certain aspects of the fraternity and athletic lifestyles increase the likelihood that these groups of college men will participate in sexual assault. Both groups usually reside in private, unsupervised residences and dorms, alcohol is almost always present at group social functions, and the enforced sense of

cohesiveness between members all contribute to their propensity to engage in sexual assault (O'Sullivan, 1991). In her research of campus gang rapes, O'Sullivan found that fraternity brothers, followed by male basketball teammates, male football teammates, and male lacrosse teammates, committed the majority of gang rapes (O'Sullivan, 1991). Pinar (2003) also argues in a review of literature pertaining to campus violence that fraternity brothers and male athletes are more likely to commit acts of sexual assault as a group as well as commit individual acts of violence, than other male groups on campus and males who do not engage in exclusively male activities (Pinar, 2003). The social activities of both groups create an environment that lends itself to acts of sexual aggression, including parties in which alcohol consumption is encouraged, if not required. Therefore, women who attend parties and/or fraternize with members of said groups are at the greatest risk of experiencing sexual assault by an acquaintance (Pinar, 2003).

### **Reactions of Higher Education Administrators**

As previously mentioned, the majority of campus administrators lack a necessary understanding of the realities of sexual assault, and are incapable of addressing this issue in a meaning manner. For instance, despite the fact that approximately 90% of campus sexual assault victims know the identity of their attacker, (Fisher, 2000), efforts to combat the problem continue to focus on measures that best address stranger rapes. Current popular institutional initiatives to lower stranger rape statistics such as additional lighting, security patrols, and free evening transportation do little to actually decrease the number of acquaintance rapes experienced on campuses (Sampson, 2002).

Another trend of higher education administrators in combating campus sexual assault is to focus on the actions of the potential victims themselves. Rape prevention programs that teach women how to physically protect themselves from an attacker teach useful tactics, but do little in situations where the victim is intoxicated or unconscious, as is the case in alcohol or drug facilitated assaults. Also, focusing attention on the woman's participation in preventing her own attack, while well-intended, only works to draw our attention away from addressing the actual problem of men who sexually assault women. Higher education administrators must stay focused on men's roles in committing campus sexual assault if they wish to address this problem at the source, especially considering that men commit eighty-nine percent of all violent crime (Miedzian, 1991).

Perhaps the most disturbing reactions of administrators to campus sexual assault is a tendency to ignore, deny, and cover-up the issue completely, which in turn condones the actions of the attackers (Sanday, 1990). There are many reasons why some administrators choose to turn a blind eye to reality. Acknowledging campus sexual assaults threatens the reputation of the university and can also result in costly legal suits, just to mention a few of the ramifications an institution can face. Administrators also have difficulty understanding the actions of the perpetrators as criminal. The excuses often cited by campus administrators for not addressing the issue is that "boys will be boys" and that sometimes "things just get out of hand" (Sanday, 1990). Until sexual assault can be conceived of as a legitimate crime in the minds of those individuals with the power to take action against the assailants, it will continue to be difficult to combat campus sexual assault.

To reduce the prevalence of sexual assault, new methods must be utilized for decreasing sexual assault rates if any deviation from the current situation is desired. Comprehensive approaches that include multiple components must be integrated into the university's repertoire for combating campus sexual assault. Some proactive measures include peer-education and training for all students, faculty, and staff that encompass the nature of sexual assault, legal definitions and pertinent laws, and discussions of environmental factors that contribute to sexual assault. Other necessary components include addressing the adequacy of mental health resources available to survivors, as well as the adequacy of campus policies that concern sexual assault. While no one component can be marginalized or omitted if the greatest impact is desired, the focus of this study will now turn specifically to the role of campus policies in decreasing sexual assault. Currently, there is a lack of research that focuses specifically on the effects of proactive measures such as policy creation and implementation. Therefore, this investigation is needed to address that lack

### **The Role of Campus Sexual Assault Policies**

Several researchers of campus sexual assault have turned their attention towards the role of the campus sexual assault policies govern students' sexual behavior (Parrot, 1991; see also Adams & Abarbanel, 1988; Bohmer & Parrot, 1993; Finn, 1996; Hughes & Sandler, 1987). These researchers believe that the existence of campus sexual assault policies is key to limiting and discouraging sexual predators from victimizing their fellow classmates. Two of the leading researchers in this area highlight this need, stating:

College administrators must view sexual assault as unacceptable and as a crime if they are to succeed in reducing this behavior on their campuses. Appropriate administrative responses must include evaluating and revising existing campus policies, judicial processes, personnel recommendations, services for victims, and public safety procedures and programs regarding acquaintance sexual assault.

These policies need to be very specific and far-reaching to deal adequately with all the different types of sexual assault and rape that might occur on college campus (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993).

In addition to the need to create and implement sexual assault policies, the overall quality of the policy is also of great importance. A poorly written policy that leaves much room for question and interpretation is not sufficient for the purposes of deterring perpetrators from committing assaults. The policy must also meet certain criteria that guarantee it is user-friendly to the survivor; further, it must be rigorously accurate and applicable to all situations, non-discriminatory against either the survivor or the attacker, and wholly complete in that it covers in detail all aspects of reporting, prosecuting and accessing necessary survivor services (Parrot, 1991).

One researcher in particular, Andrea Parrot, focuses heavily on the need to create campus sexual assault policies that work to reduce the amount of assault experienced by college women. In 1991, Parrot reviewed several different methods that higher education administrators utilize when acknowledging and addressing sexual assault on their campuses. Parrot asserts that the manner in which administrators conceptualize and respond to acquaintance rape conveys a message to students about acceptable behavior on their campuses. If victims of sexual assault have reason to believe that the campus will not support them or will not punish the offender accordingly, they will be less likely to report attacks, giving offenders the impression that the university condones their actions (Parrot, 1991). Parrot suggests that campus sexual assault policies be structured to convey a message of zero tolerance backed by uncompromising penalties for the perpetrator and any related organization. In 1991, Parrot discussed several criteria from

which university administrators could create their own high-quality policies. Each policy should contain the following components:

- A proper and correct title. For example, words such as “acquaintance rape” or “sexual assault” should be included in the title. This way there are no discrepancies as to the content of this policy, and the focus of the policy is limited. Also, by having a uniform title for the policy it will be easy to locate within a table of contents or index.
- The policy is freestanding. This means that it should not be embedded into a similar policy nor should the policy include information on a similar subject such as sexual harassment. A true sexual assault policy only includes information pertaining to sexual assault.
- The penalties for violations. This includes a range of possible sanctions for a range of violations. For example, the policy must state something close to the following statement “attempted and completed rape is punishable by removal from residential housing, or suspension, or expulsion, upon confirmation that the accused is found guilty”.
- Definitions of key terms. Sexual assault terms should be clearly defined for clarification purposes. The reader of the policy must be able to discern what the creator of the policy means when they use terms such as “consent”, “under the influence” and “penetration” as well as other pertinent terms. This will also eliminate discrepancies when administrators enforce the policy as well.
- A definition of on-campus sexual assault. It is necessary to differentiate between on-campus and off campus sexual assault so that students are aware of what

conditions or factors constitute a campus assault as opposed to an assault that cannot be associated with the university.

- Inclusion of reporting locations. The name or title of the department, center, or program that accepts the initial report of sexual assault must be included. For instance, the policy should state, “the Office of Student Affairs should be contacted to initiate a report of sexual assault.”
- Inclusion of reporting personnel. The specific name of the person to whom the report should be made should also be included in the policy. For example, if the Dean of Students, the Manager of the Women’s Center, or Director of the Student Health Center is responsible for collecting the information from the victim and making the official report, then the actual name of that individual should be included in the policy. This will allow the victim to know exactly whom to contact first, so as to avoid making several unnecessary contacts.
- Description of the reporting procedures. An outline of what events will occur after the correct department or office is contacted, what paperwork is necessary from judicial affairs, what medical and counseling services will be offered, as well as the role of the campus police department, should all be included and discussed in the policy.
- Inclusion of legal reporting requirements. These requirements should address the campus, as well as the parish or county, and state and national laws that are applicable. Including this information will educate the reader on what will happen once a report is made with the university, and whether the university is required to contact local and state authorities as well.

- Summary of services offered. This section should encompass those resources available to victims both on and off campus. The services should include those that meet the legal, medical, emotional, and physical needs of the survivor to completely cover their multiplicity of needs. Addresses and phone numbers of these agencies are a must, and a description of what services they offer is preferred.
- Approaches to ongoing case management. This will enhance the policy in that students and the campus community will be informed of what proactive measures are currently in place to prevent sexual assault. This information will also aid students and others in becoming involved in campus efforts to decrease sexual assault occurrences.
- Statement of confidentiality. The institution should guarantee the confidentiality of all persons involved and discuss the measures taken to insure the privacy of the person reporting the incident. Without this assurance, the victim may be less likely to report the assault out of fear of recognition by the offender or others, or shame of association with the events.

### **Synthesis**

Currently college women are at the greatest risk for sexual assault, with approximately 53.7% of campus women reporting incidents of sexual victimization. The unique campus environment that female students inhabit makes them especially vulnerable to attack at some point in their academic careers. Their age, along with the consumption of alcohol at social events and the presence of Greek and athletic organizations and housing increase their chances of victimization. A lack of

understanding of the realities of campus sexual assault has misguided administrators in their attempts to combat the problem of campus acquaintance rape, leaving these women with few meaningful resources to protect themselves. Although a comprehensive approach is needed to best address this situation, one solution to this problem, as Parrot suggests (1991), could be policy reforms that effectively deter offenders. The current quantity and quality of campus sexual assault policies will now be explored.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Institution Selection**

The universities analyzed in this thesis were selected according to the Carnegie Classification system. All public institutions categorized as Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive (institutions that offer no less than fifty doctoral degrees in fifteen disciplines annually) were included in the research, for a total of 102 schools (McCormick, 2000). These institutions were chosen because they represented a diverse selection of schools across the nation, all of which differed in population size, geographical location (rural and urban), regional location, and percentage of undergraduate and graduate students in attendance.

### **Search Methods for Sexual Assault Information and Policies**

The official websites of each university were referenced for information pertaining to their sexual assault policy. The first document that was assessed for each institution was the student code of conduct. Each code was located and read line-by-line for any mention of the words “sexual assault” under the section of prohibited conduct. Schools that included sexual assault as a violation of the code were referenced and recorded. Other information of interest that was found in this section of the websites, such as definitions of assault or reporting procedures, was also recorded. Then the Student Affairs website, and Student Judicial Affairs website if available, of each university was accessed. The websites were searched for any information or links to the campus’s sexual assault policy. Any information that was collected from these websites was noted accordingly. Finally, a general search of the entire website for information pertaining to sexual assault was conducted using the following search words: “sexual”,

“assault”, and “policy”. The results were then referenced and recorded for future analysis.

### **Differentiating Between Sexual Assault Information and Sexual Assault Policies**

To differentiate between sexual assault information and bona-fide sexual assault policies, two criteria were created and used by the investigator. First, to qualify as a valid sexual assault policy, the words “sexual assault” must not be merely listed along with other condemned actions in the student code of conduct. This is not to say that sexual assault should not be discussed in the student code of conduct; in fact, it is to the benefit of everyone that sexual assault be addressed in this section so that students are fully aware that it is a prohibited behavior. However, it is not adequate to include the two words “sexual assault” within a list of violations of conduct, in lieu of establishing a sexual assault policy. While it is important to list sexual assault as a violation of the student code of conduct, it is also necessary to expound upon the issue of campus sexual assault in a separate area that can better allow room for the many components of the campus sexual assault policy. Therefore, institutions that just listed the key words “sexual assault “ within their student code of conduct, and did not elsewhere elaborate on the issue, were not considered to have a bona-fide sexual assault policy.

Second, the word “policy” must be present and included in the proper title of the document. No substitution for the word “policy” is acceptable, including the words “procedures”, “protocols”, “statements”, “memos”, “response plan” or “guidelines.” The word “policy” is key, in that it establishes the written, official stance of the institution as it pertains to their tolerance of such actions and the consequences they deem appropriate for offenders of their policy. The use of any other alternative term such as those

previously listed cannot ensure the same level of response on the part of the institution. These terms are also problematic in that they do not hold the same level of official authoritative power that is associated with an established sexual assault policy that the university has in place. Also, these terms are reactionary in nature, and only serve as guidelines for reporting or responding to the incident once the assault has taken place. For these reasons, the presence of the term “policy” is necessary to determining whether the information can be classified as such.

### **Accuracy of Non-Policy Classification**

Universities that were classified into the non-policy category were contacted via email. These universities were informed of the work I was doing, the role of their institution in that work, and my inability to locate their sexual assault policy. A request was made of each university to respond with a website link from which their sexual assault policy could be accessed. This measure was taken to eliminate the possibility that schools were incorrectly categorized as non-policy schools due to investigator error. Of the fifty-six institutions contacted, eighteen responses were received, all of which confirmed the original notion that these schools did not have a sexual assault policy.

### **Characteristics of Non-Policy Institutions**

When the list of non-policy institutions was completed, the sexual assault information provided by each university in this group was analyzed to determine what similarities existed at each university in the sexual assault information they provided. The institutions analyzed all fit into one of the four following categories.

Group one consisted of schools that make no mention of sexual assault anywhere in their university information, including a lack of the words “sexual assault” in their student code of conduct section of prohibited actions.

Group two included institutions that make reference to sexual assault only in their student code of conduct. This reference could be as limited as the presence of the words “sexual assault” in the student code, or as detailed as to include a definition of sexual assault and possible sanctions that could be enacted by the university.

Group three included those schools that mentioned sexual assault in their student conduct code, and also had sexual assault information in a separate location on their website. This information was found in a document with one of the following words in the title of the document: sexual assault procedures, protocol for responding to sexual assaults, statement on sexual assault, memo on sexual assault, or response plan for sexual assault.

The final group consisted of institutions which lacked a reference to sexual assault within the student conduct code of prohibited actions, but discussed sexual assault in a separate document such as those listed in group three. After the non-policy institutions were subcategorized into these four groups, the results were analyzed and recorded.

### **Characteristics of Institutions with Policies**

Institutions that met the criteria for having valid sexual assault policies were then categorized as policy institutions. Then, the sexual assault policies at the universities in this group were evaluated to determine their level of quality. As described previously, Parrot (1991) discussed twelve distinct criteria for the creation or enhancement of high-quality sexual assault policies to be utilized by higher education administrators. These

same criteria, listed below, were used to analyze the sexual assault policies at the institutions in this study, with the exception of the inclusion of reporting personnel, as no institution in the entire investigation met this criterion.

- Policy has a proper and correct title.
- The policy is freestanding.
- The penalties for violations are included.
- Definitions of key terms are included.
- A definition of on-campus sexual assault is included.
- Inclusion of reporting locations.
- Inclusion of names of reporting personnel.
- Description of the reporting procedures is included.
- Inclusion of legal reporting requirements.
- Summary of services offered.
- Approaches to ongoing case management are present.
- Statement of confidentiality is included.

### **Determining the Overall Quality of Campus Sexual Assault Policies**

To determine the overall quality of campus sexual assault policies, the number of criteria that each policy met was considered. The percentage of institutional policies that fell in the range of meeting 90%-100% of Parrot's criteria were considered to be of excellent quality. Those schools with policies that fell in the range of meeting 60%-89% of Parrot's criteria were considered to be of good quality. Finally, those institutions whose policies met 59% or less of Parrot's criteria were classified as unacceptable.

## **Synthesis of Results**

Using the criteria for differentiating between institutions with sexual assault information and institutions with a sexual assault policy, the schools in this investigation were divided into two distinct groups - those universities that do have sexual assault policies and those that do not. Frequencies were tabulated to determine which group constituted the majority of institutions and which group constituted the minority, to ultimately determine the overall quantity of sexual assault policies at the institutions in this investigation. The non-policy schools were analyzed and grouped into one of four categories depending on what information the university makes available to the public about campus sexual assault. Again, frequencies were tabulated to determine the numerical representation of each group. The institutions classified as having a valid sexual assault policy in place were analyzed to determine the level of quality of their policies using Parrot's guidelines. A final analysis was conducted to determine how many institutions met each criterion, and whether the majority of these schools met a majority of the criteria, which determined the overall quality of sexual assault policies at the universities in this study.

Based upon my review of the literature, and the overall lack of literature in this area, my hypothesis was that the majority of the institutions in this study would not have valid sexual assault policies in place, and that at those schools that did have policies, the majority of those policies would fall into the range of unacceptable. A discussion of my actual results follows.

## RESULTS

### Institution Characteristics

The universities included in this study are located throughout the nation, with all states represented except for Alaska, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The region with the greatest percent of schools was the Southeast, with 27.45% of the institutions located there, followed by the Midwest with 23.53%, then the West with 19.61%, next the Northeast with 17.65%, and the smallest percent of institutions were located in the southwest, at 11.76% representation.

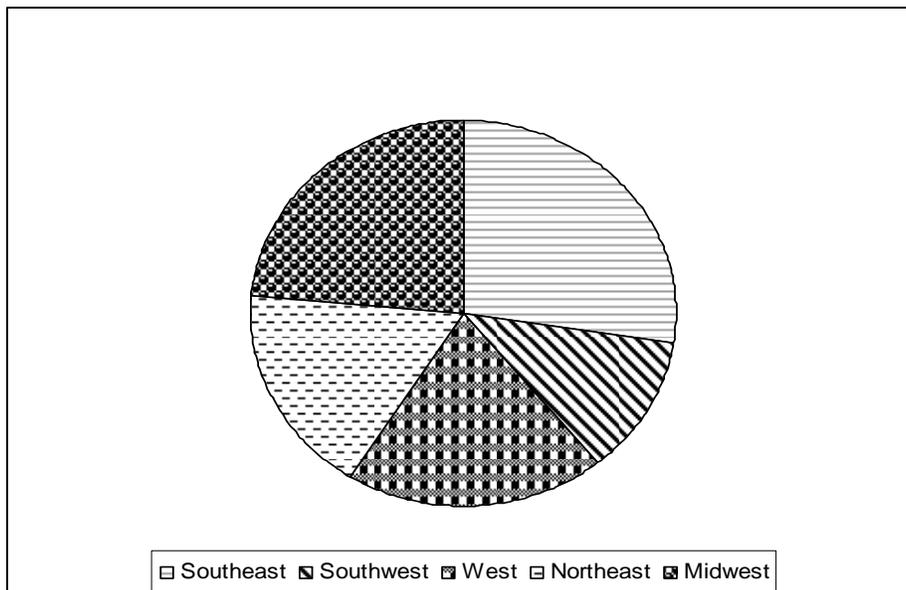


Figure 1 Geographic Distribution of Institutions

The universities range in size of student population from 4,108 at the City University of New York Graduate Center, to 51,426 at the University of Texas at Austin. The average student population of all institutions in the study is 26,628. Women represent the majority of students enrolled at these institutions, with an average enrollment of 52.1%, while men constitute the minority of student enrollment at 47.9%.

The range in the number of undergraduate students enrolled at the institutions in

this study is 8,972 at the University of Maine, to 38,627 at the University of Arizona with an average enrollment of 20,129 (excluding the City University of New York Graduate Center). The Graduate and Professional students enrolled at these institutions ranged from 1,337 at the University of California Santa Cruz, to 17,000 at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. The average graduate enrollment of all institutions was 6,606.

**Prevalence of the Existence of University Sexual Assault Policies**

The Institutions included in this investigation were categorized into one of two groups, those that have a valid sexual assault policy in place, and those that do not. The first group of schools, the policy schools, constituted 45.10% of the institutions in this study, or 46 universities from an overall total of 102 institutions. The universities that were categorized as non-policy schools represented 55.90% of the institutions in my investigation, or 56 schools from the overall total of 102 institutions.

Table 1 Breakdown of the prevalence of sexual assault policies

Institutional Division	Institutions	
	Number	Percentage
Institutions with Sexual Assault Policy	46	45.10%
Institutions without Sexual Assault Policy	56	55.90%
<b>Total Institutions Analyzed</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Findings for Non-Policy Institutions**

The 56 universities in the non-policy category were divided into four subgroups based upon the information the institution provided on campus sexual assault. The first group consisted of schools that made no mention of sexual assault anywhere in their student code of conduct or anywhere else on their official website. There were 10 universities in this subgroup, representing 17.86% of the non-policy schools. The second

subgroup of schools consisted of those that referred to sexual assault only in their student code of conduct as an example of prohibited conduct. This subgroup, which consisted of 26 schools, comprises the majority of the subgroups, at 46.43% of the total of non-policy schools. The third subgroup, those institutions that included sexual assault in their student code of conduct, and had additional sexual assault information available in the form of a sexual assault statement, procedure, protocol, or response plan, included 14 schools at 25% of the total non-policy schools. The final subgroup, those universities that had only a sexual assault statement, procedure, protocol, or response plan constituted 6 of the non-policy schools at 10.71%.

Table 2 Breakdown of institutions without sexual assault policies

Analysis of Sexual Assault Information Placement	Institutions	
	Number	Percentage
Institution makes no mention of sexual assault in code of student conduct or elsewhere	10	17.86%
Institution references sexual assault only in code of student conduct	26	46.43%
Institution reference sexual assault in student conduct code and has an additional stand-alone sexual assault "statement", "procedure", "protocol", or "response plan"	14	25.00%
Institution has a stand-alone sexual assault "statement", "protocol", "procedures", or "response plan"	6	10.71%
<b>Total Institutions</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### **Findings for Institutions with Valid Sexual Assault Policies**

The 46 schools that comprised the institutions with policies group were analyzed based on Parrot's 1992 criteria for quality sexual assault policies. Eleven of the twelve criteria were used, excluding the criteria that called for the inclusion of the name of the reporting personnel. This was eliminated because out of 102 total institutions in this study, no school met this criterion. This may be due in part to the maintenance required to include the names of the personnel, as this information would need to be updated

periodically. The remaining eleven criteria were met as follows: all 46 policy institutions, or 100%, had a proper title for their policy. There were 40 schools, or 86.96% that have stand-alone policies, not embedded into a similar policy or the student code of conduct. Institutions that included possible sanction for sexual assault offenders comprised 76.09%, or 35 schools. Definitions of key terms were included in the policies of 34 universities, at 73.91%. The differentiation between on-campus and off-campus assaults was addressed in 36 school policies for a total of 78.26%. At 37 institutions, or 80.43% of the schools, the title of the department where sexual assaults are reported was included in their policy. The specifications of how to report an assault were present in 34 of the university policies, constituting 73.91%. Only 3 institutions, or 6.52%, included the legal reporting requirements for local and state authorities. The contact information for survivor services, both campus and community-wide, was found in the policies at 33 schools, or 71.74%. The preventative measures taken by the university to decrease sexual assaults were available in 24 of the policies, at 52.17% of the schools. Lastly, 21 schools, or 45.65%, guaranteed that the privacy of the reporter would be respected.

Table 3 Breakdown of institutions with sexual assault policies

Policy Criteria	Institutions	
	Number	Percentage
Policy includes a proper and correct title	46	100.00%
Policy is freestanding	40	86.96%
Policy includes the penalties for violations	35	76.09%
Policy includes definitions of key terms	34	73.91%
Policy includes a definition of on-campus sexual assault.	36	78.26%
Policy includes reporting locations	37	80.43%
Policy includes a description of the reporting procedures	34	73.91%
Policy includes legal reporting requirements	3	6.52%
Policy includes summary of services offered	33	71.74%
Policy includes approaches to ongoing case management	24	52.17%
Policy includes statement of confidentiality	21	45.65%
<b>Total Institutions</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### Assessment of the Overall Quality of Campus Sexual Assault Policies

The overall quality of valid sexual assault policies currently in place was determined by the percentage of criteria that each school met. Of the 46 institutional polices analyzed, 7 of these universities, or 15.2%, met at least 90% of the criteria, and were therefore categorized as being of excellent quality. There were 24 schools, or 52.2%, that met at least 60% of the criteria but less than 90%. These institutions were categorized as being of good quality. Finally, 15 of the universities with sexual assault policies, or 32.6%, met less than 60% of the criteria, and were categorized as being of unacceptable quality.

Table 4 Assessment of the overall quality of sexual assault policies

Analysis of Sexual Assault Policy Quality	Institutions	
	Number	Percentage
Institutions categorized as excellent quality for meeting at least 90% of the established policy criteria	7	15.20%
Institution categorized as good quality for meeting at least 60% but not more than 90% of the established policy criteria	24	52.20%
Institution categorized as unacceptable for meeting less than 60% of the established policy criteria	15	32.60%
<b>Total Institutions</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the prevalence and quality of sexual assault policies at 102 public universities in the United States. The researcher's findings conclude that the majority of institutions, or 55.9% did not have a policy in place. Because less than half of the institutions in this study have a valid sexual assault policy, as defined by Parrot and myself, the prevalence is determined to be low, suggesting an overall lack in the existence of campus sexual assault policies. The overall quality of sexual assault policies that currently exist at 45.1% of the universities in this study is determined to be good, as 67.4% of the policies met at least 60% of the researcher's criteria for determining a high-quality policy.

### **The Current Body of Knowledge**

The existing research on campus sexual assault is vast and varied, and includes the scope of the problem and all known contributing factors, and measures that can be employed by campus personnel to combat the epidemic. The magnitude of the problem is clear, and all of the contributing factors have been adequately identified; however, despite the attempts of campus administrators, sexual assault rates have not decreased (Adams-Curtis, L., & Forbes, G., 2004). There is, in general, a lack of research that focuses specifically on the effects of proactive measures that reduce campus sexual assault, and specifically policy creation and implementation. My own research concludes that there is a great deficiency of information concerning the role of policy reform in decreasing campus sexual assault rates. To my knowledge, no study currently exists that investigates this correlation. That is why, as I discussed in the introduction to this study,

my research should be understood as the first step of many that is necessary to explore this correlation.

### **Understanding the Overall Lack of Sexual Assault Policies**

There are several possible reasons why the majority of universities in this study lack valid sexual assault policies. Perhaps the most obvious explanation for this deficiency is a misunderstanding of what constitutes an effective and efficient sexual assault policy. Many of the universities in this investigation, exactly 19.60% of the total schools, have sexual assault information available to the public; however, it is in the form of response plans, protocols, procedures or statements. While informative and explanatory of the school's position on the subject matter, this information is reactionary in nature, and also is not as credible or reliable as an actual institutional policy.

Another reason that may explain the lack of sexual assault policies is genuine ignorance of the need for a policy of this nature. As we live in a society that does not openly acknowledge and address the epidemic of sexual assault, it can be difficult for campus administrators to comprehend the extent of the problem of sexual assault on their campus, and therefore respond accordingly with the creation and implementation of sexual assault policies. Also, because the number of reported sexual assaults on college campuses often does not reflect the actual number of assaults experienced, administrators may incorrectly believe that their institution does not need a separate policy that addresses campus sexual assault specifically. This highlights the need to educate administrators on the realities of campus sexual assault, which could lead to a greater prevalence and quality of policies.

A final explanation for the lack of policies at universities all across the nation could be the negative publicity that surrounds the issue in general, which works to decrease administrative efforts to address the problem. Engaging in the discussion of campus sexual assault involves acknowledging that the institution experiences these crimes. Administrators may feel a certain amount of pressure from their supervisors to downplay the number of assaults that occur, as well as the effects that sexual assault have on the entire campus community. Universities that do not wish to draw attention to the amount of assaults reported on their campus may insist that there is no need for a separate policy to deal with the incidents. Other institutions may feel as though the creation and implementation a campus sexual assault policy is equivalent to an admission that sexual assault is indeed a problem at their campus. Universities that believe they have a greater need to ignore or avoid the issue of campus sexual assault than to protect its community from these crimes will likely not make policy creation and implementation a high priority.

### **Suggested Strategies for Change**

Using the criteria established by Parrot (1991), as well as other high-quality campus sexual assault policies as a guide, administrators can begin the process of creating or improving their university's sexual assault policy. Emphasis should be placed on incorporating all of the criteria into their policy to ensure it is wholly complete. This should be a collaborative process with all campus departments that are referred to in any part of the policy. It is also helpful to incorporate students' voices into this process, as they are directly affected by the policies.

Once a new policy is established, it could be publicized in a number of ways. Some suggestions for dissemination among the student body include utilizing campus media sources, creating literature to be distributed at orientation and other student-focused functions, presentations for Greek and Athletic students, and incorporating the information into the university's website. One strategy that can be especially effective is soliciting statements of support for the policy from higher administration such as the Chancellor, Dean of Students, and Athletic Coaches. These statements can be included in publicity literature, or recorded for use with campus radio programming.

Along with publicity, campus administrators must begin to implement the new policy immediately. Denying, ignoring, or covering-up incidents of sexual assault cannot continue once a high-quality policy is in place. When incidents occur, every aspect of the policy should be accounted for in the process of bringing sanctions against the offender(s). Also, sanctions should be similar no matter the identity of the perpetrator(s) (i.e. Greek, athlete, male, or female) nor the incidents surrounding the events (fraternity party or gang rape). If the policy is not strictly enforced immediately upon creation and continually thereafter, students may not comprehend the level of importance and validity that the administration wishes to associate with the new policy, and this mentality will be increasingly harder to unlearn over time.

As mentioned previously, policy creation should be only one part of a larger, comprehensive approach to proactively combating sexual assault. Campus administrators face the difficult task of re-norming what is acceptable sexual behavior for students. Policy creation must be coupled with other attempts to criminalize sexual assault, including changing the mentality that condones and perpetuates these violent acts.

Considering the cultural context in which sexual assault exists, special attention must be given to unlearning the social constructions of masculinity and femininity and their corresponding gender roles which influence the prevalence of sexual assault. This can be addressed in the campus environment in several ways. Academic involvement can include mandatory gender studies classes for all students, in which dialogue on these issues can lead to the creation and implementation of action models for addressing the epidemic. Peer education groups can also be instrumental in deconstructing the ideologies that support a rape-prone culture. Scholarship that focuses on male peer-education groups devoted to non-violence and reconstructing traditional masculinity asserts that association with such organizations serves as a protective factor against engaging in violent acts (Hong, 1998). By supporting academic programs that attempt to address this problem, as well as peer-groups run by the students themselves, campus administrators foster an environment free of sexual assault.

### **Implications for Change for Higher Education**

Should administrators decide to create and implement quality sexual assault policies at their universities, the benefits for the school and the campus community can be numerous. Legally, the institution and its administration will be better protected from allegations that the safety of its students is compromised in any way because a sexual assault policy is not in place. Additionally, the university will be better protected financially from legal actions that result in the school being sued. Recent legal cases have shown that colleges which have a comprehensive, high quality sexual assault policy already in place at the time of the incident are almost always able to defend themselves

against allegations that the institution did not adequately protect their students (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993).

Policy creation and implementation of a high-quality policy can bring good publicity to the school and its administration. Publicizing the university's commitment to its members' safety and decreeing a zero-tolerance attitude towards campus sexual assault will enhance the institution's reputation for their dedication to the safety and well-being of its community. This publicity will be noteworthy to current and prospective faculty, staff, students, and student's parents who are concerned with the quality of life on the campus as well as their personal safety.

Most importantly, the overall quality of the college experience will be enhanced. Female students will know that campus administrators are concerned with their personal safety and have policies in place to deter sexual perpetrators. This knowledge will enhance their understanding of their campus as a place where women are valued and their well-being is accounted for. The university that lacks a high-quality sexual assault policy risks implying that the personal safety of its students is not a high priority.

### **Limitations of This Study**

The researcher acknowledges several limitations to this investigation. Upon embarking on the investigative aspects of this study, the researcher referenced the official website of each university to gather information on the institution's sexual assault policy. Although a thorough search of each site was completed, it is possible that some pertinent information could have been overlooked. In an effort to minimize investigative error, the researcher contacted each school that did not have their sexual assault policy accessible via the Internet.

The researcher also used her own discretion to an extent when determining whether sexual assault information actually constituted a valid sexual assault policy. For the researcher, one of the key determinates for distinguishing between information and policy was the inclusion of the word “policy” in the information. If this term was not included, the information was not considered a valid policy. Other researchers may have concluded otherwise when the information met other policy criteria.

A final limitation to this study is the restriction of the institutions under examination to only those public institutions categorized as Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive. By selecting only these types of schools, a greater understanding of the larger picture of campus sexual assault policies is limited. Incorporating smaller institutions and private schools into this investigation might have illuminated different areas of concern or shown an overall different picture of the current status of campus sexual assault policies.

With these limitations addressed, the researcher asserts that the remaining investigative methods and tactics are credible and scientific.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The primary focus throughout the investigation is the need for high-quality sexual assault policies. However, future researchers would benefit from exploring the effectiveness of sexual assault procedures utilized by institutions. This research can establish whether standalone sexual assault policies are adequate, or if the combination of policies and sexual assault procedures is necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of reducing campus sexual assault.

With the addition of this research to what is currently known about campus sexual assault, there is now a foundation from which future investigations can determine the impact of policy on campus sexual assault. It has been determined that the majority of institutions do not have valid sexual assault policies. From this information, future researchers will be better equipped to explore the necessity of high-quality policies for decreasing assault rates. Therefore, the researcher believes that the next logical addition to the current body of knowledge that exists on campus sexual assault is an analysis of the correlation between the prevalence of sexual assault rates and the existence and quality of sexual assault policies.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, this study provides an exploration of the quantity and quality of sexual assault policies at universities across the nation. This investigation has revealed that the majority of institutions are in need of valid campus sexual policies, while many other universities with policies currently lack the components necessary to define their policies as high-quality. These findings demand the immediate attention of campus administrators to address this overwhelming lack. Further research on the impact of campus sexual assault policies is warranted.

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## **VITA**

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